'The Art of Not-knowing in Learning Environments:
In praise of artist-residencies in schools'

A Case Study of *Edgware Road Project residency* at Marylebone with artist-collective *Ultra-red* at St Marylebone School, a Performing and Visual Arts multi faith Church of England School in West London, and *Nest* with artists Sarah Cole, Jules Maxwell, Helen Lowe, Julian Walker and Rachel Anderson at Briscoe Primary and Nursery School in Basildon, near London.

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> School and the media are inherently discursive institutions, sites within which discourse becomes a locus of symbolic force, of symbolic violence. A communicative relation is established between teacher and student, performer and audience, in which the first part, as the purveyor of official 'truths', exerts an institutional authority over the second.
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> Students and audience are reduced to the status of passive listeners, rather than active subjects of knowledge. Resistance is almost always limited only to the possibility of tuning out. Domination depends on a monologue of sorts, a 'conversation' in which one party names and directs the other, while the other listens deferentially, docilely, resentfully, perhaps full of suppressed rage. When the wholly dominated listener turns to speak, it is with the internalized voice of the master. This is the dynamic of all oppressions of race, gender and class. All dominating power functions semiotically through the naming of the other as subordinate, dependent, incomplete...
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> - Allan Sekula's 'School is a Factory' 1987-90 [1]

Like most working in art-in-education I believe that passive consumption of knowledge is somewhat characteristic of the Irish (and UK) school education systems, and that this trains us to be adults who are perhaps more passive and less critically engaged than we might be if our education was different. The quote above from Sekula is strong, and it is from an essay that the author describes as a 'deliberate provocation' [2], but I would suggest that there is a kernel of truth in his words; that many teachers, school staff, parents and students would feel in agreement with. In such a one-sided 'conversation', as described above, dialogue, enquiry and critical thinking are sidelined. I also suggest that the physical confinement of sitting in a chair at a desk, for such extended amounts of time in childhood and youth, has a part to play in fostering passivity. In today's screen captivated world, I wonder if children, like the rest of us, are even more inclined than before to have restless, distracted minds that are disconnected from often stationary bodies [3].

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[1] Allan Sekula, in *Education,* Documents of Contemporary Art, London, Felicity Allen (ed); Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery, MIT Press, 116
[2] Sekula, 115
[3] Max van Manen states in his book *Phenomenology: Phenomenology in Philosophical issues in Educational research* that 'Phenomenological pedagogy claims that one must begin from the phenomenon of pedagogy itself,

In this case study, I am looking at contemporary art practice as having something to offer the school context in terms of an approach to learning.

I will be exploring this through two artist-in-residence programmes in London - *Nest* (2005-2008) with artist Sarah Cole in collaboration with Mark Storor, Jules Maxwell, Helen Lowe, Julian Walker and Rachel Anderson, at a primary school in the London suburbs, and *The Edgware Road Project* - a 4-year artist-residency (2009-2013) at a second-level school in the neighbourhood close to the Edgware Road, with the art collective Ultra-Red. *Nest* was funded under the UK Creative Partnerships (Thames Gateway) scheme. *The Edgware Road Project* was a Serpentine Gallery project.

With *Nest* I will be looking at how the artist Sarah Cole worked with others to create safe spaces for personal and creative expression within the school. With the *Edgware Road Project residency* I will be looking at how the artist-collective *Ultra-Red* worked with students to produce knowledge that critiqued both immigration policy and the educational system within the UK. With both projects, I will be making note of multi-sensory aspects to the work, and its affects.

With this text, my intended audience are primarily teachers, school principals and those who teach teachers; as I am aiming to advocate for the role of artists in schools and in teacher-training. The nature of these residencies in UK schools are of course particular to the schools they took place in. However, I don't think that the UK location of these residencies has any direct impact on their relevance for the Irish context. My reason for selecting these projects, aside from simply admiring them, was that their lengthy durations and extensive high quality documentation, provided me with the research material I needed for a substantive enquiry into art practice in formal education settings. I am aware that funding for artists to work in any significant way within schools is difficult to acquire, and I will be discussing avenues of opportunity within the Irish context briefly.

Embodied learning
In John Dewey's text 'Democracy and Education' (published in 1916 and still conspicuously relevant today), he outlines how the infant learns through encountering the world with her own body, exploring cause and effect through reaching, handling and other activities that involve motor response to sensory stimuli. Each action the infant makes in the world, both with objects and people, produces a reaction. In essence, the infant experiments and learns how things are connected. This practically acquired knowledge is contrasted with a formal educational model characterised by rigidity of method and a zeal for correct 'answers', a zeal that he believes is motivated by the seeming easy measurability of results. He says 'were all instructors to realise that the quality of mental process, not the production of correct answers, is the measure of educative growth something hardly less than a revolution in teaching would be worked…'[4] In other words, when it comes to learning, it ain't what you know, it's the way that you know it.

