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Viscerality and Slowness: An Anatomy of Artists' Pedagogies of Material and Time

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Abstract

This paper explores community artists' pedagogies in relation to time and material. Thirteen unstructured interviews were conducted with eight artists under the auspices of an organisation that facilitated community-based workshops in Cambridgeshire, UK throughout 2011 and 2012. Concepts salient to the artists emerged, and six of the eight artists were observed facilitating twenty workshops across five sites. We found that the artists create conditions for open-ended enquiry across five dimensions: space, time, material, body, and language. This paper focuses on one of these dimensions – that of material, with reference to one other, that of time. We discuss artists' criteria for workshop materials, including simplicity, slippage, immediacy, richness, and ephemerality. We examine how the artists presented a 'limited palette' of select materials, though provided each in abundance. And we interpret the artists using

materials to facilitate what they described as slowness---an immersive, pleasure state free from past prescription and future expectation.

Introduction

This paper investigates artists who engage others through workshops based in informal community settings. The artists defined their pedagogies across multiple disciplines, however we are concerned with the materials, methods, and media normally associated with visual art. This paper addresses the limited understanding in the education field of what artists do when collaborating with others, why they value it, and how they describe it. We consider these artists' interest in the open-ended and immersive nature of experiencing materials, how they do not want people to be prescribed or judged. We use 'anatomy' as a way of evoking talk about their interest in embodied, sensory-rich experiences of materials, and their focus on two particular dimensions that emerged from the research: 'viscerality', as it pertains to media, and 'slowness', a concept relating to ways in which artists handled time.

Since the 1990s, artists from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds have moved towards collaborative and site-specific pedagogies with those who may or may view themselves as members of what Becker (1984) called "the art world". Artists associated with this participatory movement have engaged in dematerialised, less commodifiable artistic pedagogies evident, for example, in performance art (Lippard, 1997). Blurring the boundaries between artist and audience, these artists have addressed the perceived exclusiveness of the art world by engaging under-represented audiences traditionally relegated to more passive forms of participation. To do so, they have engaged audience members in the co-construction of situated artistic events. Somewhat stagnating in the 1980s, this movement resurged in the 1990s (Goldbard, 2006). Reflecting different points of emphasis, this most recent movement has been named and theorised in a multitude of ways including: dialogic art (Kester, 2004); new genre public art (Lacy, 1995); littoral art (Ross, 2006); a/r/t/ography (Springgay et al., 2008); relational aesthetics (Bourriaud, 2002); collective artistic praxis (Kwon, 2002); and more generally, socially engaged arts practice, community arts, or participatory arts.

As artists have engaged audiences in situated artistic events, the boundaries between performance and pedagogy, as well as learning in and outside the school, have become fuzzy. The role and character of the visual artist-teacher has been researched (e.g. Daichendt, 2009), as has the role and pedagogical approaches of artists working in schools (e.g. Galton, 2008; Hall, 2010) and galleries (Pringle, 2008 and 2009). Garoian (1999) describes negotiating the tensions between "the art of pedagogy and the pedagogy of art" (pp. 22-23), including dissolving identity boundaries between being an artist and being a teacher. Pedagogic insights have been derived from research of artists' multi-disciplinary practices with young people outside schools; some artists have been identified utilising project-based experiential learning

strategies to provide young people with the chance to direct projects in ‘real-world settings’ (Larson and Angus, 2011; Burnard and Swann, 2010; Brice-Heath and Smyth 1999). A “pedagogy of collegiality” has been used to describe how media artists and young people co-construct inquiry and share accountability in the production of youth radio (Chávez and Soep, 2005; p. 411). A similarly collegial approach has been described at The Hugo House, a place for writers, including young people, that favours collective curiosity and open-ended, pleasurable inquiry (McCue, 1997). Hugo House’s collaborative, relational focus on “what ifs” recurs in a/r/tographic projects where listening and viewing one another through relational pedagogies is described as a way of stepping out of comfort zones and familiar ideologies (Bickel, B., Springgay, S., Beer, R., Irwin, R. L., Grauer, K., and Xiong, G. 2010; p. 98). Personal ownership of these places and projects, as well as the diverse roles they provide, may empower young people to perceive themselves in civic terms, as those who can alter the circumstances of their lives and of their communities (Feilan, 2009; Brice-Heath and Smyth 1999; Brice-Heath and Roach, 1990). Artists in some arts programs engage young people in a sustained process of progressive problem solving, what Larson and Angus (2006) call “adaptive learning” (p. 255).

