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Education Collectives: Tracing Self-Organised Collective Practices in an Institutionalised Art World

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Master of Arts thesis abstract

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Abstract

Motivated to seek different ways of working and practicing education apart from the bounds, hierarchies and limitations of art institutions, educators and practitioners engaged in pedagogical work have self-organised into collectives that work aside from institutions. However, many of these collectives still engage and work with institutions, blurring the boundary between the institutional and the self-organised.

This research delves into the less-explored phenomenon of self-organised education collectives to seek knowledge on how education collectives form and self-organise their practice while navigating the interdependent relationships with art institutions, and how the collective, self-organised way of working influences their education practice.

Employing conversation as the main methodological approach of inquiry, I engaged in in-depth conversations with three education collectives: Invisible Pedagogies (Pedagogías Invisibles), microsillons and trafo.k. By defining and discussing four structural elements of self-organised practice: situating, practicing, assembling, and sustaining, this study explores how collectives situate their practice in relation to institutions, how they form and organise themselves, and how they sustain the multitude of practical, financial, emotional, and social aspects of collective practice.

This research illustrates the multi-layered entanglements that exist between self-organised and institutional practices and the contested, ambiguous landscape that collectives are situated in. It brings forth the challenges that educators face working both aside and within institutions, the various models that self-organised collectives have adapted to sustain their practice and the fascinating connection between critical education and collective practice.

Keywords collective practice, education collectives, self-organising, critical education, critical gallery education, educational turn in curating, art institutions, institutional structures, art world

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Introduction

In the recent decades the art world has developed a growing fascination with education and pedagogical practices, illustrated by the educational turn in curating and art (Graham et al., 2016; O'Neil & Wilson, 2010; Rogoff, 2008). Adopting pedagogical models, methods and concepts into curatorial and artistic practices has materialised in numerous publications, exhibitions, projects, and initiatives, both institutional and self-organised (Borgen, 2013; Herbert & Karlsen, 2013). While this phenomenon has managed to challenge formal conceptions of education and has set forth alternative and critical learning practices it has also been criticised by failing to engage with the real struggles and experiences of educators and positioning the curator as the sole agent of transformation (Mörsch, 2011; Sternfeld, 2010).

Even with the growing topicality of educational discourse, the institutional art world still often assigns education a peripheral role to exhibition making, collecting and artistic practices (Allen, 2008; Graham et al., 2016; Helguera, 2021; Sternfeld, 2010). Almost all art institutions such as museums, galleries and biennials have education, learning or audience engagement programmes and many pride themselves with positioning education as a priority in their mission statements and grant applications. In reality, however, educators still tend to be marginalised within the institutional hierarchy, and the potentiality to practice education is often limited to being a tool to draw in spectators, affirm institutional views and hierarchies (Helguera, 2021; Mörsch, 2011; Sternfeld, 2010). Especially in more conventional art institutions, education falls short in its potential to be a critical tool for addressing topical socio-political issues and entanglements, challenge institutional working tactics and bring forth more participatory and collective practices in learning.

Acknowledging the problematic institutional behaviours and the positionality education takes within the art world has contributed to the formation of self-organised education collectives. These art education collectives, often characterised by critical education practices that challenge dominant structures in society, politics, institutions, and education itself, have decided to work aside from institutions. Operating apart from the structural bounds, hierarchies, and limitations of art institutions implies a quest to practice and organise independently. Working differently from the institutions suggests a possibility to ground one's practice in collectively decided terms and gives power to negotiate one's

practice and challenge the solidified takes on education that have often prevailed in art institutions. Yet for many reasons these self-organised collectives still work with institutions, blurring the boundary between the institutional and the self-organised. This positionality of working aside while still in relation reveals a fascinating dynamic and a multitude of entanglements, complexities, and potentialities that a self-organised collective practice entails.

Furthermore, in the recent years there has been a boom in the proliferation of collective practices and their connection to institutional forms of working, exemplified by the Indonesian artist collective ruangrupa curating documenta 15[1], a "decentralised" curatorial collective taking on São Paulo Biennial in 2023 (Trouillot, 2022) and Manifesta 15 inviting artistic collectives to engage with local communities and socio-political urgencies for their upcoming edition in Barcelona in 2024[2]. While much attention of the art world has been given to art collectives, not that much research exists on art education collectives, which are at the core of my research. Collectives have mostly been examined, discussed, and written about in the context of artistic practices and artist-run spaces[3] (Borgen, 2013; Lind, 2007) but rarely in the context of education. In their turn, critical education practices have mostly been researched as part of art institutions and their education programming (Allen, 2008; Mahony, 2016; Mörsch, 2009, 2011; Sternfeld, 2010). More importantly, independent and self-organised practices, have largely been discussed in the fields outside of academia and academic research, as these practices most commonly exist on the peripheries of institutional structures and as grassroots, bottom-up organising initiatives (Hannula, 2006; Herbert & Karlsen, 2013). Therefore, this research opens a novel avenue for exploring and discussing self-organised education practice that academia has not previously engaged with that specifically to bring forth important knowledge on how such collectives situate, practice, organise and sustain themselves.