What relevance might art practice have to impacting the quality of mental process? In Tate Education curator Emily Pringle's text 'The Artist as Educator' she draws on educationalist Michael Eraut's notion of 'know how' as a type of knowledge base that is different to 'know

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as it is experienced, rather than from certain philosophical or theoretical concepts or preconceived educational ideas and ideals that would predispose one to see the challenge of bringing up and educating children and young people in foreclosed ways. This does not mean that one can free oneself from one's cultural and historical context, but it does mean that one can orient to the way in which the pedagogical context is experienced in the here and now'.

[4] John Dewey, in *Education,* Documents of Contemporary Art, London, Felicity Allen (ed); Cambridge, Massachusetts: Whitechapel Gallery, MIT Press, 30-31

what', which is more capable of generalisation and codification. Artistic 'know how', she says, is experiential, complex and context specific. She cites artist and educator Roy Prentice as identifying the artwork as an 'imaginative outcome' which embodies 'the knowledge required for its production' [5].

This idea of art as embodying the knowledge required for its production leads me to *Ultra-red's* residency as part of the Edgware Road project, but before I address this point, I will first give an introduction to the project.

Ultra-red and the Edgware Road project: an introduction

The artist-residency with *Ultra-red* ran for 5 years at St Marylebone School, a Performing and Visual Arts multi faith Church of England School in West London. The following description for a 2013 exhibition - one of the project's public outcomes - gives a good overview:

> Like most other schools in London, the St Marylebone student body is diverse. Many of the students are refugees, asylum seekers or new immigrants to the United Kingdom. Consequently, the legal issues surrounding state citizenship have a particular urgency within the school. This is not, however, the only form of citizenship students must negotiate. Schools are essential to the production of social citizenship, which involves preparing the young to participate actively and productively in civic and community life. Responding to these issues, *Ultra-red* led students through a set of actions in the classroom and sound walks through the surrounding neighbourhood. They listened to the school, the city and each other. Listening situated groups in the present and brought the big questions of citizenship into the everyday activities of the school and the city. Together they reflected on how rules, regulations and social norms affect learning and visions of life beyond school.[6]

In a project film, curator and *Ultra-red* member Janna Graham gave more details on the process, telling us that, in 2009, 150 students worked with members of Ultra-red and activists that Ultra-red had brought in. Out of the notes (100s of flip-chart pages) that were taken on the 'sound walks', Robert Sember of Ultra-red produced a hymnal. The hymnal was designed to be used as a replacement or companion to the one used in their twice weekly service. For the opening event, the hymns were sung, live. In subsequent years, this hymnal was used as source material for other students in the creation of their own artworks. In the first year, a number of visual arts and performance works were made, and culminated in a multi-disciplinary performance. A year later, students interpreted the songs through a dance choreography. The dance choreographies were recorded and screened life-size within the crypt of a local church. Another piece of work is from other students, who answered a series of questions, some of which were related to questions of education, the neighbourhood. These were edited with sounds from the neighbourhood and historical material from the neighbourhood.[7]

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[5] Emily Pringle (2009), 'The Artist as Educator: Examining Relationships between the Art Practice and Pedagogy in the Gallery Context' in Tate Papers, Spring 2009, 2

[6] From exhibition description at Serpentine Gallery: RE:ASSEMBLY Ultra-red and The St Marylebone Church of England School 18 – 21 April, 2013; accessed 13 May 2019: https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/ultra-reds-reassembly

[7] Project film, accessed 14 May 2019 https://vimeo.com/63868467

Fig. 1 Life-size projection of recording of dance choreographies, '*Songs for Edgware Road,
Installation view at St Marylebone Parish Church, crypt , RE-ASSEMBLY exhibition 2011-2013,
(18 April - 21 April 2013) Photograph © 2013 Jon Lowe*

*Fig. 2 Hymnal, installation view Songs for Edgware Road,
Installation view at St Marylebone Parish Church, crypt ,
RE-ASSEMBLY exhibition 2011-2013
(18 April - 21 April 2013) Photograph © 2013 Jon Lowe*

One of the teachers in the Marylebone School - Stephanie Cubbin - who was active and involved in the project, became inspired to write an alternative 'curriculum', with *Ultra-red,* based on the activities undertaken by Ultra-red and the students. This is titled *A Subverted Curriculum* and is available online as a resource for others.[8] As it describes the activities and methods of the residency, I will be using selected content from this curriculum, to look at how the work produced by the students and *Ultra-red* embodied the knowledge required for its production.

