



Dunseath, J. and Squires, K. (2023) Chew, *On Not Knowing: How Artists Teach*, Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, UK, 9 - 10 June 2023.

[conference workshop script and slides]

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Distracted Pedagogy - Chew - Jenny Dunseath & Kate Squires 2023

Chew 1:

[SLIDE] We are Jenny Dunseath and Kate Squires and we would like to welcome you to our contribution today. CHEW is a series of playful interventions that are interspersed throughout today's Distracted Pedagogy event.

CHEW seeks to ask whether material engagement can help to divert passive thinking into research? It seeks to provide a space in which material can draw attention to the individual's sensual, intellectual and subconscious thinking through embodiment, subversion, diversion and repetitive actions. It involves four x 5 minute prompts of multi-sensory approaches that are designed to encourage focus to shift from the mind to the body, and from thought to action.

We hope that these activities will allow a chewing through making; The interactions are intended to enable a material processing of theory; a constant oscillation between making and language.

For the duration of today's session, please have some chewing gum and plasticine ready. Please follow the instructions given to you throughout today's event. If you cannot chew the gum, or touch the plasticine, please simulate doing so, or you might have your own approach.

[SLIDE] To begin, we would like to bring you back to your bodies and the place we are in. Please touch your jumper or top, then touch your hand, and then touch your plasticine. Please chew the chewing gum. Hold your plasticine and look around you.

Both the plasticine and the chewing gum can be similar to, but not quite, human. The warm, soft, skin-like quality of the plasticine and the way our teeth's impression reflects our bodies back to us. Both bodily and alien.

[SLIDE]

"Materiality is both too alien and too close for humans to see clearly." (2004: 349)

Can this 'alien' materiality (simultaneously human and non-human), distract us by allowing our attention to keep wandering back to the body, away from the isolation of the mind?

Whilst you're chewing, try to notice your thoughts as they pass through you.

There might be one or two you want to hold onto. Try to grasp one, and hold it.

[SLIDE 4] Can you chew a thought into the gum instead of saying it?

Can your hand mimic the action of your teeth?

[SLIDE] Current research suggests the body affects the brain as much as the brain affects the body. That even the smallest amount of physical activity, like fidgeting or chewing gum, can raise levels of neurotransmitters which are essential for improving attention and focus.

Let's bring our attention to the materials we are using

[SLIDE] The mutability and temporary feel of plasticine was used by Ellen Gallagher to subvert found historic magazine advertising which encouraged transformative hair and beauty products to its African-American readers.

[SLIDE] Hannah Wilke's modelling of chewing gum into miniature vulva which she stuck to her own body as a metaphor for the chewing up and discarding of women.

[SLIDE] Please keep chewing the plasticine and the gum

Chew 2:

[SLIDE] How are you digesting the other sessions?

[SLIDE] Please notice the shape of the chewing gum in your mouth

[SLIDE] Can you make the shape of your chewing gum out of the plasticine?

Here the process of feeling the shape of the gum, draws attention to our mouths and to be inside our heads. It allows both the throat and mouth to be used, to be brought in, contained, and our voices muted.

Whilst contained in our mouths, the gum can't be seen, but it is understood by being felt and sensed. Here, two ways of understanding an object are established, the cerebral idea, and the object that is hidden or withdrawn. When we attempt to translate our sensation of gum into plasticine, making the hidden visible through our sense of touch, our attention shifts again from the thought to the material. Can this activity create space to distract and divert passive thinking into active thinking?

[SLIDE]

"That which looks at all things can also look at itself and recognize, in what it sees, the "other side" of its power of looking. It sees itself seeing; it touches itself touching; it is visible and sensitive for itself"

For Merleau-Ponty, we see through and with the body. Through embodied experience, we situate ourselves in the world.

[SLIDE] In *Clay* (2015), a performance by Jade Montserrat, the artist is totally absorbed in the materiality of the landscape. We see her using her body to work with the clay. Does thinking with our body allow us to be in dialogue with the context we are in?

[SLIDE] In Orozco's *Yielding stone*, a plasticine ball, equal to the artist's weight was pushed through the streets of New York. We are able to visualise the physical experience of the plasticine as it is imprinted, we are also able to see the act of experience happening to the plasticine.

[SLIDE]

"We situate ourselves in ourselves and in the things, in ourselves and in the other, and at the point where, by a sort of chiasm, we become the others and we become the world."

[SLIDE] How is your plasticine and chewing gum? Could you take the gum out of your mouth, and look at the plasticine. How do the shapes compare?
Leave them side by side for now.

Chew 3:

[SLIDE] Is CHEW distracting, disrupting, disjointing, subverting your thoughts? Please take a new piece of chewing gum and grab your plasticine.

[SLIDE] Please move the chewing gum from one side of your mouth to the other.

