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# More than a Meeting

## Performing the workshop in the art institution

BEN CRANFIELD AND MARIANNE MULVEY

<sup>1</sup> Mulvey was assistant curator and later curator, Public Programmes at Tate 2009–16. For confidentiality, all reference and critique relating to Tate is drawn from what is available in the public domain.

<sup>2</sup> Claire Bishop mentions the workshop as central to the work of participatory artists, such as Oda Projesi and Paul Chan (2012: 20, 251).

<sup>3</sup> Modelled on Lacy's *Crystal Quilt* (1985–7), *Silver Action* (2013) was a live work inviting women over the age of 60 who had been politically active from 1950 to 1980 into conversations around tables over the course of a day. The piece was created through a preliminary series of workshops with women over the age of 70, in part gathered by Tate's Communities team.

A brief review of several UK art institutions' websites demonstrates the ubiquity of workshops: Tate Britain advertises 'Artist-In-Residence Workshops For Schools'; under 'Learn>Community', Whitechapel Gallery advertises that its 'free workshops are designed to support first-time visitors as they explore art and making' (Whitechapel n.d.); the Victoria and Albert Museum states 'from calligraphy to virtual reality ... illustration to photography, our workshops offer a huge variety of ways to get hands-on experience and explore new skills' (V&A n.d.); the Paul Mellon Centre (PMC) offers workshops on 'Student Dissertations', 'Research and Writing' and 'Writing on Art' (PMC n.d.); Arnolfini's offering suggests a strong bias towards making, with images depicting clay, wool, collage, hand-made paper and a group sitting around a table (Arnolfini n.d.); while the Scottish Sculpture Workshop (SSW) announces its intention to 'empower artists and communities through collective learning and skills development ... experimentation, alternate knowledge production, togetherness and artistic desire' (SSW n.d.). From a quick glance across these webpages then, the language and images used to promote the workshop suggest that it may be understood – or utilized – as a space of sociality, inclusion, craft, knowledge acquisition and skills exchange. Indeed, at its most basic, the word 'workshop', consisting of the two words 'work' and 'shop', signifies both a space where something is produced and something is exchanged.

As teachers and sometimes public programme curators with a deep affection for the workshop, our concern is both for what happens within these spaces and the function of the workshop as a meeting place.<sup>1</sup> Divergent value systems are mobilized in the use of the workshop as a cross-over format, from pedagogy and corporate culture to contemporary curatorial and artistic

practices. Indeed, beyond the range of workshops offered to schools, families and communities readily advertised on art institutional websites, models of curatorial workshop 'by-invitation' exist as more specialized meetings than those reviewed above. These have been central to advanced curatorial projects such as *ACADEMY, Learning from the Museum*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands, 2006 and freethought's contribution to Bergen Assembly in 2016. The curatorial workshop builds on the long-term use of the workshop as the bedrock of 'participatory'<sup>2</sup> art practices where specific groups are invited into an artist-led model to work on something later made public through a specific viewing situation, such as Suzanne Lacy's *Silver Action* in Tate Modern's Tanks in 2013.<sup>3</sup>

Yet surprisingly little published research explores this form within discourses of curating art and performance. One must go beyond these fields, to health and pedagogy, for example, where the efficacy of the arts workshop as a research methodology has been reviewed (Tarr *et al.* 2018). What is the significance of this turn to the workshop as a special kind of meeting within the art institution? Furthermore, why has curatorial practice – traditionally dedicated to the care, scholarship and arrangement of objects – been drawn towards the workshop as part of its expanding repertoire of cultural modes, alongside other distinct, but related forms of meeting, such as the reading group, seminar and discussion? What work is the workshop doing within the context of the art institution and what cultural value systems does it shift, or fail to shift, that have been historically prioritized within those spaces? What does this form of meeting, which promises to be more productive, more open, more useful than an ordinary gathering or talking shop, invoke and bring with it?