A creative critique that linked the education system and immigration policy
In the first part of the curriculum, a process and method for investigating the idea of citizenship is described. As part of this investigation certain activities such as taking the state 'citizenship test' are outlined[9]. This test is not unlike a test in school that relies on the

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[8] The Subverted Curriculum; accessed 23 May 2019;
https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/files/downloads/a_subverted_curriculum_final.pdf
[9] Ibid, 11–15, accessed 23 May 2019

recollection of previously memorised facts. The method of this test, and the questions it asks, is used as a way to consider the criteria which the state employs to include or exclude people in the process of becoming new citizens in the UK. The underlying values or rationale of this selection process is further questioned through a follow-up discussion that looks at the dichotomy of everyday 'social' citizenship versus the legal reality of 'state' citizenship.[10] Perhaps, for students participating in this enquiry, a parallel might be drawn between the compartmentalising and hierarchical educational system of which they are a part, and the compartmentalising and deliberately excluding system of state citizenship, faced by migrants in the UK. *Ultra-red* have constructed a framework for the students to think through these things for themselves, in a method that is non-didactic, and though it provides direction there is perhaps more space for questions than for answers.

Fig 3 Ultra-red RE:ASSEMBLY 2009 Civis Sum performance at
The St Marylebone Church of England School
Photograph: Mark Blower © 2013 Ultra-red

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[10] From A Subverted Curriculum: 'The government's citizenship, what philosopher Etienne Balibar called 'State' citizenship, is governed by borders, laws, the police and military, and determines our access to various rights, such as a job, healthcare, housing and even education. This kind of citizenship is like a box—either you are inside it, a "natural" citizen, or you are outside it, an "unnatural alien." This kind of citizenship is used to describe some people as illegal. People fighting for the rights of migrants strongly condemn this classification, saying that it is discriminatory and even de-humanizing. The citizenship of everyday life, what Balibar calls "Social" or "Active" citizenship is not a citizenship of legality. No one can be illegal in this form of citizenship. Active citizenship is about actions and relationships. How are we situated in our families, communities, societies? Active citizenship is about how we are connected to others, how we work for the good of society as a whole by being nurses, for example, or making sure that no one has to be without a home. It is also about the fact that people looking for work or safety sometimes leave their first homes and migrate elsewhere in the world in the hope of being able to have a job and participate economically in society. This desire for safety, a meaningful life, and happiness seems to be something all of us can understand and that we would hope others would respect us for if we ever decided or were required to move somewhere else in the world.' Cubbin, Stephanie, with Ultra-Red, *The School and the Neighbourhood: A Subverted Curriculum,* pp 17 – 18, Possible Studies Pamphlets, Hato Press, 2016; accessed 23rd May 2019

Building on this enquiry, *A Subverted Curriculum* also describes a key creative activity – the sound walks. The students undertook these walks with pre-formed questions, created within their groups in a previous lesson, the criteria for the questions was that they be on 'something the group would like to learn about citizenship in everyday life in this part of London'.

Instructions for the sound walks, from the curriculum, page 23:

> There are a number of things to keep in mind as we do this (walk). Walking to a place and walking back from it can help understand the place itself. No place exists in isolation. As we walk from the school to the site, be aware. Pay attention to the different sounds and the different visual elements of the journey. Ask yourself how the city changes as we walk from the school to the destination. Write these observations in your notebooks.

There is an invitation to observe the sense impressions of the changing environment that the act of walking through a neighbourhood offers.

Page 23:

> [Stand still and quietly for 2 minutes]. Now that we are here, let's just take two minutes to quietly listen to the place so that we can fully arrive here and can start becoming aware of the details of this place.
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> ii. Walk the perimeter of the site together in silence. When you have returned to where you started, ask: "What did you hear?" "What did you see?" "What do you now know about the place?" "What else would you like to know about the place?" [record the responses in a notebook]
>
> 'We are now going to walk back to the school... As we did on our way here, please pay attention to your surroundings as you walk. At what point would you say we have actually left this particular area and moved into another? (My comment - Interesting in relation to the idea of borders) How do you hear and see that difference? Why is there a difference? What does this journey tell you about the area in which the school is located...?

There is a sense of not-knowing but instead enquiring and using creative, open thinking to look more closely to the everyday world. The engagement with the subtlety of the senses of listening and looking, invites attention to nuance, as illustrated in the questions: What did you hear?" "What did you see?" and "What do you now know about the place?" The linking of the senses of seeing and hearing with *knowing* in these questions, invites an embodied knowledge and the final question 'what else would you like to know about this place?' invites curiosity for further enquiry - an open position of not-knowing but instead wondering.

There is something of this quality of wonder, this meditative engagement of the senses, combined with critical enquiry, that links joy, learning, and, as I seek to illustrate with my next reference, ethics.