[SLIDE] And move the plasticine from one hand to the other. Please Repeat until you find a comfortable rhythm, and until the next task is given.

[SLIDE]

[SLIDE] Elizabeth Price's *Boulder* 1997 was made by a repeated process of unwinding packing tape and then winding it into a sphere. Her PhD detailed the process of making *Boulder*, 1997 and shows how the subjective, repetitive process of making can generate knowledge.

[SLIDE] *"When I think back I am surprised at how thoughtlessly I initiated the process. But though I had no plan, it is clear from the development of the sphere that despite the abstracted idleness of the initial activity, at some point the possibilities of fidgeting with tape began to be tailored by a knowledge of its function."* (Price, E. 1999: 13)

[SLIDE] Ingold writes about weaving a basket, within which he shifts the emphasis from the end object, or artefact, to the process of making, the weaving. It is within this action that the mind and body work with the material. For Ingold it is this "life activity" that can restore the artefact to its context in everyday life.

Objects then could be seen as mute end points, with meaning being found within the weave, or process. Or in the mind of the viewer.

[SLIDE:]

"The world of our experience is, indeed, continually and endlessly coming into being around us as we weave.[. . .] Mind is not above, nor nature below; rather, if we ask where mind is, it is in the weave of the surface itself. And it is within this weave that our projects of making, whatever they may be, are formulated and come to fruition." (Ingold, (2000): 347)

To focus for a moment on the process. Like weaving, winding tape, or chewing, what does the repetition of an action with material do to the mind? Can this repetitive process of simultaneously moving the gum and plasticine demonstrate the importance of joining thinking and making?

[SLIDE] Here Shonibare is able to subvert the work with the inclusion of the cloth, a potent by-product of the colonial period, can be seen as highlighting the exuberance of the upper classes in

Fragonard's original and laying bare the complex colonial history. At the same time the cloth expresses post-colonial racial pride, nationalism and resistance.

[SLIDE] The other side of repetition is a repeating of an act, a reenactment. Thinking through Foucault for a moment, can the process of repetition allow us to re-think an action in a different context? Can reenacting something in a different time or place allow an objective critical understanding? Or allow a different critical understanding?

[SLIDE] Can we suggest you take your plasticine and gum, and reenact this in another space in order to focus back and reflect on the generative moment of embodied experience?

Chew 4:

[SLIDE] Through these interventions, we have moved from embodiment to the tangible object, to consider process repetition, reenactment and the muted object.

[SLIDE] Please keep chewing the gum and chewing the plasticine.

[SLIDE] Chew has been the chewy distraction, pushing and pulling at your attention and focus. The actions have been designed to bring awareness to the development of thought by using materials to bring attention to the body and change passive into active learning. The interventions aimed to allow space for processing and for processes of distraction

[SLIDE] Let's think about the space we are in - a space of learning. With the use of a PowerPoint presentation, we nod to traditional educational tools. A screen talking at you, returns us to the disembodied experience of online learning, and can remind us of the noticeable shifts in agency and attention that occur in these disparate spaces.

CHEW has been a presentation, with no presenters. Actions and information have been given with no tutor watching. Please chew through these questions for a moment.

[SLIDE]

*Does our non-presence allow you to be more or less engaged?
Have our interventions distracted you from, or brought more attention to the other sessions?
If there is no tutor or presenter, is accountability and evaluation possible?*

[SLIDE] What about the materials?

The chewing gum could mute you as an audience. Your chewing disarms your ability to talk and to talk back. Or does it empower you to mutely express your lack of engagement?

[SLIDE] Similarly the plasticine occupies your hands and could draw attention away from the screen, maybe it prevented you from keeping notes. Or, maybe you didn't use the materials at all?

[SLIDE] Consider this Head of The Thinker by Rodin. Through the process of casting the extracted head comes with a blob of excess plaster, a material interruption. The head seems to speak or breathe a thought. The materiality here, shapes the work in a way that is unexpected.

Through our interventions, what did the materials do to your thoughts? Did the materiality diversion or distraction shape your thoughts or change them in some way?

[SLIDE] And finally, whilst chewing, and with your mouth firmly closed, please turn to the person next to you and comment on today's intervention,

Try to interpret what they are saying?

Thanchew

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Quotes

Jenny Dunseath & Kate Squires 2023

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Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, ed. James M. Edie, trans. Carleton Dallery, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964. Revised by Michael Smith in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*, Galen A. Johnson, ed., Evanston: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1993.

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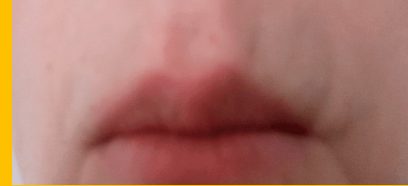
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Elizabeth Price PhD: A demonstration of a relation between thinking and doing: Sidekick; and other unfinished work, undead 1999



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