## (RE)SITUATING THE WORKSHOP

A conversation titled 'Curating/Curatorial' between Beatrice von Bismarck and Irit Rogoff in 2012 marked the emergence of a key debate defining the last decade of contemporary curatorial discourse – whether curating is a mode of representation and display or post-representational 'doing' (von Bismarck 2012). Von Bismarck advocated for the exhibition as a space of creation, production and activation, echoing Maria Lind's now famous description of the curatorial that 'involves not just representing but presenting and testing; it performs something here and now instead of merely mapping something from there and then' (2010: 63). The word 'performance' in Lind's description is especially important for our understanding of the pleasures and pains of the workshop as curatorial mode, discussed below. For now, we want to draw attention to the way in which such a shift in thinking emphasizes, simultaneously, the gathering function of the curatorial and the productive and experimental nature of meeting, which leads curator Nina Czegledy to identify the emergence of the exhibition as a 'workshop lab in public' (2012: 141). Rogoff advocated for an abandonment of the exhibition as a cultural form altogether, proposing a post-representational notion of the 'event of knowledge' instead. Here the performance of the event is as important as anything existing prior to or after this event. The event of knowledge is a special sort of meeting, not just of objects or people, but of 'existing knowledges that come together momentarily' (Rogoff cited in von Bismarck 2012: 23).

A closer look at Rogoff's collaborative curatorial work reveals that, while the exhibition is still an important element of making public, the active 'work' of the curatorial is just as likely to be found in other forms of meeting. Preceding the ill-fated Nicosia edition of the Manifesta Biennale, Rogoff and others curated a series of 'coffee breaks', described as 'informal public brainstorming session[s]' (e-flux 2006), while the project *ACADEMY, Learning from the Museum* 'brought together 22 philosophers, theorists, architects, planners, performers, activists, artists and students in seven groups, each of

whom posed a related question and proceeded to investigate it as a project' (Rogoff 2006). The activities that Rogoff and other advocates of an expanded notion of the curatorial undertake are often explicitly labelled as workshops, yet even when they are not, they have helped validate the format as central to contemporary artistic and curatorial practice. This has happened alongside the discourse of New Institutionalism and what has been termed the 'educational turn' in contemporary art and curating (Graham *et al.* 2016).

The workshop appears as a blank canvas, offering practitioners and institutions alike a loose definition of activity that is understood to be more 'active' (following Rogoff and Lind) than traditional exhibition making, on the one hand, and more engaging than other academic meeting formats, such as the seminar or lecture, on the other. In fact, the workshop is far from neutral territory on which to project the fantasies of post-representational participatory curating and art making. As indicated by the 'coffee breaks' and 'brainstorming' described above, the workshop borrows in part from meeting formats standardized in corporate work culture. Sometimes related to problem-solving, especially when used as a verb ('let's workshop this'), at other times used to indicate a more open, playful and social activity such as team building, the workplace workshop is enacted when more is needed from the everyday function of the meeting. It may be clumped together with seminars, conferences *and* meetings as part of a general apparatus of information exchange and idea development (Cherrier and Saidi 2021: 609–10). Yet the workshop is understood to have a specific set of affordances and formal requirements that, according to D. W. Brinkerhoff, include 'a participatory orientation that engages attendees actively in both learning and application' (1994: 2).

It may seem perverse to suggest that workshops in the art institution are used in the same way or for the same purposes as the corporate workshop, but many of the features adumbrated by Brinkerhoff are central to its use in the arts; most particularly its participatory format that overcomes modes of instruction and unilateral informational delivery. Less obvious,

but equally important, are the workshop's focus on objectives and productive outcomes and the relationship of the attendees to those goals. However, the (re)turn of the workshop to art spaces and contexts is not just a sign of them having been colonized by neo-liberal, corporate models of workforce training and motivation. It is also a recognition of the lineages (artistic and other) of the workshop that the corporate workshop itself has drawn upon. These include industrial and craft production, education and theatre, bringing together a complex and sometimes conflicting set of values and functions.

As indicated by the examples above, the practical or manual is readily suggested by the idea of the workshop – a chance to get 'hands-on' with a problem or material – what Brinkerhoff calls the 'technical' (ibid.). Although in practice a workshop may be just another term for a seminar, its haunting by histories of making, industry and technical learning suggest something more practical, applied or productive than a 'mere' discussion. In the visual arts and design, the Bauhaus workshops in 1920s Germany are an important reference point for keeping the arts linked to a progressive idea of modernism as embedded in technical learning and experimentation with materials.<sup>4</sup> Within the British context, in the early 1910s Roger Fry's Omega Workshops in London specifically sought to break down the boundaries between 'fine' and 'decorative' arts and to provide a route to market for artists working in the Bloomsbury circle (Billingham 1984). The workshop, then, can act as a conceptual bridge between industrial utility, pre-industrial craft skills and neo-liberal forms of immaterial labour in the quaternary economy.