'The Enchantment of Modern Life, Attachments, Crossings and Ethics' is a book by political theorist Jane Bennett. In this text, Bennett argues for the importance of a secular

enchantment, or sense of wonder, as an antidote for modern disenchantment and the ennui that it can invoke:

> To be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday….If popular psychological wisdom has it that you have to love yourself before you can love another, my story suggests that you have to love life before you can care about anything. The wager is that, to some small but irreducible extent, one must be enamoured with existence and occasionally even enchanted in the face of it in order to be capable of donating some of one's scarce mortal resources to the service of others. In the cultural narrative of disenchantment, the prospects for loving life—or saying "yes" to the world—are not good. What's to love about an alienated existence on a dead planet? If, under the sway of this tale, one does encounter events or entities that provoke joyful attachment, the mood is likely to pass without comment and thus without more substantial embodiment.[11]

One might use Bennett's reasoning here to argue for the value of art or beauty in our lives, and in formal education. In her description of enchantment, or wonder, she describes a captivation whose origin is in the senses:

> You notice new colors, discern details previously ignored, hear extraordinary sounds, as familiar landscapes of sense sharpen and intensify. The world comes alive as a collection of singularities. Enchantment includes, then, a condition of exhilaration or acute sensory activity. To be simultaneously transfixed in wonder and transported by sense, to be both caught up and carried away—enchantment is marked by this odd combination of somatic effects.[12]

In this project, it could be said that *Ultra-red* engaged the students in a multi-sensory aesthetic experience that was both meditative and perhaps also joyful, or at the very least affective. Combining this activity with critical enquiry, perhaps invited the students to engage at a deeper level of both caring and thinking, on the topic of immigration policy and its relevance to their locale.

One of the resulting artworks from this process, as mentioned previously, was a hymnal that could replace or be a companion to the one used in their twice weekly religious service. *Ultra-red* are an art-collective that primarily engage with sound, and so it is apt that the work produced by them and the participating students is, in a sense, a sound work. In the process that led to the creation of this work, the students and *Ultra-red* asked the question 'What is the sound of citizenship?. As the text that accompanied the *Re:assembly* exhibition says, they listened 'to the school, the city and each other'. And then they spoke, and these spoken reflections became part of the hymnal, a collaborative artwork created for an audience of fellow students and their teachers, to be encountered in a place of religious service, arguably a place to consider ethical and moral questions.

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[11] Jane, Bennett. 2016. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Rights, Action, and Social Responsibility. Princeton: Princeton University Press ,11
[12] Ibid, 12

Fig 4 Ultra-red, RE:ASSEMBLY, Songs for Edgware Road,
Installation view at St Marylebone Parish Church, crypt , RE-ASSEMBLY exhibition 2011-2013
(18 April - 21 April 2013) Photograph © 2013 Jon Lowe

Nest – softening the institutional space

Nest was a project in a primary school close to London. Led by socially-engaged artist Sarah Cole, it blurred the boundaries between home and school, speaking to the fact that as artist Sarah Cole put it 'at primary level the pastoral care of children is blended between parents and school educators' and also to her belief that most learning actually happens outside the classroom. Below is an introduction to *Nest*, taken from the text '*Cuckoos in the Nest: Performing place, artists and excess'* written by Sally Mackey, Professor of Applied Theatre and Performance at the University of London, and Sarah Cole.

> *Nest* (2007–08) was the last stage in a three-year arts residency taking place in Briscoe Primary and Nursery School (Briscoe), a school for around two hundred 3–11 year-olds on the outskirts of Basildon, near London, United Kingdom. Nest evolved from a broader initial inquiry entitled *Lie of the Land* (2005–07)…. The main premise of this project was to examine the ambivalent relationships Briscoe Primary School community had with its sense of place. Using strategies from archaeology, pedagogy and performance, artists were commissioned to engage with different sectors of the school: the school council, the learning support staff, the parents' group, the teachers, the mid-day playground staff, those pupils labelled 'gifted and talented', and those with identified educational needs or who were simply found roaming around outside of class. The whole school was involved, with over 120 people more directly so….*Nest* became a promenade performance on Sunday, 24 February 2008, in