While the foregoing sample of research may provide an emerging portrait of community artists’ pedagogies, education researchers in other areas such as literacy have gained a much deeper understanding of the ways in which social contexts beyond schools and the cultural practices that arise through them contribute to students’ overall learning. Gadsden (2008) has argued that more targeted analyses are needed on the role of community artists’ pedagogy in promoting learning within social contexts beyond schools. We have noted that there are fewer in-depth studies of artists using principally visual methods when working with young people in informal community settings, thus overlooking the materiality and temporality of community artists’ pedagogies. This study addresses this gap in knowledge.

Methodology

To identify community artists for this research, eight people were purposively sampled from a UK charity that offers creative projects for children and adults. This organisation, Cambridge, Curiosity, and Imagination (CCI), began in 2002 as an informal network of artists with a diverse range of backgrounds in art, education, drama, and museum education. Its founder began the network in partnership with women that she met through her children. She noted that these mothers shared “common languages” and “mutual interests”. The group of women piloted a series of projects in early years settings and then established a charitable organisation to offer what the organisation’s promotional materials describe as “imaginative and ground-breaking projects” for children, professionals, families, artists, and community groups across the East of England (CCI, 2009).

At the time of this study, there were 15 people in CCI. All were invited to participate in the study and eight agreed. The eight artists agreed to the disclosure of their names and described themselves in the following ways:

- Anne-Mie obtained her MA in Fine Arts and trained as a visual art teacher. She is a practising visual artist and has offered workshops for children and adults at museums, schools, and arts centres.
- Deb studied English literature as an undergraduate and then trained as a biological anthropologist. Her particular interest includes partnering with toddlers and parents in woodlands to develop an outdoor creative practice.
- Debbie trained in visual art to MA level and has worked with a wide age range of people, from very young children to adults. She has an environmental interest and prefers to work with natural, biodegradable, recycled or found materials.
- With a background in psychology and marketing, Ruth strategically directs the organisation. She partners with the others listed here to facilitate workshops.
- Filipa describes herself as a movement artist with a MA degree in dance movement therapy. She worked in a variety of audiences and settings from education to health care.
- Thelma trained as a secondary visual art classroom teacher in South Africa before turning to offering arts and crafts workshops in and beyond schools.
- Idit, the founder of the organisation, trained in theatre design and currently works as an interdisciplinary artist.
- Sally is a theatre practitioner and visual artist with training in sculpture. She has described herself as a creative facilitator doing residencies in and outside schools for children, families, museum educators, and others.

These eight artists were informed of the participation requirements of the study and ethical considerations before they voluntarily agreed to participate.

A flexible, principally ethnographic multi-phased design was used because there was not a sufficient research base to predict their pedagogies or a focus for the study. Methods of data collection and analysis were adapted from grounded theory to progressively focus on artists' interests. Thirteen participant-led, unstructured interviews with the eight artists initiated the research (Powney and Watts, 1987). Concepts emphasised by the artists were identified through a constant comparative analysis of interviews. Participant observation and subsequent interviews focused on these concepts whilst remaining open to new ones (Strauss and Corbin, 2008).

After the first phase of interviewing, two artists relocated and could no longer continue. Six artists were observed facilitating 20 workshops in total across multiple sites, including three

nature reserves, a school, a community centre, and a public cemetery. Each workshop was normally two hours in length. Workshops served nursery and primary school children with their parents and grandparents, and sometimes their nursery nurses and teachers. To triangulate findings, five reflective conversations were observed when these artists collectively described and discussed these workshops with site partners. Moreover, seven semi-structured interviews with six workshop participants were conducted.

