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Collaborative efforts in recent performances and participatory artworks

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ABSTRACT

This essay considers collaborative methods from the perspective of an artist and a curator. Our reflections stem from *within* creative practice processes as a way of exploring modes of knowledge interactions, learning, and collaboration. We reflect on performances and participatory artworks that involve complex social interactions across their planning, making and realisation, and draw on conversations to reveal the volatility and changeability of artworks and curatorial strategies. We emphasise that collaborative, cooperative and participatory methods in visual arts projects are inextricably social and political. We discuss two visual arts performance and participatory projects – *Invitation to Dialogue* (2019) and *Conversation Mat* (2022) undertaken at AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery) in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, aimed at transforming the artistic, curatorial and participatory ego through an exploration of voice. In so doing, we question artistic, curatorial, and participatory ownership and/or dominance. We explore distinctions between project-time and use-time as a way of contrasting designed aspects of collaboration with those that go beyond the control of makers in risky ways. We draw attention to art/life orientations which generate many modes of collaboration. We discuss an attentiveness necessary for attending to the differing speeds of participants.

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Introduction

A dominant perspective on the artist-curator dynamic holds the curator responsible for the exhibition planning and outcome, and artists for their solitary genius in the creation of artworks (Lind 2010, 202). Sometimes, it is said that the process of exhibition making involves a tussle of ego. And by the end of the artist-curator transaction, each acquires an almost mythological status in the eyes of the audience. Against this backdrop, for artists and curators who are used to conceiving of their work for a largely passive audience, collaboration and participation poses a challenge. The authors of *Participation Is Risky: Approaches to Join Creative Processes* note that ‘Most makers are still educated in classical

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Figure 1. Chris Braddock with dialogue group, *Invitation to Dialogue*, 2019, cushions, carpet, email room sheets, scheduled activations, dimensions variable. In *How to Live Together* curated by Balamohan Shingade. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Photo: Sam Hartnett. Courtesy the artist & Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery.

contexts where they are taught to create projects (like videos, photos of furniture) that are finished once they are launched onto the market’ (Huybrechts, Dreessen, and Schepers 2014, 11–12).

Recent perspectives on curatorial practice and the artist-curator relationship, however, challenge this traditional view. For example, distinguishing the ‘curatorial’ from curating, Jean-Paul Martinon writes, ‘The curatorial is a jailbreak from pre-existing frames, a gift enabling one to see the world differently ... a practice of creating allegiances against social ills ... a procedure to maintain a community together’ (2013, 4). Martinon’s notion of the curatorial might mean ‘reimagining exhibitions as devices’ as ‘personal refigurations of what is usually taken for granted’ (10). In a similar vein, Paul O’Neill argues for forms of curatorship that challenge artistic autonomy (2012, 97). Emerging in the 1990s, the group exhibition strives to ‘activate discursive processes that enable dialogical spaces of negotiation between curators, artists, and their publics’ (128). These approaches, writes O’Neill, are durational in the sense that exhibitions can change over time in an open ended, cooperative and accumulative process (128).

This article draws on our experiences to consider the curatorial as a procedure to maintain and extend communities, and as a discursive process that becomes cooperative. We emphasise collaborative methods from the perspective of an artist (Chris) and a curator (Balamohan). We write about collaboration collaboratively. In ‘The Collaborative



Figure 2. Chris Braddock, *Conversation Mat*, 2022, cotton, wadding, scheduled activations, 3.08×9.8 m. Fabricator: Arlo Pavlovich. In *Equinox_1:03PM NZST_23-9-22*. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Photo: Chris Braddock. Courtesy the artist.

Turn,' Maria Lind discusses collaboration as an open-ended concept that incorporates cooperation and participation. Lind delineates cooperation as 'the notion of working together towards mutual benefit' (Lind 2010, 185). Participation, on the other hand, suggests the formation of contexts where others might take part and, in turn, have an impact (185). From these perspectives, we reflect on performances and participatory artworks that involve complex social interactions across their planning, making and realisation, and draw on conversations to reveal the volatility and changeability of artworks and curatorial strategies. We emphasise collaboration as an important method that can offer performers and participants a site for social-political critique and a way to demand the reconfiguring of relations (see Huybrechts, Dreessen, and Schepers 2014, 11). In this respect, we emphasise that *all* collaborative practices are embedded in social-political relations and negotiations. As cooperative interlocutors ourselves, our dialogue enacts and extends a collaboration that was initiated a few years ago. *Invitation to Dialogue* (2019) by 'Chris Braddock with dialogue group,' and *Conversation Mat* (2022) initiated by Chris Braddock, are the two visual arts performance and participatory projects this article will focus on. Both were undertaken at AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery) in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, and both were aimed at transforming the artistic, curatorial and participatory ego through an exploration of voice. Both artworks involved collaborative forms of dialogue that might test out social-political relations of power.