If the lineage of the art and design workshop keeps contemporary corporate culture tied to ideas of technical utility, manual labour and economic viability, the equally rich tradition of the theatre workshop underpins the workshop as a space of immanent and experiential value (Rasmussen and Wright 2001). The ubiquitous use of the workshop in art institutional education/access programmes and corporate team building is often less concerned with production than the relational and transformational.<sup>5</sup> Borrowing from and diluting

the demanding practices of modernist theatre rehearsals, that are 'not only a preparation for the opening [night]' but 'are for the actor a terrain of discoveries, about himself [*sic*], his possibilities, his chances to transcend his limits' (Grotowski cited in Rasmussen and Wright 2001: 2), the workshop has become a quick-fix device of self-discovery to produce better workers for the company or better publics for the art institution.

#### THE WORK OF THE WORKSHOP

Taking the genealogies of today's workshop as it appears in contemporary art and institutional practices together with the notions of production and exchange inherent in the word itself, we approach a picture of its contemporary use-value in art institutions. The frequent proximity of 'workshop' and the term 'well-being', whose nebulous connotations refuse to be pinned down, positions the institution as caring a little more deeply about and for those taking part than in other forms of programming. The quality of this care and 'well-being' produced through taking part cannot be quantified, but the ongoing nature of, for example, the 'CreativeShift: Adult creative well-being workshops' at Arnolfini signifies some kind of commitment from institution and participant beyond the exchange implied by the more usual offer to 'visitors' or 'audiences'. The V&A's eclectic offering, alongside several of the other institutions mentioned above, positions practical skills acquisition alongside experimentation with a variety of materials (paper, clay, wool) and processes (photographic, sculptural, craft). These are visualized through images: close-ups of hands working materials, small groups working around a table or discussing in a gallery. Among other things, these images signify a sociality prefaced around getting together to learn, make and do in an intimate setting and the banishment of the broadcast model of public engagement from these spaces. In fact, the facilitator of these workshops is frequently just out of view, despite the prominence of the 'Artist-led Workshop' model (Tate n.d.b). It is almost as if participants are getting on with it themselves, absorbed in their work, discussion

<sup>4</sup> A 2010 Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York exhibition was titled Bauhaus 1919–1933: Workshops for modernity.

<sup>5</sup> The famous Six Thinking Hats corporate workshop exercise owes a lot to traditions of roleplay and the late modernist theatre rehearsal (de Bono 2017).

and making, without the need for direction, suggesting horizontality and co-production. Such advertising of workshops also foregrounds ideas of social inclusion and accessibility. This is often signified by the use of descriptors such as 'local' and 'outside of formal education' alongside images connoting informality and play (Whitechapel n.d.). When brought to a more specialized art historical institution like the PMC, all of these connotations serve to soften the edges of its programme for art historians and scholars—in reality, a highly specialized public—with the word 'workshop' merely appended to a session's title.

That there is sometimes something vaguely patronising about the way in which the workshop is utilized and promoted across these institutions and beyond, is just one of the tensions arising when critically assessing how it is being deployed there. Depicting participants and their labour serves to make, momentarily, them and/or their work hyper-visible. In reality, workshops (as part of a broader learning or education offer) most often function as a supplementary activity within the institution (Dewdney *et al.* 2013), despite what is known as the 'educational turn' in curating, foregrounding discursive modes and learning formats (O'Neill and Wilson 2010). This is not to say that what happens within these spaces is not valued and valuable in and of itself. Rather, it indicates that the rise of the workshop in curatorial, institutional and art practices is not merely incidental or trendy, but performs particular functions.

Before considering what these functions might be, it is worth dwelling on how participants' labour might be understood as valued within the workshop, in relation to ideas of 'work' and 'shop' mentioned earlier. Might this labour be seen as an extension of the wider making visible and/or acknowledgement of artistic labour that has marked the landscape of contemporary art (Kunst 2015)? If the workshop performs the labour of process, it could be said to bring the implied labour of the studio into the institution for a more public consumption, shifting the notion of value from viewing a finished product, to participation in the process of making that 'work' of art. Through the artist-led workshop,

the creative work of artistic labour is re-packaged for participants. In addition, if the workshop in the art institution centralizes the (artistic) labour of facilitation, it also dramatizes being in a creative process and makes such work of co-production available for consumption as an experience.