To describe their pedagogies, three of the five sites were selected. These sites featured four artists offering workshops in the cemetery and two nature reserves. These three sites were selected because the degree of participants' informed consent was satisfactory. Once descriptive cases at each site were drafted, the artists were interviewed to negotiate aspects of their accuracy, style, and content. In negotiating this description, we were interested in presenting the complexity, density and variation of these community artists' pedagogies from their perspectives. To do so, we decided to use a nested case study approach and include all eight artists who participated in the study even though only four were featured in the descriptive cases (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This decision allowed us to draw on additional artists' perspectives as we turned to interpret what had been described.

Based on our emerging understanding of artists' interests and actions, we turned to a broad, phenomenological conception of pedagogy that we considered consistent theoretically. From this perspective, pedagogy is useful in describing how one comes into being among others, and through this becoming, extends one's capabilities (van Manen, 1990). The themes used to interpret their pedagogies include: space, time, material, body and language. These five pedagogic themes overlap with a phenomenological lifeworld that consists of space, time, body, and relations (van Manen, 1990). After developing this interpretive framework, a focus group with six of the eight artists, as well as separate interviews with the founder and director, was conducted to examine similarities and differences in interpretation and strengthen the trustworthiness of the account.

In this paper, we present findings on the artists' uses of material and its relationship to time. A discussion of the artists' use of language has been discussed elsewhere (Denmead, in press). To present coherently this interpretation of the artists' approach to material and time, we have presented findings by category. Discussed in the next section, categories are drawn from metaphors that the artists used to describe their pedagogies and include: simplicity, slippage, immediacy, richness, and slowness.

Findings

Simplicity

Artists were observed consistently introducing materials that they described as ‘ordinary,’ ‘simple,’ and ‘everyday’. These inexpensive materials included string, twine, yarn, masking tape, chalk, and different types of household papers, such as baking and lining paper. Debbie joked about the difficulty of deciphering a bag of rubbish from a bag of materials that these artists used in workshops. Most artists described the importance of participants finding and using materials from the sites where workshops took place. In the outdoors, examples of found materials included sticks, feathers, flower petals and grass. In a hospital-based workshop, Filipa and Anne-Mie described how they used materials from the hospital, such as sick bowls, pill pots, and hospital scrubs.

Drawing on the Italian Arte Povera movement known for using unconventional materials, Sally echoed the other artists when she offered a political justification for offering ordinary materials and encouraging the use of found ones. She said:

I think it’s the idea about using stuff that is inclusive and including of a lot of people... I think that’s probably a political sense... I don’t want to make this an exclusive activity [from field notes].

Through those materials, most artists described sharing an interest in not allowing participants to feel excluded on the basis of skill. Anne-Mie described how a more specialized art material such as oil paint would demand know-how that might exclude participation. Exclusion, several artists described, might also occur through a lack of access, financial or otherwise. Most artists described how they wanted to emphasize that ordinary materials, found in household cupboards for example, could offer a generative starting point for some exploration.

The majority of the artists described how ordinary materials prompted people to explore them in ways that might feel, in their words, ‘more authentic’ or ‘less prescribed’. One artist described in a program evaluation how this ‘simplifying approach to the materials leaves space for the children to represent their own ideas and experiment’. By contrast, Debbie noted that a specialized material such as clay might suggest the need to make clay ‘look nice’ as a ceramicist might, whereas an everyday material, such as masking tape, would not prescribe its use to the same extent. Debbie described how everyday materials might encourage experimentation by lessening the fear of failure. Idit echoed this sentiment by emphatically pointing out, ‘You cannot fail with the stuff we give people’. She added that less expensive, everyday materials might comfort participants because if they felt they ‘screwed up’, it would

at least not feel like an expensive mistake. A related characteristic of materials artists selected for workshops included what one called slippage, discussed next.

Slippage

The artists described selecting materials with slippage, which as one noted meant that the materials could ‘easily become something... that lend themselves very quickly into transforming into something else’. Also termed ‘open-ended’ materials by other artists, I did describe introducing ambiguous materials and objects in workshops including unfamiliar kitchen tools and inviting people to invent functions for them. Sally contrasted ambiguous and playful shadows projected from an OHP with the literal representations projected by digital visualisers now used in some classrooms. Filipa offered a wet wipe as an example because it does not have an ‘obvious, immediate identity as a toy thing’. By contrast, Filipa described avoiding the introduction of objects such as a Barbie doll because it is ‘readymade with a whole army of ideas and thinking and expectations’.