which the audience entered the school in Year 6 spaces (10/11 year-olds) and travelled back to infancy via fourteen installations. The school was transformed. Parents wrote words in soil across the floor of the hall, the head teacher became Bo Peep with two sheep in her office, 500 bread rats were baked to the sound of UB40's 'Rat in Mi Kitchen' and a fight broke out in the cupboard for Taking Stock. Each nest had been devised with, for or by the inhabitants of the school, supported by seven artists with a varying degree of engagement. The guide for each promenade was a child 'twitcher' (a bird watcher). The audience's journey began by being crammed into an air-raid shelter and listening to the voices of 10-year-old children describing the moment when a bombshell hit them. The death of a mother, the suicide of an aunt, the loss of a budgie, the murder of a dog, the departure of a dad. The final nest, devised with composer Jules Maxwell, was one of silence.[13]
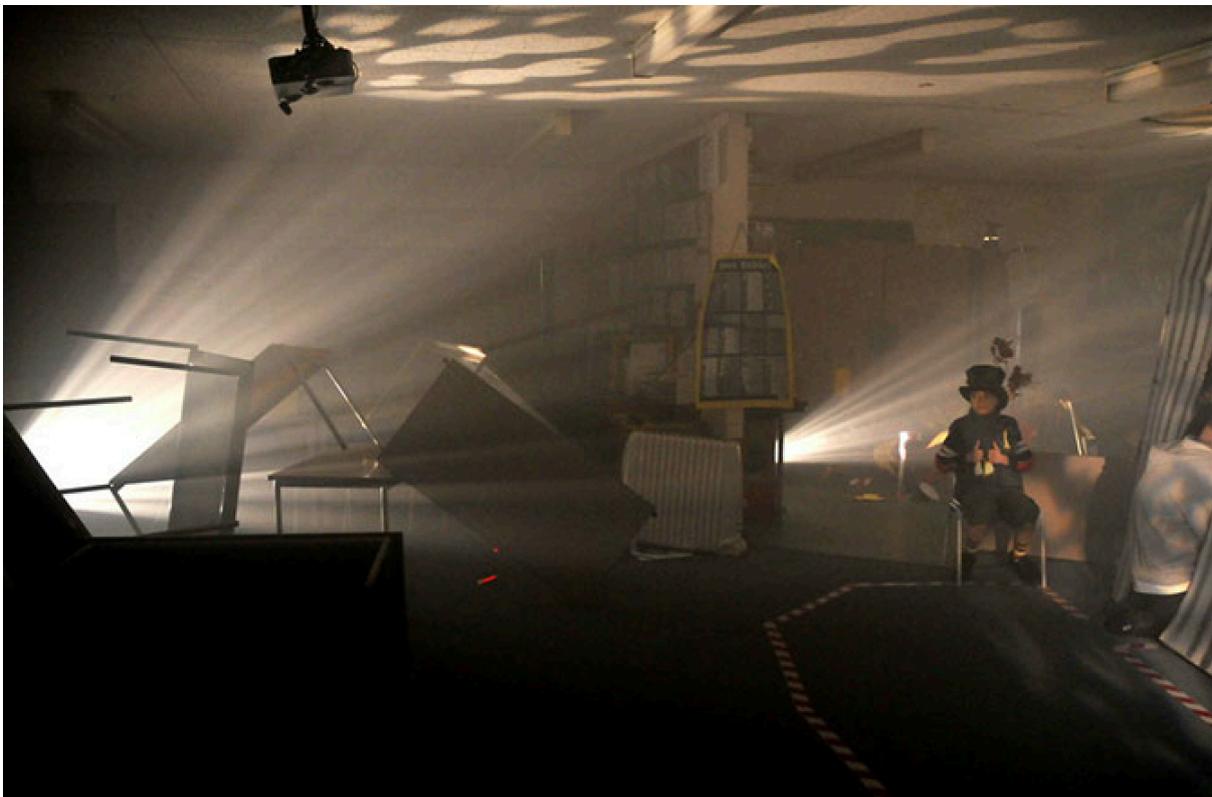

Fig 5. Nest, one of the fourteen installations for Promenade event that was the culmination of the Nest project, an 'air-raid shelter' where audiences could listen to the voices of 10-year-old children describing the moment when a 'bombshell' hit them.

In order to frame the processes and outcomes of *Nest* as learning, I refer to Anna Cutler, Director of Learning and Research at The Tate, England in her 2010 article '*What is to be done Sandra?*'. In the quote below she outlines the idea of learning within formal (e.g. school) and informal (e.g. gallery, youth club) settings and looks at the concepts of 'education' and 'learning':

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[13] Sally Mackey and Sarah Cole, (2013), 'Cuckoos in the *Nest*: Performing place, artists and excess', *Applied Theatre Research* 1: 1, doi: 10.1386/atr.1.1.43_1, 43

In attempting to unpick the differences between the formal and informal, or rather to explore and explain the similarities and divergences of both, I have come to describe learning and education in more particular terms. There are a variety of ways to explore the idea of learning depending on one's discipline. Neuroscientists describe it as the neurological process of receiving and processing new data. They explain that every human being is wired up the same way to learn. Information from external stimuli is received in the brain where it is filtered through analytical and emotional networks and then stored as memory (or rejected en route). This cognitive process (that is, the mental process through which we acquire and manage information) sorts the wheat from the chaff, and enables us to make decisions as to what to store and what to edit out. They would argue that there is therefore no formal learning and no informal learning to be had. There is only one type (just learning), and it is simply the settings and approaches that differ…..