Is this opportunity to participate in the process of creative work a fair and purely positive moment of exchange? The workshop as a developmental form of artistic practice in which an artist 'collaborates' with a closed workshop cohort (for example, at Tate: Sehgal 2012; Lacy 2013; Ashery 2014) may provide a more complex picture of what is produced and consumed. In these examples, through open calls and more specific recruitment through existing community partnerships, participants with specific skills, interests or lived experiences are invited to commit to a series of workshops with an artist to develop a piece of 'work'. The results – whether discursive, choreographic, theatrical or all of the above – have a moment of unveiling or performance in a much more public space, like Tate Modern's Tanks and Turbine Hall. The premise of horizontality and equality in the moment of meeting is now re-packaged as the work of one artist, while the moment of equity within the workshop is incorporated in the perceived political agency of the work, even though it is often the (prior and lived) experience of participants that is the primary material from which the resulting work is produced. In exchange for their labour, participants get to 'consume' an experience with an internationally acclaimed artist (whether or not this is a conscious motivation), placing the workshop squarely within the experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1999).

The workshop is, therefore, an ideal space for the 'prosumer' as someone who labours *and* consumes through their participation. Drawing on Alvin and Heidi Toffler's coinage of the term in the 1980s, Jen Harvie theorizes and critiques the prosumer's role in the trend for theatre companies like Punch Drunk and You, Me, Bum Bum Train to sell experiences explicitly relying on the active involvement of their audiences to direct their participation and design their own experience (2013: 28–9). Whereas these

companies make the labour of their audiences explicitly part of their enjoyment, the art institutions 'offer' of the workshop, though naming the opportunity to work up front, is rather more veiled about who is labouring for whom, and to what end. Additionally, in Harvie's example, the prosumer's work is carried out and rewarded in the moment, heightening the individual's theatrical experience. In the institutional setting, signing up for the opportunity to work during a workshop may involve bringing one's own prior experience of an issue to the table to labour over it together. We return below to ways in which some workshops require rather a lot of work from participants in order to be effective, through one specific example.

This ethical and aesthetic tension between collective production in a moment of facilitated dialogue and its subsequent re-authoring in a moment of presentation within the museum and gallery market system has been previously critiqued (Kester 2011; Bishop 2012). What concerns us here is not whether the outcome of the workshop is ethically or aesthetically robust, but what work the workshop is doing within the institution. Does it recalibrate the politics of engagement centred upon the meeting of the acculturated 'eye' and the modernist art object (Bourdieu 2010 [1984]: xxv)? Or does it offer a *performance* of democratic participation to maintain the infrastructure of artistic value and neo-liberal hyper-production? Furthermore, does the workshop offer a performance that operates *performatively* in the institution, or does it perform in order to limit the performative demands that may issue from its occurrence?

The positing of the above questions relies on a complex and slippery relation between understandings of performance, performativity and non-performativity. To suggest the workshop might be in and of itself a performance within the art institution invokes its live, sometimes staged, and often theatrical nature. Not only because it may reference the traditions of theatrical rehearsal as mentioned above, but also because workshops sit alongside other public programming forms in the art institution that are specifically tasked with bringing people together in directed activities of specific

duration, in difference to object-based forms of exhibition. Indeed, public programmes in visual arts organizations without dedicated performance curators are often the spaces where more explicit modes of performance are programmed and commissioned (for example, Nottingham Contemporary). There is another way that the workshop can be said to be a performance, in that it stages something for the institution in terms of its stated mandate or aspirations. As described above, the workshop is frequently used as a space to perform the institution's commitment to its publics in terms of engagement and opportunities for participation, while also indicating the institution's utility in terms of transformation, skills acquisition or production to funders.

Yet to call a workshop a performance might suggest that it is merely such. Here the ideas of performativity and non-performativity are useful to understand how the workshop as performance can 'speak' to and for the institution and whether or not that 'speech' acts within the institution or remains merely symbolic. By using the word 'speak' we are invoking the notion of performative utterance proposed by J. L. Austin and developed by Judith Butler (Butler 1990, 2019), to mean, as Dorothee von Hantelmann (2014) says, 'that under certain conditions signs can produce reality'. Von Hantelmann, following Austin, questions the value of attempting to differentiate language (or in Hantelmann's case artworks) that are performative and, therefore, 'reality producing' from those that are simply 'reality-describing' (ibid.). However, we see value in maintaining the idea of performativity as a way to think about how the performance of the workshop (that in reality is often little more than a talking shop) does or does not live up to its nominative claim to work and produce change within and beyond the performance of the workshop.