Invitation to Dialogue aimed at fostering thirteen weeks of dialogue sessions held in a shoes-off installation comprising roll-out carpet and custom-made cushions. *Conversation Mat* also aimed at facilitating different presentations and discussions on a huge (10 m long) orange roll-out quilt. Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery is a university gallery on the ground floor of an art and design studio building. This setting helped bring together diverse dialogue and discussion groups. Both projects became a hub of activity, allowing the building's occupants to view the gallery's function differently.

After outlining the core concerns of the exhibition in which *Invitation to Dialogue* was held, we introduce how physicist David Bohm's considerations of agency inform the project. How can Bohm's research into quantum physics and the practice of meditation open up the potential for dialogue without purpose or agenda? The discussion then turns to questions of agency and its relationship to social inequality. We look to communication theorist Mohan J. Dutta to consider how participatory practices of collaboration might reconfigure (or entrench) existing power relations in the gallery context. Feedback from some of the participants and unforeseen forms of collaboration restructured our own visions of what *Invitation to Dialogue* was offering, both during its 'project-time' (programmed sessions) and 'use-time' (all the gallery opening hours) (Huybrechts, Dreessen, and Schepers 2014, 39). These critiques challenged us to think more about how we could reprioritise some of the fundamental values underpinning contemporary visual art practices and institutions. Finally, we discuss *Conversation Mat* as an experiment in participant-driven 'use-time' and a way of harnessing 'the generative potential of participatory projects' (294).

Invitation to dialogue

On the occasion of *How to Live Together*, Chris Braddock invites a group to come together every Wednesday afternoon to dialogue in a manner proposed by physicist David Bohm.

[...] A dialogue has no predefined purpose or agenda ... It is neither a discussion nor a debate ... Participants try to suspend their beliefs, opinions and judgements in order to shift the emphasis from the content of thoughts to the process of thinking. (Shingade 2019, n.p.)

Balamohan Shingade (BS): ST Paul St Gallery offered suitable conditions for our experiment. Under the umbrella of Auckland University of Technology (AUT), the Gallery takes its cue from the instruction to universities in the New Zealand Education Act of 1989, that they ‘accept a role as critic and conscience of society.’ Consequently, the Gallery was free of the pressures to justify its existence through the ordinary market-based mechanisms and metrics, like recording visitor numbers or selling work on the artist’s behalf.

For a thirteen-week duration across Semester Two in 2019, the Gallery hosted an exhibition called *How to Live Together*. This was the invitation to artists and others: Let us inhabit *How to Live Together* as an ongoing enquiry, and this exhibition as a scene or a course guided by the coupled question: What is the intimacy we must develop to create a community? What is the distance we must maintain to retain our solitude?

My curatorial initiative was to follow Roland Barthes’ provocation from a 1976–1977 lecture series titled *How to Live Together*, which guided my decisions and focus – administrative, curatorial and artistic. In this sprawling exhibition, as one reviewer put it (Lopesi 2019), the ‘deliverables’ (see Huybrechts, Dreessen, and Schepers 2014, 10) included several projects, including curriculum resources for teachers, an artist-in-residence programme, offsite performances and participatory projects, as well as a proliferation of correspondences and carefully crafted notes by the artists on Barthes’ lecture series, on community and solitude, on relationships, responsibility, and reciprocity.

Christopher Braddock (CB): And this list of exhibition deliverables continues here now as you read our collaborative, ongoing dialogue. The challenge here is to consider *all* these various types and moments of collaboration as ‘live,’ or if they are traces of something (past, present and future), to consider *all* traces as animate, of the moment, and significant (Braddock 2013, 24). This sense of onward continuity in practices of collaboration is typical of participatory projects. Huybrechts, Schepers and Dreessen write: ‘Since participatory projects rely on the input from both makers and participants, they are never finished. Their process and ‘final’ form is inherently undefined, which may lead to a feeling of uncertainty among makers and participants’ (Huybrechts, Dreessen, and Schepers 2014, 12). In this respect, we explore the possibility that our approaches, or exhibition methodology, are as significant as ‘content.’ Put another way, the *way we do things* as a lived experience is indivisible from a more classical notion of exhibition content and outcome.

BS: The curatorial methodology that structured *How to Live Together* was the concept idiorrhymy. For his 1976–77 lecture course, Barthes borrowed this concept from monastic traditions to study forms of communal life. The word idiorrhymy, which is composed of *idios* and *rhuthmos*, ‘one’s own rhythm’, refers to the lifestyles of monastics who live alone but are dependent on a monastery; it is a type of sociability that respects differing rhythms, temperaments and needs. In his course, Barthes opens idiorrhymy outward from the field of religion to other everyday spaces that ‘attempt to reconcile



Figure 3. Chris Braddock with dialogue group, *Invitation to Dialogue*, 2019, cushions, carpet, email room sheets, scheduled activations, dimensions variable. In *How to Live Together* curated by Balamohan Shingade. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Photo: Emily Parr. Courtesy of Chris Braddock & Emily Parr.

collective life with individual life, the independence of the subject with the sociability of the group,' community and solitude (Coste 2013, xxii).