….Education, on the other hand, might be defined as the structures and systems established to manage and guide learning: *what* we teach/learn; *why* we teach/learn it; and *how* we teach/learn. These are structures based on a set of socially determined values. This means that education is ideologically driven (by ideology I mean the dominant, hegemonically maintained hierarchy of value). Given that our society prioritises formal learning, the informal tends to be labelled as self-improvement or leisure, implying a lack of necessity or seriousness. When measured against the formal system, it often fails to reach the mark. How, given this ideological scenario, could it do anything other?[14]

Cutler refers to examples of spaces of informal learning as youth clubs and galleries. Though Sarah Cole and her team worked in a school - a space embedded within an educational system that prioritises formal learning, I would argue that artist Sarah Cole actively gave the realm of personal life (or home life) which is more the domain of informal learning, a more defined space within the school setting. The emotional expression involved in some of the creative work, can be illustrated in the previous description of the 'air-raid shelter' where students and the artist created a work based on moments of an emotional bomb-shell hitting them. With this and other work, personal and emotionally challenging issues were actively brought into the more public realm of the school, and its community.[15] Arguably, emotional issues were erupting within the school lives of the students anyway, as Sarah describes the sense of overwhelm experienced by the teachers in the face of the breadth of needs that the children had, often resulting in a

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[14] Anna Cutler, 'What Is To Be Done, Sandra? Learning in Cultural Institutions of the Twenty-First Century', in *Tate Papers*, no.13, Spring 2010, https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/13/what-is-to-be-done-sandra-learning-in-cultural-institutions-of-the-twenty-first-century, accessed 30 April 2019.

[15] Entering this difficult emotional terrain for the facilitating artists surely required considerable sensitivity, which would have been helped by the longevity of the project. It was also evidently difficult emotionally for the artists - Sarah mentioned that the team were offered counselling. One of the artists – Julian Walker – spoke about the challenges in the text 'Cuckoos in the *Nest*: Performing place, artists and excess':' He talked also about 'pitching in and out' of the project, and how difficult he found this – particularly with some of the problems the pupils were facing. Knowing that you had to 'walk away' added to a sense of guilt….an outpouring of grief and frustration from staff and pupils could sometimes be overwhelming. Julian insisted that you have to care – 'that's 90 per cent of your justification for doing it' – yet, along with some of the other artists, he was in despair, at times at feeling unable to help individual pupils with longer term problems.'

number of 'lost boys' usually to be found in the corridors, bored and listless, having been ejected from the classroom[16].

Throughout the course of the project Sarah became interested in Hakim Bey's theory of the Temporary Autonomous Zone, 'and the ways that adults can also adapt to a TAZ situation if the context and materiality is right'. Through the use of theatrical devices, and architectural interventions, she and her team made alterations to the fabric and feel of the school, changes which elicited different responses from the school's students, staff and visitors. For instance, the aforementioned boys who were continually ejected from the classroom, and who could be found roaming the corridors, were recruited to help construct a giant hay room in the school hall. It is Sarah's belief that these boys engaged in this because it was fun, physical and it was something that they could take ownership for. With the hay nest, the boys also acted as the guardians to the space through the week of its existence. Throughout this week, normal activities continued but Sarah asserts that 'people's behaviour changed dramatically once in the 'nest'….. Parents were amused and delighted to be invited in, not standing outside as usual waiting for their kids. It offered a peculiar, inviting, softened and mildly transgressive space that smelt of the land, not the usual stale plimsols and sweat. Most significant was what happened when we removed the nest - there was a great deal of loss expressed, grief almost, and it raised two questions for me: How, in pedagogic terms, can we explore learning as a cycle of creation and destruction without the latter always being perceived as a negative? This we explored on an away-day (we had two weekend away-days over the three years with staff, mostly Teacher's Assistants, where we spent an hour making objects at the Horniman Museum then asked them to destroy and re-build (as a bird might do with a nest)….' [17]

Perhaps partly reflecting Sarah's belief that most learning takes place outside the classroom, *Nest* primarily took place in the marginal spaces of the school – in the corridors, halls, kitchen, outdoor spaces. Other theatrical interventions that served to transform the usual fabric of the school involved the adopting of hybrid animal personae or images of the animal kingdom, whether it be it hay nests, bread rats, aviaries…Sarah Cole describes an instance of this, and the materiality of such an approach:

> *Nest* taught me a lot about artistic practice as a form of pedagogy….about embodied, experiential encounters and the value of working on the margins. To canvas ideas about what 'nest' might mean, I paid an actor friend (who was heavily pregnant) to dress up as a giant rabbit and go round all the classrooms asking each child what a nest meant to them. That is how we ended up with the phrase "I want a nest as dark as penguin's fur"….I had previously intended to ask staff to survey their kids but knew it needed a different mode of questioning, theatrical perhaps but also you answer a giant rabbit differently to your teacher, it opens up spaces for imagination and you know that a rabbit will listen to you and take it away back down the hole…[18]

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[16] Taken from Sarah Cole's email to the author, 15th April 2019