Gibson (1979; p. 127) theorises how materials have “affordances” that provide preconscious clues as to how they might be used (e.g. a pull on a drawer, a handle on a hammer). It appears likely that these artists avoided materials with obvious affordances, so that participants did not simply do what materials afford and prescribe. To illustrate the slippage of materials during workshops, consider the ways artists and participants were observed using lining paper at Sawmill Street. It became:

- a percussion instrument for tapping sticks
- an object to unroll
- a track lane for racing back and forth
- a pit for jumping across
- a river for washing a monkey
- a lens for looking at grass
- a tableau for making marks, and
- a display for found objects.

With materials that can slip, most artists appear to hope that participants do not feel prescribed with regard to how those materials might be used. The artists described using materials with immediacy for similar reasons.

Immediacy

Several artists expressed interest in materials that are immediate, or do not require multiple steps in production and ongoing deliberation. Most artists described an aversion to oil paint or ceramic glaze that would demand multiple layers, drying times, and necessary sequences. They used masking tape rather than glue, with several artists commenting on the adhesive immediacy of tape. One participant in the artists' workshops compared the immediacy of materials they introduced and a paint colour mixing activity for young children she led in her nursery. She described her activity involving the following steps:

You put the brush in the water. You press. You touch the brush onto the sponge so it's not too wet. You put it into the powder paint, and then you put it into the mixing palette. Then you go back and wash the brush, put it into a different colour. Sponge. Different colour. And then mix it and see what colour you get. And then you put it on the paper. It was just too much.

By contrast, the artists provided ripped strands of fabric for participants to adorn outdoor landscapes of colour. Imit described that these immediate materials allowed children to explore material without 'thinking first and then doing' or 'looking at what somebody else is doing' before making. Immediate materials appeared to be intended to draw attention away from prescriptions of the past and expectations of the future. The artists' use of materials that richly engaged the body's senses were used with similar intentions.

Richness

The artists described using materials that more fully and pleasurably engaged participants' bodies and their senses, what several artists described as 'sensory-rich' materials. Shusterman (2008) describes how digital technologies are designed to overstimulate and desensitise the body, thus driving consumption through an unyielding demand for greater stimulation: more speed, more information, and stronger sensations. These artists appeared to select materials with a more natural hue, to draw the body into a liminal space where its senses pleasurably touch and are touched upon by rich materials.

Filipa described mud in one natural reserve as 'delicious'. The use of mud was observed for presenting children immersive opportunities for mark and sound making with their bodies (e.g. stepping and splashing). Sally mentioned the 'sheer delight' of using clay at another outdoor workshop because it was a 'visceral material', or so pleasurable to feel with one's body. Filipa and Sally critiqued one of their workshops, noting that the clay's dryness might have explained why participants did not sustain their engagement with the material as long as they preferred.

In early years education, sensory-rich materials is often associated with Montessori (1917) who promoted developing her theorisation of children's nine, not five, senses. She argues that children's sensory experiences of the world are at first chaotic, and they must fine-tune their senses to master relationships with their environments in the future (Montessori, 1917). This notion provides a point of contrast with these artists' descriptions of sensory-rich materials. The artists did not describe an interest in participants' preparation for the future, but engaging participants in the pleasure of exploring materials in the immediate.

Most of the artists discussed an interest in using natural materials. They contrasted natural materials with synthetic and sterile ones, such as plastics associated with high-tech objects. An exception included found materials such as plastic aprons that Filipa and Anne-Mie described using in one workshop based in a hospital workshop. However, they did not invite participants to wear those coloured aprons to shield themselves from messy materials, but rather to use them to adorn a space by, for example, tying or weaving them together. By contrast, Debbie noted her disappointment at an outdoor workshop she observed, where children were asked to put a coat and then a waterproof apron on before messing about with clay outdoors. Hearing this, Ruth joked that wearing a coat and apron when working with clay would be the equivalent of putting on plastic gloves and putting up a protective screen before making crumble so as to avoid becoming dusted with flour. The artists' emphasised the embodied pleasure of experiencing natural materials.