In the context of our exhibition, idiorrhymy was an experiment in reconciling the differing speeds and slownesses of each project. The exhibition was not defined and contained *a priori*, but by way of artwork coming and going, as moving parts within the whole. In this way, idiorrhymy allowed an exhibition-project or enquiry to unfold progressively, 'to weave along horizontally, from one case to the next, via bridges and bifurcations, each case eventually leading to the next and merging into it' (Jullien 1999, 124). Not everything was visible or unequivocal at various stages, but by the end, an experience was lived through, a landscape sketched in, an approach figured for a life together (Shingade 2019).

CB: As part of *How to Live Together*, the members comprising 'Chris Braddock with dialogue group' (2019) came together every Wednesday afternoon to dialogue in a manner proposed by quantum physicist David Bohm (as a resource for thinking about other ways to meet). The number of one-hour sessions for *Invitation to Dialogue* totalled thirteen, mirroring the duration of Barthes' lecture course and recalling the first session in which he said, 'We'll have to hold onto the unsustainable for thirteen weeks: after that, it will fade' (Éric Marty 2013, xiii). Barthes' words reinforce our ideas that collaboration resists more conventional deliverables (as resolved and commodifiable images

and objects). Collaboration holds onto the unsustainable in ways that critique how artistic identities are forged and institutional infrastructures and resources are distributed.

My interest in Bohm stems from the way Bohm translates the implications of quantum discontinuity and entanglement into concerns about agency and an ethics of human interaction across time and distance; quantum action-at-a-distance. Bohm explored 'thought' and problems that arise from assumptions about a mechanised, singular, and fragmented view of the self. Bohm said that 'we need to pay attention to thought both individually and collectively' (2014, 12). The individual sometimes assumes that their thinking is their own; that they are in control of their thoughts and generate them by themselves. The intention of a dialogue group is to unravel the view that an individual's thinking is all their own, singular and fragmented, as if 'the one who thinks (the Ego) is at least in principle completely separate from and independent of the reality that they think about' (Bohm 1980, xi). In a counter argument to these assumptions, Bohm's premise was that thought itself is a process of movement, the content and structure of which is by no means our own; not the result of an individuated (fragmented) knowing self. Rather, thought emerges from a field of discontinuous and entangled experiences, fears, histories, stories, and so on that cannot be described as our own (see Krishnamurti and Bohm 2014, 447–448). Learning from quantum entanglement, dialogue groups aim at opening up potential for what Bohm calls 'participatory thought,' the possibility of a ground of being that never began or ends, and which unfolds from the environment (Bohm 2014, 96–99; 103).

Bohm's ideas about the potential of community are expressed in heart-felt ways and mirror some of the concerns expressed in the literature about collaborative art forms, such as Suzy Gablik's approach to 'connective aesthetics,' that is listener-centered, embracing values such as compassion and care (Lind 2010, 195). Bohm writes: 'Love will go away if we can't communicate and share meaning ... If we can really communicate, then we will have fellowship, participation, friendship, and love, growing and growing' (2014, 54). Pursuing this kind of exploration of dialogue as collaboration and cooperation, Bohm and Indian philosopher/mystic Jiddu Krishnamurti had conversations in 1983 about the future of humanity. During these exchanges, Bohm's proposition that thought emerges from a field of discontinuous and entangled experiences that are not our own, and therefore not attached to our self/ego, was also applied to ideas about meditation (Krishnamurti and Bohm 2014, 464–477).

BS: Bohm's idea of 'participatory thought' aligned with our independent interests in contemplative practices that are sustained by a community but that are simultaneously practices of solitude. I was introduced to meditation in the Zen tradition, and Chris practises Sufi meditation in the *Naqshbandi Mujaddidi* tradition.

CB: The principal aim of Sufism is to transform the self/ego by awakening the heart through meditation (Rasool 2002, 103). This is travelling off the horizons; off the plains of thought as an extension of consciousness (1). This alignment of interests reinforces that practises of collaboration often evoke art/life orientations and may stem from shared habits, sensibilities, attitudes and beliefs of those involved (see Lind 2010, 200).



Figure 4. Chris Braddock with dialogue group, *Invitation to Dialogue*, 2019, cushions, carpet, email room sheets, scheduled activations, dimensions variable. In *How to Live Together* curated by Balamohan Shingade. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Photo: Emily Parr. Courtesy of Chris Braddock & Emily Parr.

Bohm and Krishnamurti asserted that we can only come into contact with meditation when the self/ego is not (Krishnamurti and Bohm 2014, 464–467). They maintained that we cannot consciously *try* to meditate, like an activity of thought reflecting on itself. In this sense, conscious meditation would be a contradiction in terms. How then, they asked, can we be attentive to meditation in ways that do not involve consciousness and all the movements of thoughts: feelings, desires, will, fears, memories and so on? How do we know what lies beyond thought when thought needs to be silent? (466) Such ‘attentiveness’ could not be a thoughtful attentiveness; not like *paying* attention or concentrating. Meditation must then involve a kind of attention without the ‘me’ (the self/ego) present; without the activity of thought that conditions (466–467). This kind of attentiveness would not then involve concentration and effort. Bohm and Krishnamurti likewise argued that love and compassion come through this kind of attentiveness. Like meditation, love has no relationship to thought; love is not personal and can only be when the self/ego is quiet (469–470).