This understanding of performativity may jar with more colloquial uses of the word to describe either the general nature of something as characterized by elements of performance, or, more pejoratively, as a rhetorical or empty gesture made for show without intention to act. To maintain Butler's use of performativity, we refer to such empty uses of language, gesture

or format as ‘non-performative’. We take this idea from Sara Ahmed (2016), who uses the term to theorize moments when institutions put out statements, hold talks and workshops about social justice or racial equality that fail to operate performatively (that is, to do anything) within the mainframe of the institution itself. Our preference for Ahmed’s use of non-performative is not just to maintain the prior meaning of performativity, but also to emphasize that such instances of inaction are neither an unfortunate failure of process, nor the empty use of rhetoric. Rather, they are the consequence of systemic and infrastructural mechanisms that work to prevent the translation of what might be said or agreed in a meeting or workshop into action.

To explore further how performance, performativity and non-performativity operate through the form of the workshop, we focus on an example that both exemplified the trend for art institutions using the workshop as the idealized and politicized performance of public engagement *and* exceeded the boundaries of sanctioned co-production and performance. ‘Disobedience Makes History: Exploring creative resistance at the boundaries between art and life’ (Disobedience), 2011 by The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (the Lab) led to the formation of the activist group Liberate Tate. It remains one of the most significant public programming activities in Tate’s history. Commissioned by Tate Modern’s Public Programme curators to run a workshop on art, civil disobedience and the museum’s role in climate change in 2010, according to Liberate Tate, the Lab were ‘told by curators that they could not take any action against Tate and its sponsors’, a mandate ‘policed by the curators’ (Liberate Tate n.d.). In what is now an infamous story, workshop participants ignored this directive and created a performance action protesting against British Petroleum (BP) sponsorship in the museum. Several participants subsequently banded together to create a new activist network with the stated aim of ending Tate’s reliance on oil sponsorship by 2012 through a series of targeted performance actions in and around the museum.<sup>6</sup> In 2015, BP announced the end of its twenty-six-year

sponsorship agreement with Tate. In an article for *Art Monthly* narrating the events of the workshop, John Jordan of the Lab described it as ‘pedagogic success beyond anything we could ever have imagined’ (2010: 35).

It is clear that ‘Disobedience’ was never designed by Tate’s Public Programme team to be a conventional piece of audience engagement, using playful activities to explore an exhibition or collection display. Indeed, it can be seen as part of the wider shift in curatorial practice described above, away from exhibition making and towards Rogoff’s performative event of knowledge. Such events were also part of the innovative practice pioneered by the Public Programme team to rethink not only how potential publics interacted with Tate, but how they could be engaged in its critical reformulation. For example, The Tate Encounter’s project (2007–10) utilized forms of meeting, such as the workshop, discussion and interview, to critically unpack forms of encounter with the exhibition, alongside the assumptions in institutional policy about what publicness might mean at Tate (Tate n.d.a). The commissioning of the ‘Disobedience’ workshop can be understood as a continuation of this desire to bring questions that might be reserved usually for staff and board meetings about the function and relation of the institution to its publics, not as audiences but as participants and co-researchers. However, Tate Encounters was a three-year-long research project where the findings developed through workshop formats were made public through documentation, publications and reports. Its aspirations were for the project to have performative effects within the institution itself, most notably by challenging and shifting the reductive and neo-liberal function of contemporary diversity policies (Dibosa *et al.* 2013). ‘Disobedience’, despite the productive evocations of its format, had no such follow-through or context within which to give performative force to words spoken there. Arguably, such a discreteness promised to render the workshop no more than a performance of horizontal institutional consultation.

This is not to say that such performances have no value. Indeed, the workshop as a performance

of a productive meeting is common within contemporary art and curatorial practice. The artist Cally Spooner, for example, often uses script-writing workshops as a way of exploring dominant uses of language within organizational contexts, even using such collective working to critique the non-performative gestures of contemporary politics (Corpus Network n.d.). Much more akin to the theatre workshop as a space of transformation – an end in itself – the workshop *as* performance stages the moment of meeting as the scene of critical, collaborative work. By inviting the Lab to facilitate the workshop, however, the promise of something more than a performance loomed. Jordan's positioning of the workshop as radical pedagogy shifts the emphasis from learning and skills acquisition or, even, from critical performance, to transgressive situation (hooks 1994). Significantly, it wasn't just the Lab's position as activists that marked this shift, but the actions of the institution itself, in its attempt to demarcate and frame the scope of the workshop as more than a meeting.