At one nature reserve, a partner from a local museum who commissioned and observed the workshops there noted how the children's tactile puncturing of paper lying on the grass was accompanied by the satisfying sound of making holes; one parent described her child becoming completely engrossed in making these holes. The making of holes may have expressed for this child a fundamental need to 'create aesthetic significance' (Hickman, 2005) or an evolutionary need to 'make special' (Dissanayake, 1992). When commenting on their workshops, Idit emphasized the importance of participants having a chance to derive pleasure from the things they touch, see, hear, and smell. Debbie added that pleasure is the sustaining factor of participants' explorations with materials. If the pleasure is gone, she suggested, the playful exploration will stop. As Springgay (2008) has noted, sensational pedagogies "keep us moving, inciting us to sense beyond this moment towards another moment" (p. 654).

Dewey (1934/2005) describes how the body's senses act on the world, are acted upon, and can lead to an experience that feels like an interpenetration of bodies and the world they inhabit. For Dewey (1934/2005), aesthetic experiences are an "attainment of a period of equilibrium" that initiate "a new relation to the environment, one that brings with it potency of new adjustments to be made through struggle" (p. 16). This "time of consummation" is a period of "beginning anew" (Dewey, 1934/2005; p. 16). Greene (2000) argues that aesthetic experience

is at the heart of Dewey's conception of the possibility for freedom because this experience allows for framing new and unfamiliar purposes. For the artists investigated here, one interpretation is that immersive exploration sustained by rich materials is a way to shed habituated ways of being and embrace new possibilities. This pedagogy of becoming is intertwined with a pedagogy of slow, sustained pleasure which is discussed in greater detail next.

Slowness

Most artists described selecting materials that contribute to slowness, a temporality that Sally described as 'true immersion and flow'. Csikszentmihalyi's (1991) concept of 'flow' describes an effortless release of 'psychic energy' during moments 'where nothing else seems to matter' and there is a 'feeling of union with the environment' (p. 41). Flow is an immersive process whereby we encounter new levels of complexity, experiencing both differentiation and integration (i.e. what sets us apart and in common with others), whilst receiving positive signals that we are up to the task of meeting these new levels of complexity.

The artists seemed to place special emphasis on the 'childlike' nature of this immersion. Deb noted that this slowness does not feel like classroom time, but feels more like the elastic, slow time reminiscent of the way people experience time playing outdoors as children. Similarly, all the artists emphasized slowness as a childlike way of being. Romanticising childhood may be a projection of a need for a paradise lost that never was, but turning to psychology, particularly pragmatist principles, we gain another view.

Psychologists have long explored why perceived time might feel slower for children. One theory put forward by the early psychologist William James is that "the foreshortening of years as we grow older [is due] to the monotony of memory's content" (James, 1901; p. 625). Dewey (1934/2005) extended James' embodied theory of psychological time in his conception of aesthetic experience by suggesting that perception is cut short once our sensory systems recognize a familiar sensation. For children, the lifeworld is unfamiliar terrain that calls out to their bodies' senses. This more heightened sensory state leads to more and better memories of immediate pasts and more distinct moments of time are parsed amidst what James coined the "stream of consciousness" (James, 1901; p. 625). As a result, the perceived duration of time begins to lengthen and the slower time feels.

This theory of slow, childlike time suggests that to stifle the acceleration of time as one grows older, then people should do what some of the artists, parents, and children did in these workshops: play with chalky chalk; shake flower blossoms from a snow machine tree; let ladybirds run on their legs; slop about in cold, messy, slippery clay; puncture holes in paper laid across grass; sprinkle sparkly dirt on masking tape; engage with the unfamiliar and embellish

memories with sensory-rich experiences. All the artists were less interested in the mundanity of acquiring technical skills needed, for example, to shape clay, but more so how experiencing the pleasure of clay sustains qualitative reasoning, a way of knowing the world with and through the body (Eisner, 2002). Elsewhere, Eisner (2001) writes:

Who can forget the experience of wet clay coursing between your fingers? There is a certain joy in working with a paper collage and finding relationships of color and form that you could never have imagined at the outset. The smell of paint, the feel of clay, the heady aroma of rubber cement are qualities that satisfy (p.6).