BS: *Adda* offered me a conceptual anchor for the *Invitation to Dialogue*, the type of dialogue envisioned by Bohm we hoped to create as a work. The word *adda* is common to Hindi and Bengali and designates both a practice and a place. ‘Adda is an Indian social practice of unrestrained palaver, but the word also refers to the place of practice – a roadside joint near a tea-shop, the outer parlour of a person’s home, an office after hours’ (Shingade 2015, 4). It is neither a discussion nor a debate, both of which suggest working towards a goal or reaching a decision. It is a meeting place – practice with no predefined purpose or agenda, not unlike the rubric under which we came to dialogue as ‘Chris Braddock with dialogue group.’

CB: In relation to idiorrhymy as a curatorial methodology, a dialogue group was an attempt to find what Barthes calls a median or idyllic form between the excessively negative forms of solitude and assimilation (Barthes 2013, 9). This means seeking out conversion moments as he writes: ‘In a life ... what are the disruptive elements – that cause this discourse to be abruptly broken off? Conversions?’ (141). Following the ideas of Bohm, ‘Chris Braddock with dialogue group’ tried to talk together without hierarchies. There were no leaders, minutes, action points or topics of conversation, and no conclusions for the group to arrive at. Participants were encouraged not to talk about what they know, trying to suspend their beliefs, opinions and judgements in order to shift the emphasis from the content of thoughts to the process of thinking, thus dismantling egos and coming together in what Bohm called ‘participatory thought.’ This might be a ‘movement of thought’ that emerges from a field of discontinuous and entangled experiences, fears, histories and stories.

BS: While Chris undertook the role of a facilitator, he did so with a view to do himself out of that job after introducing Bohmian dialogue. In these ways, *Invitation to Dialogue* as part of *How to Live Together* evolved from an aspiration for an egalitarian space for speaking with others. If structures determine who speaks, what might be the communication infrastructure that an artist and curator might inaugurate to hear those voices? On what and on whose terms is the hearing possible? Who is being heard? We wanted to hold those tensions in place while working in a gallery context, and in line with Éric



Figure 5. Chris Braddock with dialogue group, *Invitation to Dialogue*, 2019, cushions, carpet, email room sheets, scheduled activations, dimensions variable. In *How to Live Together* curated by Balamohan Shingade. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Photo: Emily Parr. Courtesy of Chris Braddock & Emily Parr.

Marty's reading of the question underpinning Barthes' lecture course: 'Is it possible to have an idiorrhymic group? Is it possible for a community of beings to exist with no Telos, no Cause?' (Éric Marty 2013, xii).

CB: The answer, in the end, was 'no,' because the *Telos* or Cause was transformed into an exploration of the *way we do* things as lived experience. More than explicit 'topics' for discussion, such as the use of plastics or carbon emissions. While those explicit topics are extremely important, we found our egos locked onto them and risked dominating the discourse, saying what we know and trying to convince others to join us. Instead, our desire for egalitarian dialogue through modes of collaboration, cooperation and participation entailed searching out spaces and ways of working together towards mutual benefit that would *future enable* better conversations about *any* significant topic. This meant holding dialogue in a speculative way. The premise was that we must transform our egos before a democracy of voice is possible. It was about trying to find asymmetries of relations that might structure dialogue. How do we see (materially) how difficult it is to see people that are 'outside' our own orbits? Bohm's ideas about dialogue groups as a way of challenging the collective and individual ego seemed like a good way forward in responding to these questions.

BS: We can situate our discussion of voice with the help of communication scholar Mohan J. Dutta who was a keynote speaker at the 2019 AUT ST Paul St Curatorial

Symposium held alongside the exhibition *How to Live Together*. Dutta's work is motivated by the problem of inequality – specifically, a form of communicative inequality. In his view, material inequality is mirrored by communicative inequality, and if we understand social change as aimed at egalitarian justice – that is, as having to do with a restoration of equality – then it is important to pay attention to sites of discourse and discursive articulation. Communicative inequality includes unequal access to sites of discourse, discursive processes and articulations. In this context, Dutta's work offers a way to conceptualise voice by placing it amidst the interplays of structure, culture and agency. 'Culture' in this framework is a site of meaning-making, and it might also reflect the everyday contexts within which meanings of art and belonging are negotiated and worked through. 'Structure' refers to the ensemble of organisations that direct the flow of resources (see Dutta 2008). 'Agency' reflects the capacity of individuals and groups to actively make sense of the contexts in which they are immersed and participate in decisions that impact their health and well-being.