[17] Taken from Sarah Cole's email to the author, 25th March 2019

[18] Taken from Sarah Cole's email to the author, 25th March 2019

Fig 6 Drawing by Talya Baldwin, from her children's picture book, which was commissioned as part of the project

Fig 6, Walking on Eggshells, a work developed with staff

Returning to '*The Enchantment of Modern Life, Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*', author Jane Bennett has a whole chapter on metamorphing and hybrid creatures and their enchanting affect. She sees these transforming creatures as embodying freedom and potentiality, qualities that are begotten through a sense of mobility of the body:

Metamorphing creatures enact the very possibility of change; their presence carries with it the trace of dangerous but also exciting and exhilarating migrations. To live among or as a crossing is to have motion called to mind, and this reminding is also a somatic event. My hunch is this: hybrids enchant for the same reason that moving one's body in space can carry one away—think of dancing of or the quick intake of breath and the rush after a hard push on the swing. Some of the political potency of the term freedom might be traced to its association with the pleasure of bodily mobility.[19]

Recalling my earlier point drawn from Jane Bennett's 'The Enchantment of Modern Life', that art practice often has certain material and aesthetic qualities that can help generate a sense of joy that is instrumental in transforming a person from a state of hopelessness to caring about life and the people they share the planet with, I extend this to *Nest* and to the sense of care necessary for the students to feel safe to have expressed and then worked creatively and collaboratively with, the tender and sometimes painful life events that became their artistic material.

Nest involved the entire school community - the children, parents/guardians, teaching assistants, school principal, other staff and teachers. One parent's response is described below in the aforementioned 'Cuckoos in the Nest' text:

> Such affect is remembered three years later by the longer-term residents of the *Nest* project. One of the parents (now a teaching assistant) wrote of the experience with raw poignancy, reflecting the pleasure of the *Nest* experience as well as mourning its ending: '[E]ach parent took their tools away with them and have continued to build on the things they found out about themselves. Why would anybody want that to end?' (fax, 3 October 2011) She was one of the parents performing in the gym, hanging upside down as an expression of the gymnastics her life entailed. The impact of the project on her had been profound; she gave several examples where she had felt more confident in approaching new activities, including performance and role-play, as well as the lasting effects on the school through the narratives of the project that were passed on to the many new staff. 'You can't say *Nest* without smiling.' (interview, 28 September 2011) She believed the event had become an affective cultural moment in the school's history that genuinely changed the atmosphere of the institution. [20]

Other impacts noted in the same text in an interview with head teacher Diane Pilgrim (two years after the end of the project) were as follows:

> Sometimes you work in such tight boundaries in school and it was such a privilege to work beyond that – to work with such creative people.' She spoke, too, of lasting tangible impact. First, 'Welly Wednesday' is an activity inspired by the unusual approach of the whole project, where every other Wednesday morning throughout the year, the nursery and reception pupils (aged 3–5) work outside, eschewing the formal classroom. Second, the original nest that Mark

[19] Jane, Bennett. 2016. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Rights, Action, and Social Responsibility. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 26

[20] Sally Mackey and Sarah Cole (2013), 'Cuckoos in the *Nest*: Performing place, artists and excess', *Applied Theatre Research* 1: 1, doi: 10.1386/atr.1.1.43_1, 58-59

Storor built in the school hall had attracted pupils, staff and many other activities. Pilgrim recognized the powerful 'nurturing' role the nest had fulfilled during its week's installation, where pupils had shared unspoken thoughts with Sarah and Mark: this had been pivotal in inspiring *Nest*. As a result, together with a learning support tutor, Pilgrim has since created 'The Nurture Club'. Pupils 'who you walk on eggshells with' are identified, and after the first half term of the academic year, they spend every afternoon in the 'booster' room, the setting for the Nurture Club, with a specialized support worker. This lasts for half a term, starting and finishing with a self-esteem profile.[21]

Fig 7. The 'Airing Cupboard' – a parent had written on the ground using soil, as part of a performance

Challenges

Sarah mentions that since *Nest* she has not since worked with a primary school, preferring to work with teenagers and older people, and that she often says to her students that schools are the least creative of places (she is a lecturer Central Saint Martins at the University of London). Also, challenges identified by Sarah Cole, in expectations from both students and teachers for fixed outcomes from lessons [22], were echoed by teacher Stephanie Cubbin in the *Subverted Curriculum*.[23] These two inter-related issues raise the questions 'how can we understand learning as creative?', 'how can we make schools more creative places?' and to be more specific, if artists are to be brought into a school to help make this happen, 'how can we best support artists in doing this?'. To mention again Jane

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[21] Sally Mackey and Sarah Cole (2013), 'Cuckoos in the *Nest*: Performing place, artists and excess', *Applied Theatre Research* 1: 1, doi: 10.1386/atr.1.1.43_1, 58-59
[22] Taken from Sarah Cole's email to the author, 25th March 2019
[23] A Subverted Curriculum, 104-105

Bennett's concept of enchantment, I wonder if more teaching staff were 'enchanted' themselves with contemporary art practice, would this support be easier to obtain?