This interpretation returns us to a more primordial understanding of aesthetic experience focused on senses. Dewey (1934/2005) was interested in a pleasurable “heightened vitality” between body and material, where there is a “complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events” (p. 18). This strongly resonates with the artists’ descriptions of slowness, and indeed Csikszentmihalyi’s (1991) conception of flow. Perhaps at the core of the slowness the artists described, Dewey (1934/2005) suggests that the senses are not “pathways along which material is gathered to be stored away for a delayed and remote possibility” (p. 18), a critique of the assumptions underlying Montessori’s interpretation of the sensory database stored in a central cognitive processing unit (i.e. the mind). Instead, Dewey describes the body and mind in more distributed terms, with inseparable senses as the “sentinels of immediate thought and outposts of action” (p. 18). Here, bodies are located in liminal spaces where their senses touch and are touched upon by the world (Shusterman, 2008). In these liminal spaces, children might become immersed ‘in their materials’ as some artists described.

In this moment of flow, our past and future in relation to the object perhaps slips away. As Deb suggested, time feels different when we meet spaces and materials on their own, uncomplicated by the certainty of past routines or burden of future expectations. Neurological pathways may shift, leading us to accept these objects of our attention, whether they be chalky-chalk or sprinkly dirt, as things-in-themselves, uncomplicated by autobiographical references. Past references and future expectations are temporarily suspended amidst this slowness, thus minimising the possibility for failure. Immersed in slowness, participants cannot fail because they have temporarily suspended, or phenomenologically bracketed (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), what has come before or what has come next. The artists expressed how this temporal quality of slowness could be sustained through selecting ephemeral materials discussed next.

Ephemerality

Related to slowness, several artists described their interest in the ephemeral nature of material and making. By ephemeral, the artists meant that the materials did not have properties that made them physically last or deem them worthy of safeguarding. Sally noted her interest in the 'act of making' and 'the possibility of material' rather than the outcome. She noted transitioning during art school from making visual objects toward installation and performance, such as making furniture out of caramelised sugar. Describing why she made impermanent furniture, she said:

I am very against making permanent objects that sit in the world. It is all tied into that consumerist thing... I'm very resistant to it.

Debbie discussed similar influences when choosing living willow to make outdoor sculpture. She described her interest in its short lifespan. The willow sculpture literally takes root, grows and evolves, and then dies when its roots eventually crowd each other out. Filipa discussed this notion of impermanence in light of her interest in movement. 'With dance,' she said. 'It's gone, it's always going.'

With this interest in immateriality, it is perhaps not a surprise that most artists provided materials likely not considered worth preserving. Masking tape, for example, does not provide permanent adhesive. Children at one outdoor workshop collected small flowers and grasses to adorn masking tape wrapped around their wrists. Here, children and their mothers are paired "in making special" (Dissanayake, 1992; pp. 97-98) or "artifying" (Dissanayake, 2009; p. 9) what would otherwise be ordinary experience, perhaps an evolutionary acquired practice for strengthening mother-child bonds. Contributing to this ritualized behavior is the immersive pleasure of elaborating ordinary, ephemeral materials into beautiful bracelets. A mother of one of the participating girls mentioned how pretty the bracelets were though they did not last very long. Idit suggested that what was made during workshops could be 'taken apart, taken home, or put in the bin'.

Most of the time, artists were observed discarding what was left behind after workshops, with the exception of occasionally taking materials such as clay or bamboo sticks for future re-use. Children and parents would sometimes take objects home, such as a ripped piece of paper with a loop of masking tape and natural materials stuck to it. Nonetheless, inexpensive, impermanent and ordinary materials perhaps made them easier to discard. One interpretation is that several artists may have felt that more ephemeral materials allow participants to enjoy the immersive pleasure, for example, of ripping and adhering with masking tape rather than trying to make objects deemed worthy of permanently sitting in the world. This immersive pleasure emanates from within, a contrast to externally imposed, short-lived desire (Foucault,

1990). This immersive pleasure might be further encouraged by presenting abundant materials in a limited palette.