Our projects tentatively attempted to build communicative infrastructures for other voices and ways of speaking. We can take galleries and museums as infrastructures for communication, as sites of discursive articulations. But across the visual arts, as in other areas of life, certain groups maintain the right to voice, for communication and participation in the discursive arena, while others are systematically marginalised. The intention of *How to Live Together* was to consider how a gallery could be present in the lives of communities and individuals. How do we democratise voice and how should we engage in hearing and listening? What do performance and participatory art traditions lend to this kind of discussion? Importantly, whose voice? How do they speak and who speaks the loudest or longest?

CB: These questions that simultaneously evoke our need for sociability through collaboration and cooperation whilst maintaining our independence are another way of considering how we can transform the artistic, curatorial and participatory ego. Moreover, as these questions about participatory practices of collaboration cannot be separated from social and political dynamics, especially of institutions, we should ask how galleries and museums can be present within the lives of their communities. In this context, it is not visitor numbers that are inherently important to communities – the museum does not matter to some communities; what is more, the museum sometimes represents cultural imperialism ('good art looks like this' and 'let us educate you').

BS: For *Invitation to Dialogue*, we developed a cooperative approach with artist and exhibition designer Eddie Clemens to develop an installation suggestive of movement and the potential of change. Together, we asked: what are the installation and performance devices that resist communicative inequality? How might such devices explore the problems of unequal access to sites of discourse and discursive processes?

CB: Balamohan had initiated regular planning meetings about eight months before the exhibition to discuss the curatorial conceptual overview as well as specific contributions. These meetings were not to *inform* artists but to come to a shared understanding of how social and structural equality is mirrored by communicative equality. In this sense, the



Figure 6. Chris Braddock with dialogue group, *Invitation to Dialogue*, 2019, cushions, carpet, email room sheets, scheduled activations, dimensions variable. In *How to Live Together* curated by Balamohan Shingade. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Photo: Chris Braddock. Courtesy the artist.

restoration of equality and the importance of paying attention to sites of discourse pulsed through the preparations for the exhibition, not simply the exhibition itself.

BS: A partly rolled-out carpet suggested the possibility of rolling-up and rolling-out the space for dialogue. Custom-made cushions were stacked against a wall as if recalling Donald Judd’s minimalist sculpture of a stack of boxes from the 1960s. The cushions were to be grabbed by participants and arranged or thrown into the space for dialogue. Participants were requested to remove their shoes, and the email invitations that Chris distributed during the project were pinned to a wall as gallery ‘room sheets,’ in the mode of more conventional labels for artworks indicating title, medium and dimensions. In this sense, the room sheets were an open invitation to further participants or passers-by, as well as functioning as ongoing exploratory notes on the nature of the performance.

CB: While these installation and performance strategies might sound straightforward, I had not worked with a curator in this way before, and these resolutions were preceded by several difficult decision changes that collaboration enabled. For example, a large minimal ply shelf/sculpture for shoes was completed and installed only to be removed following observations that it appeared too large and domineering, and that the debris of discarded shoes across the gallery floor would enhance a sense of idiorrhythmy, or



Figure 7. Chris Braddock with dialogue group, *Invitation to Dialogue*, 2019, cushions, carpet, email room sheets, scheduled activations, dimensions variable. In *How to Live Together* curated by Balamohan Shingade. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Photo: Chris Braddock. Courtesy the artist.

‘one’s own rhythm’ for participants. Furthermore, the email invitation room sheets were professionally framed in white behind glass, only to be removed and the A4 sheets simply pinned to the wall, again enhancing the provisional and process-driven nature of the invitation. We make special note of these behind-the-scenes decisions because they remind us, as indicated by Huybrechts, Schepers and Dreessen, that collaborative and participatory projects are characterised by the ‘risky trade-offs’ that continuously take place between all participants (Huybrechts, Dreessen, and Schepers 2014, 275–276). They note that participatory projects are not so much defined by objects and technologies with specific functions, but rather, they see them (after Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory) as ‘socio-material assemblies where the partaking elements, being people and objects, mutually define and shape each other’ (275). They continue to say that none of these ‘elements involved in risky trade-offs ... should be understood as determinants or prerequisites for (certain forms of) participation’ adding that they can be ‘opened and difficult to control’ (275).

Another useful way of drawing on related literature on collaborative art and design practices, such as Katrien Dreessen et al. (2011) and Liesbeth Huybrechts (2011), is to think about distinctions between two key moments: project-time and use-time (Huybrechts, Dreessen, and Schepers 2014, 36–40; 275–276). Following these distinctions, project-times for *Invitation to Dialogue* were constituted by the weekly invited dialogue sessions, which were strongly moderated by our framing of the project to generate different ways of behaving together (276). The ‘risky trade-offs’ (275–276) that occurred during project

time were numerous. The university gallery context heightened the impact of these ‘performances,’ utterly at odds with other conventional meetings. For some participants, they became the most memorable experience of their university life. One participant noted that they were able to sit in their wrongings [*sic*] and establish a relationship of care.