The language of invitation is crucial to the contemporary form of the workshop in the art institution; artist-facilitators are invited to create a workshop, and, in turn, participants are invited to do something. Invitation is part of the language of hospitality pervading contemporary curating that may appear benevolent, even generous. However, as Beti Žerovc warns, 'if you enjoy someone's hospitality, you have no right to make objections or to establish anything whatsoever of your own' (2016: 151). In the case of 'Disobedience', before a public invitation was made in the form of marketing copy advertising the event, a private invitation had already been extended to the workshop's facilitators 'to run a two-day workshop on art activism, looking at the issues of the museum's environmental impact and exploring ... : "What is the most appropriate way to approach political issues within a publicly funded institution?"' As Jordan recounts, this initial invitation shifted through emails from the curators who began to backtrack on their promise. Rather than limit the remit of the workshop, the Lab took one of the emails that they had received from the institution stating that it could not host any activism directed

against Tate and its sponsors' and made it the 'primary pedagogic material for the workshop ... projected [it] onto the wall, reminded the students that the Tate's sponsors included British Petroleum and asked them if they wanted to obey or disobey the Tate' (Labo Zone n.d.). In this way, the workshop facilitators created a new invitation to participants: to be disobedient guests in the institution. Importantly, the Lab used the expectations of the workshop format that one may *make* and *rehearse* and re-purposed the invitational restrictions as fodder for the development of subsequent public performances of disobedience within and beyond the workshop itself.

The email instructing the Lab not to specifically target Tate's sponsors was an attempt to render the workshop non-productive in terms of immediate performative consequences for the institution. Equally, perhaps, to perform the boundaries of the workshop in order to absolve the curators of responsibility for any institutionally undesirable outcomes. Rather than seeing this as incidental to the formation of the workshop, it should be understood that such delimitations on the permitted effectiveness of workshops are a part of their contemporary cultural function within institutional culture. As delegates of the institution, the curators recognized the inherent performative potential of the workshop content and format and sought to limit this potential and render the workshop non-performative in Ahmed's terms (2006). Indeed, the active refusal to recognize the performative potential of a proposition is central to an axiomatic example of institutional non-performativity that Ahmed provides in which an agreement that all members of a university panel need to have had diversity training is repeatedly denied and unacted (2016: 5).

Invoking their contractual relationship, Jordan recounts how the Tate curator claimed the Lab 'betrayed' their trust by projecting a private email onto the public forum created by the workshop and inviting discussion on it. A further meeting (decidedly less open or generative than a workshop) to discuss (and manage) the intentions of the workshop's second session with the Lab was called. With email traffic no longer



effective, corporate structures of governance were drawn upon resulting in, according to Jordan, a fraught meeting between the Lab and Tate's Public Programme team, front-of-house and security staff. With only Jordan's published re-telling to rely upon, the details of what happened and reactions to it are not represented in the round. Nevertheless, his description serves here to demonstrate the fraught potential of the workshop space within the institution. In his engaging re-telling on the Lab's own website, Jordan quotes another alleged email, this time from a participant who claims to have been "very inspired by this liberating experience ... I've never been to a workshop that raised pulses and adrenalin the way this does" (Labo Zone n.d.). This is a story of invitations, emails, meetings, workshops, pedagogy, performance and direct action. When it gets too much (or as Jordan writes, the 'shit hits the fan') the institution calls upon the meeting function to pull back and limit the excessive performative and transformative potential of the workshop. Yet, crucially, this function fails; the workshop's potential to be 'more than a meeting' is taken up by participants, turning 'raised pulses and adrenalin' into direct action.

Returning to the idea of the workshop as a place for making and theatrical rehearsal, the group produced the one thing that the institution couldn't refuse – performance art. The specific pieces produced by Liberate Tate were not just exquisite symbolic gestures in this mode, but moments of performative assembly that, in Judith Butler's words, were 'nascent and provisional versions of popular sovereignty', specifically calling on the promise of the institution to serve its publics (2018: 16). As Liberate Tate have shown in their own accounts of subsequent performances as direct action and performative assembly, the invitational promises of 'Disobedience' helped develop a practice of performative performances that constantly demanded the institution become what it promised to be for its publics: responsive to the realities of climate change and open to the most urgent art of the time. Such performative demands were constantly met by the stultifying non-performative performances of official meeting culture, such as ethics

committees and board meetings (Liberate Tate 2012). The workshop is not only a promise then, but a commitment to doing the labour of transformation. Building on Bojana Kunst's idea of the artist who, as an exemplary post-Fordist worker, is always 'at work', the workshop extends institutional labour to the public, allowing them to see themselves as 'at work' within the institution. However, what is not always made clear is how such participation might become a commitment, even a burden, to work on an issue beyond the bounds of the workshop itself.