Presenting Abundant Materials in a Limited Palette

All artists described offering a limited selection of materials, each material offered in abundance. Some examples included forty-meter rolls of lining paper, a dozen rolls of masking tape, and/or an enormous mound of clay. Most artists suggested they did not want participants to ever feel limited by the amount of material they provided. At the same time, the artists ‘limited the palette,’ as Idit described it. To illustrate, two artists only offered baking paper, crayons, and masking tape during one workshop. In another workshop, two artists offered clay and a blue tarp. Idit argued this constraint challenges participants to take notice of the potentially unexpected materials they introduce. Idit suggested this limiting constraint can begin to extend participants beyond ‘doing what they normally do’. The artists appeared to present a limited selection of materials in abundance to enfold bodies in pleasure and to surprise them as well. Perhaps this interpretation resonates with how Springgay (2008) describes creating possibilities for transformation through excess, or that “which is created when control and regulation disappear and we grapple with what lies outside the acceptable” (p. 41). To do so, Idit suggested a guiding principle for the artists is that ‘less is more’.

Most artists described presenting these materials in unfamiliar ways. For example, several artists described playing with volume, dimension, and scale through stringing masking tape from floor to ceiling indoors, putting a large mound of clay on a blue tarp, or casting large shadows of small objects with an OHP. Filipa often did this to dramatic effect, rolling out lining paper further and further across settings. She described doing so to raise participants’ interests in the materials and sense of uninhibitedness in using them. Deb added that she finds it pleasurable when participants find out that they do not have to ‘stick to the rules’, or that ‘things do not have to be as they were’.

In addition to this sense of unfamiliarity and uninhibitedness, Filipa argued that there is an ‘aesthetic’ to her presentation of materials. She described carefully lining up wooden matchsticks on a table to appear inviting and beautiful, a behaviour Dissanayake (2009) has termed “artification”(p. 9). In a school-based workshop for young adolescents, Idit and Anne-Mie were observed similarly shaping several large bricks of clay across the floor like cars on a train, which the children appeared to respond to with delight. Sally argued that this presentation of materials created ‘a slant on an existing setting’ and might further extend participants’ explorations. Alternatively, artists sometimes presented materials once workshops were well underway. At one outdoor workshop, Debbie unbound a bolt of willow and began to use her ‘Derby Dibber’ to build a temporary outdoor gallery space after participants set off to explore the woodland. Sally and Filipa similarly rolled out lining paper

to create a focal point at Blackberry Bush after participants set off. Echoing Debbie's description of her delayed use of the Derby Dibber, Sally noted that:

. . . if we had laid the paper out immediately, they might not have spent much time enjoying and exploring the space first. It then seemed like a way to extend their reflecting and exploring further when they returned to base
[from interview transcript].

Moreover, Sally argued that seeing paper and chalk at the beginning of workshops would suggest to them they were going to 'sit and draw'. In a way that is similar to their use of immediate materials, some artists did not want participants to deliberate how to use materials during their introductions. In this sense, perhaps the artists created situations that draw on their practical imaginative activity. The notion of 'practical sagacity' (Hickman, 2011) is apposite here - through their practical engagement with various materials and media, artists use their wisdom regarding what it takes to explore materials in ways that sustain pleasure and extend wisdom amongst their participants.

Conclusions

Overall, it was found that artists used materials to facilitate workshop participants' ability to refashion more inventive, evocative, and pleasurable ways of being in the world. They did so by introducing materials they selected for various qualities: simplicity, slippage, immediacy, richness, and ephemerality. They offered a limited selection of materials and presented them in abundance to encourage a sustained pleasure state of slowness. In slowness, future expectations and past prescriptions slipped away and their participants could move beyond the customary and the acceptable.

The artists argued that opportunities to extend being in pleasurable ways were necessary because of the narrowing, prescriptive, and accumulative ways of being shaped by the corporatisation of private and public life. Notwithstanding the prevalence of conceptual approaches to contemporary art practice, the importance of active physical engagement with materials amongst these community artists was seen as paramount. Practical engagement was not seen as superficial handling of materials but a profound and visceral experience. Moreover, the artists were more interested in pleasurable, playful exploration of materials than acquisition of technical skills. Indeed, these explorations were core to the artists' pedagogies as these embodied explorations reflect what it means for them to be visual artists in the broadest sense, that is using materials with their bodies to make distinctive, unfamiliar marks on the world.

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