Conclusion
Through these case studies, this text has explored what contemporary art practice can offer the school context in terms of learning, from the perspective of both method and subject of enquiry. Through excerpts from texts by Allan Sekula, Emily Pringle, John Dewey, and Anna Cutler, it has considered the nature of learning and education, and the debates still current regarding what we learn, and most especially how we learn, in formal education. It has identified an overemphasis on the educative approach that asks students to often uncritically 'consume' facts to be recalled on demand as being problematic in its arguable fostering of passivity. In response to this, I have suggested that a quality of 'not-knowing', is highly useful to engage real enquiry on a topic.

This text has demonstrated how artist collective *Ultra-red* worked with students to generate an energy of not-knowing through the sound walks, an experience that was at once multi-sensory, meditative, critically engaged (pre-formed questions) and aesthetic. Pairing the sound walks with the exploration of the citizenship test, the students were given the opportunity to link their everyday neighbourhood with the notion of citizenship and immigration policy, and to link this with the educational system of which they were a part. With the resulting 'hymnal' artwork, I have shown how the knowledge generated in the process of making this sound artwork - an artwork that calls on people to have empathy for their fellow humans (and whose ultimate place of residence was a religious space) - was necessary for its production.

I have referred to Jane Bennett's text 'The Enchantment of Modern Life', in advocating for the role of professional practicing artists in schools, from the perspective of generating joy and well-being, and the potential these qualities have to enhance our ability to care. I have established how Sarah Cole and fellow artists in *Nest*, worked to create 'mildly transgressive' spaces within the school through theatrical devices and architectural interventions, and shown how these interventions prompted alternative responses and conversations from the school's students, teachers and parents/guardians. I have demonstrated how *Nest* engaged participants on the realm of the personal, and the lasting benefits of that approach as evidenced (amongst other things) by the school's decision to implement a 'Nurture Club' within the school, as a safe space for personal conversations between children and the support worker.

Within this text, I have shown how artist Sarah Cole and team, and artist collective *Ultra-red*, brought the multi-sensory and body mobility into the learning experience; by leaving the classroom, consciously activating the senses; and in the case of *Nest*, altering the materiality of the school.

In short, through these case studies, I have briefly explored the positive effects that artist-residencies in schools can have on the quality of learning, school culture and individual lives.

Note on resources
As mentioned at the beginning of this text, aside from the quality of the work, I partly chose these two projects to research, due to their significant durations. The considerable substance of these projects, and the documentation available on them, made them exciting examples for me to examine in relation to the effects of art practice on education, and hopefully for the reader to consider. However, educators reading this text may wonder how an educational institution would access the resources for a comparable project. There is no easy answer to this but there are resources such as the Per Cent for Art scheme that is

open to schools who have a new build or an extension, that can be used for an artist-residency programme, rather than the production of a permanent artwork. Currently the Per Cent for Art budgets available to schools, would not equal the budgets of the two projects profiled here but they could potentially offer enough funds for an artist to work at a school for a year or longer, depending on the time commitment agreed by the artist and the school. Other schemes such as the Creative Schools initiative also offer ways for schools to work with artists, though in more minimal ways than in the projects outlined here. There are also artists of all disciplines, curators and arts consultants that may be interested in working in partnership with a committed school, and who would have the skills and knowledge to seek funds for such a collaboration.

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Other resources:

Nest project website: http://www.nest-life.com/

Q & A with artist Sarah Cole, on her work in *Nest*: https://soundcloud.com/artquest/socially-engaged-practice-2?in=artquest/sets/the-real-world

RE:ASSEMBLY exhibition web page on Serpentine Gallery website:
https://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/ultra-reds-reassembly

Biography Cleo Fagan
Cleo Fagan is the founder and director of *Superprojects* - an initiative for young audiences that generates possibilities for creative encounters with contemporary art and artists. *Superprojects'* work includes school-based workshop and artist-residency programmes, Per Cent for Art commissions, festival events and child-centred exhibition programmes that open up the richness of national and international contemporary art practice to child participants; whilst actively fostering their development as meaning-makers and artists. Recent projects include *Elemental* – an exhibition of contemporary sculpture, especially for children, with newly commissioned work by artist Caoimhe Kilfeather and existing work by artist Karl Burke, and creative response space designed and created by practising primary school teacher and trained artist Anne Bradley. *Elemental* was exhibited at *Uillinn: West Cork Arts Centre* from January – March 2019, with a collaborative commission of work by artist Siobhan McGibbon and a group of 3rd, 4th and 5th class children from Dromore National School in Bantry. *Elemental* will be exhibited in *Visual,* Carlow, from September 2019 – January 2020.

For more information on Superprojects please visit: www.superprojects.org