#### CONCLUSION: MORE THAN A MEETING, MORE THAN A WORKSHOP

The genealogies of the workshop lay down a promise, even in their corporate function, of potential co-production that may exceed the space of the workshop itself. That something will be rehearsed, co-created and later performed always promises to exceed a bureaucratic process. At times it promises to be transformative. Even if Tate had not ended BP sponsorship, the workshop's promise was taken up, whether or not the institution intended it to be. It could even be argued that the invitational structure of the workshop within the art institution performs another function – of making participants feel grateful enough for an opportunity to discuss and do the work of social justice that the institution is not doing, to continue doing it after the workshop itself has ended. The genesis of Liberate Tate out of a workshop of Tate Modern's Public Programme also shows that, ultimately, all regimes of attention fail to control the publics they are directed at (Phillips 2019). The neo-liberal institution, despite its careful attentional management, is undone most effectively through the excessive co-production of a workshop where participants both refused to behave according to its invitation to non-performatively perform criticality *and* were so 'inspired' by this 'liberating experience' that they committed to doing the work of demanding Tate drop its BP sponsorship, indefinitely. The potential cost of this to individuals is hard to imagine and quantify, and yet the results (as this example shows) were significant.

From this multi-faceted example we might also gather that without the co-creative process of social transformation, the individual transformation so often desired as the end goal of corporate and arts workshops only gets us so far. For Documenta XV (2022) in Germany, curators ruangruppa emphasized collective production, centralizing the workshop in their process of collectively curating a Documenta of/with many other art collectives, mainly from the Global South (ruangruppa 2022: 12). We see this move as indicative of how the workshop and its (messy, open-ended, disruptive) potential has travelled from the margins to the centre of the art world in the ten years following ‘Disobedience’. The standardization of the workshop as part of collective art making and exhibition practice was crystallized in one of the *lumbung stories* video series by Agus Nur Amal at Grimmwelt Kassel. Performing the story of ruangruppa’s Gudskull in Jakarta with music, humour and props, the artist stated the very simple tenets of we hang out, we workshop, we exhibit. Elsewhere, evidence of past workshops was left over in central venues like the Fridericianum art museum, with digital advertisements and paper signs inviting participation or keeping curious latecomers out of spaces closed for workshops. The prominence of these in the latter venue, in particular, was striking – with each grand, ground floor room given over not to art objects per se, but collective processes: seating and lounging apparatus suggested gathering; communal tables suggested making, reading and talking; drawings pinned up showed the results of children’s workshops; screens showed recorded Zoom conversations; the spaces were littered with signs announcing ‘open workshop’ and invitations to add to what was there.

As suggested above, if the programming and advertising of workshops serve to represent the institution as accessible, inclusive, caring and efficacious, the experience of visiting workshop paraphernalia and ‘outcomes’ at Documenta XV is a reminder that such spaces are performed, performative and sometimes non-performative. Although the exclusive temporal and spatial nature of workshops means that, in J. J. Charlesworth’s words, it may feel like

‘there are lots of works that are “turning their backs” to you’, something Charlesworth sees as a good thing (Charlesworth *et al.* 2022), what the curatorial strategy of Documenta XV appears to reveal is that the work of the workshop is always ongoing and deferred. While the challenges that have faced ruangruppa show how hard it is to maintain such a space of collective deferral in the face of demands to represent and exhibit product, what the lasting effect of their open workshop processes of *lumbung* (pooling excess and sharing of resources) may be on Documenta as an institution, or the institution of the art world at large, is yet to be understood. How can we quantify the work of the workshop? Does it stay within the space performed, or does it exceed it with something that is produced and then displayed, circulated, utilized or performed elsewhere? These questions have only been partially answered by the examples reviewed, and yet the transformative potential of the workshop to be more than a meeting is, we hope to have shown, worth working with.

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