BS: Others found Bohm’s methodology insufficient: Could there be a latent agenda that would unfold despite there not being an official topic-based or teleological agenda? One ‘risky trade-off’ included periods of silence. While Chris and I were at home observing silence collectively, other participants found it difficult to sustain. A visiting artist recalled the military occupation of the streets of their childhood to link silence with silencing or being silenced as a form of repression. This was a reminder that participatory practices and collaboration can draw out what is in-egalitarian. In this respect, we asked: what allows the propping up of certain processes and not others?

CB: Another ‘risky trade-off’ involved the sharing of a family secret that no-one felt they wanted to discuss outside the project’s time, but which was nevertheless an uncomfortable turn in the dialogue. Also, within project-times, conventional audiences introduced complications. If someone entered the gallery during a dialogue session to ‘view’ the artwork they had to either sit down with us or move on. Standing, looking, and listening to the dialogue was not an option. There could be no viewer or passer-by. And if ‘audience’ members did join us, the momentum of the dialogue returned, at least for a short time, to an explanation of what the group was doing.

BS: Coming back to the distinction between project-time and use-time, use-time for ‘Chris Braddock with dialogue group’ constituted all the gallery opening hours when the weekly dialogue sessions were not taking place. The invited participants and all others moving through the building at any time were part of ‘use-time.’ For example, we know from anecdotal evidence that participants’ habits or ways-of-being learned in the dialogue meetings extended beyond the artwork and into the university’s day-to-day meetings.

All other people moving through the building at any moment during ‘use-time’ were unpredictable. University curriculum groups wanted to use the installation of cushions and carpets for seminars, while some students found the space inviting for downtime, presumably because of a shortage of comfortable lounging and leisure spaces on campus.

CB: This expansive sense of ‘use-time’ resulted in students sometimes eating and sleeping in the space, even with their shoes on despite the signage to the contrary. Huybrechts, Schepers and Dreessen called these unpredictable participants ‘potential participants’ in that they ‘are not yet involved in the participatory projects but could become committed to the project in the future’ (Huybrechts, Dreessen, and Schepers 2014, 277). These use-time participants can be generative, meaning they could evolve into distributed communities that further engage in a project (287–288). But these generative participants can also embrace deviations, meaning they can ‘show possibilities or pitfalls of the project that the initial makers or participants may not have foreseen or imagined’ (291).



Figure 8. Chris Braddock with dialogue group, *Invitation to Dialogue*, 2019, cushions, carpet, email room sheets, scheduled activations, dimensions variable. In *How to Live Together* curated by Balamohan Shingade. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Detail of room sheets. Photo: Chris Braddock. Courtesy the artist.

In these regards, the project had to ‘tolerate and sometimes even support conflict and discussion’, as discussed by Huybrechts, Dreessen, and Schepers (2014, 292).

BS: In relation to idiorrhythmy as a curatorial methodology, as an experiment in reconciling the differing speeds and slownesses of each person and project within the exhibition as a whole, *Invitation to Dialogue* also aimed to bring this kind of attentiveness to time and to collective life within the walls of a university. In this respect, a major ‘project-time’ benefit was to work *with* time, being attentive to it as material. For example, the dialogue group often discussed our experience of cooperating with comings and goings *in* time. We were experiencing time, but time was experiencing us. It was as if we were listening to time, and from there we were *being* the process and *observing* the process as both social and personal expressions of time. Sometimes, participants expressed feeling fuzzy around the edges and a sense of freedom.

CB: As Erin Manning has noted with regard to collaboration in the gallery context, there are environments such as her *SenseLab* that ‘collaborate to generate new ways of working together around issues and practices that exceed any one participant’s capacity’, and there are exhibition contexts that are different to this because they begin ‘with the force of our own contribution (our own work, our own career as artists), which makes it much more difficult to activate an emergent solidarity’ (Gansterer et al. 2017, 373). Because *How to Live Together* invited individual artists and artist collectives to experiment within this strange ‘zone that falls between two excessive forms’ of solitude and assimilation (Barthes 2013, 9), we wanted to question the artistic and curatorial gesture, creating what Manning terms a ‘minor gesture,’ with ‘a capacity to make felt a shift, a variation in experience that deeply alters the ecology of that experience’ (Gansterer et al. 2017, 14).

As with Dutta’s assertion that culture and art is a significant site of meaning-making, Manning stresses that ‘art can and does make a difference.’ She continues:

Art practice is one of the ways through which the opening that a minor gesture activates can be followed. Art for me is not about replaying the stakes of macro-politics but about orienting tendencies that create follow-on effects in experience that affect what moves the political at its core. In this sense, art is proto-political, affecting what can come. (Gansterer et al. 2017, 371)

As we sought ways to democratise voice and engage in non-judgemental listening/hearing, we were seeking out ways to not replay the stakes of macro-politics. We tried to design an inviting and non-challenging environment, and we endeavoured not to repeat some of the patronising aspects of a gallery’s community outreach public programme. We asked how collaborative methodologies inaugurate different minor gestures and structures.

Conversation Mat

CB: We begin to wind our discussion down with a mention of another collaborative artwork, *Conversation Mat*, also at AUT ST Paul St Gallery as part of the exhibition *EQUINOX_1:03PM NZST_23-9-22* that opened on the 2022 southward (vernal) Equinox (at 1:03PM New Zealand standard time) on Friday 23 September.



Figure 9. Chris Braddock, *Conversation Mat*, 2022, cotton, wadding, scheduled activations, 3.08 × 9.8 m. Fabricator: Arlo Pavlovich. In *Equinox_1:03PM NZST_23-9-22*. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Photo: Chris Braddock. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 10. Chris Braddock, *Conversation Mat*, 2022, cotton, wadding, scheduled activations, 3.08×9.8 m. Fabricator: Arlo Pavlovich. In *Equinox_1:03PM NZST_23-9-22*. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Photo: Chris Braddock. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 11. Chris Braddock, *Conversation Mat*, 2022, cotton, wadding, scheduled activations, 3.08 × 9.8 m. Fabricator: Arlo Pavlovich. In *Equinox_1:03PM NZST_23-9-22*. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Detail of Balamohan Shingade's *Beyond the Saffron Wave* activation 29-9-2022. Photo: Chris Braddock. Courtesy the artist.

Conversation Mat was initiated by me as a collaborative site for conversation activations. It was a large, roughly 3×10 m orange padded quilt/blanket/mat. It had a dramatic presence in the space, like a huge colour field artwork spreading across the floor. Once again, shoes-off protocols applied for each invited activation that was sign-posted on the wall as gallery room sheets. A crucial part of the artwork was the nature and design of the invitations.

BS: Similar to *Invitation to Dialogue*, this collaboration envisioned the gallery as a discursive space, an infrastructure for communication and a set of installation and participatory frameworks that could facilitate wider community involvement. The room sheets listed times and gave descriptions of six scheduled activations that included my day-long, seven-hour residence on the ‘Conversation Mat’ titled *Beyond the Saffron Wave*. I invited participants to open-ended dialogues where I shared songs and poems from the subcontinent and sustained a day’s worth of conversation on the topic of ‘how to live together,’ including discussions about ascendent authoritarian-populism and the threat of the Hindutva (Hindu nationalism) movement.

CB: While any group could deploy the mat/quilt without formal invitation, another activation involved the AUT research cluster Vā Moana who hosted Philipp Schorch, Professor of Museum Anthropology at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, and the videographer Paul Janman. As another activation, I collaborated with performance artist Layne Waerea with participants for a work titled *Sweaty Conversations in Tāmaki Makaurau* which also included orange cushion/bags designed for a previous performance at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in 2022. The final activation involved the AUT University’s *Middle Eastern and North African (MENA)* student mentoring programme facilitated by Nabil Sabra, which hosted Muslim students to discuss safe and supportive community.

Conversation Mat (2022) was an experiment in participant-driven ‘use-time’ (Huybrechts, Dreessen, and Schepers 2014, 39). The mat/quilt was largely given over to a wide range of potential participants, dramatically increasing the gallery’s possible audiences and/or participants. In many cases, neither artist nor gallery staff were present for the activations. In this respect, they were largely unmoderated so any ‘risky trade-offs,’ as proposed by Huybrechts et al. were unaccounted for. This also means that they can never truly be assessed in terms of their participatory ‘outcomes.’ They present ‘the generative potential of participatory projects’ (294).



Figure 12. Chris Braddock, *Conversation Mat*, 2022, cotton, wadding, scheduled activations, 3.08 × 9.8 m. Fabricator: Arlo Pavlovich. In *Equinox_1:03PM NZST_23-9-22*. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Detail of Balamohan Shingade's *Performance and the Concept of Voice* activation 6-10-2022. Photo: Chris Braddock. Courtesy the artist.



Figure 13. Chris Braddock, *Conversation Mat*, 2022, cotton, wadding, scheduled activations, 3.08 × 9.8 m. Fabricator: Arlo Pavlovich. In *Equinox_1:03PM NZST_23-9-22*. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Detail of Rodney Cross' poetry activation 23-9-2022. Photo: Chris Braddock. Courtesy the artist.

Conclusion

BS: Collaborative, cooperative and participatory visual arts projects are inextricably social and political. The two projects we have discussed explore ‘how to live together’ as an experiment that question clear exhibition ‘deliverables,’ and instead embraced non-tangible and generative possibilities that are inherently undefined and unfinished. In so doing, they question artistic, curatorial, and participatory ownership and/or dominance.

CB: We adopted and developed Huybrechts, Schepers and Dreessen’s distinctions between project-time and use-time (2014, 36–40; 275–276) as a way of exploring the controlled and designed aspects of collaboration and those that go beyond the control of makers and participants in risky and generative ways. This meant that there were unpredictable and sometimes uncomfortable aspects encountered during the projects. We drew attention to the art/life orientations from which many modes of collaborative and cooperative artmaking stem. And, finally, we attempted to discuss an attentiveness necessary for group and individual participatory/performance activity that aimed at reconciling collective life and individual voice as it attended to the differing speeds of participants.

BS: Let us conclude with questions and reflections on the potential directions for the gallery-audience and artist-curator relationships by considering the successful and challenging aspects of *Invitation to Dialogue* and *Conversation Mat*.

CB: We had to court failure all the time. Seeking out conversion moments through idiorhythmy (as a median between negative forms of solitude and assimilation), meditation, and adda (as unrestrained palaver), meant failing and learning from it. While a university gallery setting is largely free of market-based mechanisms and metrics (sales, recording visitor numbers, local council expectations etc.), could a gallery sustain a future project with entirely undeliverable use-time activity? On the one hand, could artists and curators resist all forms of documentation, as most stakeholders seem committed to contributing to the art historical archive? How far would participants be willing to go in relinquishing tangible deliverables? On the other hand, Bohm’s methodology was insufficient, and without minimal structure, latent agendas to do with participatory ownership or other forms of dominance could unfold. As Huybrechts et al. note, the unknowns associated with undeliverable use-time activity could harm a project through potential unethical or deviant behaviour (2014, 291).

BS: Among other concerns, we had reservations about our safety while discussing the Hindutva movement. Mohan J. Dutta’s call to unveil communicative inequality remained a key driver, but we sometimes witnessed how participatory practices, and collaboration can draw out what is in-egalitarian. Certain groups maintain the right to voice. But our question, ‘How do we democratise voice?’ remained nevertheless present.



Figure 14. Chris Braddock, *Conversation Mat*, 2022, cotton, wadding, scheduled activations, 3.08 × 9.8 m. Fabricator: Arlo Pavlovich. In *Equinox_1:03PM NZST_23-9-22*. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Detail of *Sweaty Conversations in Tāmaki Makaurau*, Layne Waerea & Chris Braddock activation 4-10-2022. Photo: Ena Kosovac. Courtesy the artists.



Figure 15. Chris Braddock, *Conversation Mat*, 2022, cotton, wadding, scheduled activations, 3.08 × 9.8 m. Fabricator: Arlo Pavlovich. In *Equinox_1:03PM NZST_23-9-22*. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Detail of *Sweaty Conversations in Tāmaki Makaurau*, Layne Waerea & Chris Braddock activation 4-10-2022. Photo: Ena Kosovac. Courtesy the artists.

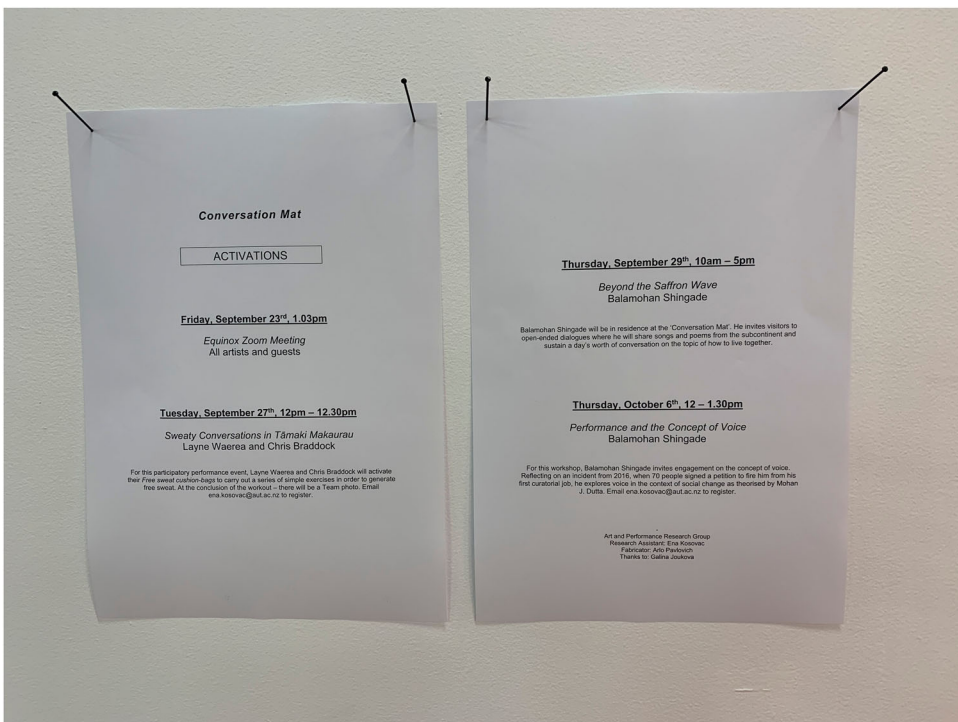


Figure 16. Chris Braddock, *Conversation Mat*, 2022, cotton, wadding, scheduled activations, 3.08 × 9.8 m. Fabricator: Arlo Pavlovich. In *Equinox_1:03PM NZST_23-9-22*. AUT ST Paul St Gallery (renamed Te Wai Ngutu Kākā Gallery), Tāmaki Makaurau/Auckland. Detail of room sheets. Photo: Chris Braddock. Courtesy the artist.

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