Thus, looking past the growing popularity of collectives and the prevailing focus on artistic collective practices, my intention with this research is to examine **how education**

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[1] documenta 15, https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/about/
[2] Manifesta 15 Barcelona, https://manifesta15.org/news/manifesta-15-mobility
[3] Book on art collectives and artist-run spaces *Death to the Curator - Artist-Run Culture in the Nordic Region* (2021)
Publication by artist-run gallery Sorbus *WASTED YEARS – Sad, sexy, and artist-run* (2020)

collectives form and self-organise their practice while navigating the interdependent relationships with art institutions, and **how the collective, self-organised way of working influences their education practice**. I intentionally use the word “education” rather than “educational” when talking about collectives because for me it alludes to the broader processes of education that surpass the act of teaching or educating someone. I see education as a process of learning and unlearning in itself, in addition to teaching. This line of thought resonates also with the practices of education collectives I am researching in this thesis, who see their critical education practice as a learning situation for everyone involved. Furthermore, I am grounding my research in theoretical writings and contextual practice-based resources on education as a critical collective practice, educational turn in curating and the positionality of education in the institutional art world. Additionally, I also explore the theory of collective practice and self-organising.

Acknowledging my own situatedness, I engage with this research subject and its examination from the position of an educator who has worked with devising and implementing education programmes in art institutions. Thus, my research into self-organised education collectives has been motivated by a growing interest in taking a distance from the institutional ways of being and doing to explore different directions of practicing education in a more collective, critical, and non-conventional way. My intention with this research is not to position art institutions as monolithic structures unable to critically challenge or change their own practices. Nor do I wish to take on an anti-institutional position, place blame or generalise the complex problematics that institutions both experience and continue to sustain. Therefore, rather than engaging in institutional critique or positioning self-organised collectives as a solution or a cure to the institutional ways of being, I am interested in shining a light on certain institutional structures and behaviours that might have motivated self-organised art education collectives to form and work apart from institutions. Moreover, I am interested in exploring how these collectives situate and build their practice, how they organise their work inside the collective, negotiate power, decision-making and sharing of labour, and how they sustain their practice. Finally, while being self-organised these collectives collaborate with art institutions, which makes it captivating to explore the reasoning and challenges behind these entanglements. All in all, this research is an invitation to think, question and reflect together with people involved in self-organised collective practice.

Employing conversation as my main methodological approach of inquiry, I engaged in in-depth conversations with three education collectives: microsillons, Pedagogías Invisibles (Invisible Pedagogies) and trafo.k. Conversation as a methodology is often used in Indigenous research due to its inherently communal nature, narrative-focused approach, and dialogical engagement where all parties of a conversation are co-creators of knowledge (Kovach, 2010). Thus, conversation seems to be not only an adept form of engaging with a collective to discuss their practice but also by being a learning situation where knowledge is co-created it organically relates to the subject of my research – education practice.

Structure-wise, I start this thesis with discussing theoretical and practice-based writings to set the scene and give context. In the first chapter I discuss education as a critical collective practice, touching upon critical gallery education, followed by the educational turn in curating. I continue with discussing the art world's fascination with education and conclude with examining problematic institutional patterns and the positionality of education. The second theoretical chapter is devoted to discussing the concept of collective, the motivations and challenges behind collective practice, as well as examining self-organising and structures behind such practice. In the third chapter where I position conversation as a critical inquiry and a production of knowledge, I articulate my reasoning, choices, and practicalities of conducting this research. The fourth chapter is where I discuss and critically reflect on the statements and knowledge gained through the conversations with the collectives, structuring the chapter on four elements of self-organised practice that I have defined: situating, practicing, assembling, and sustaining. I end my thesis with conclusions distilled throughout the research process.

Situating education within institutions and the art world

Almost every art institution be it a museum, a gallery or a biennial offers education programming at some capacity and often position themselves as discursive sites where learning and knowledge production take place. But looking more closely and critically at how education is perceived in the art world and how the neo-liberal and institutional structures instrumentalise education while marginalising the struggles and experiences of educators offers a different view into the relationship between art institutions and education practice.

In this chapter I am aiming to situate education as a critical and collective practice, touching upon critical gallery education as that is the context in which the art education collectives that I am researching in this thesis have practiced education and have engaged with the institutional ways of working. I will also be looking at the fascination that the art world has developed with education, illustrated by the ambivalent phenomenon called educational turn in curating, and how education is still often positioned within the art world. When pondering the problematic aspects of art institutions, their working practices and how education fits into the scheme of their operations, I am doing so both from the position of an individual who represents the audience and of an educator that has worked with education programmes in art institutions. Acknowledging my own situated knowledge and potential biases, I am threading carefully not to generalise the issue at hand and rather than engaging in institutional critique, my intention is to bring forth some of the problematic institutional working tactics that might have influenced the formation of self-organised collectives that practice education apart but still in relation to art institutions.

Education as a critical practice

When discussing education in the scope of this thesis, it is important to articulate that I am not talking about formal schooling or academic education tied to national education curricula, nor am I discussing education that takes place in public art schools aimed at professionalisation and teaching art. Drawing from critical education theorists such as Nora Sternfeld and Carmen Mörsch, education in this thesis is seen as a critical and collective practice, taking place in non-formal settings and situations both within art institutions as gallery education and the wider social field as a self-organised education practice. It is characterised by a dialogical and critical questioning of existing perceptions, conditions and

hierarchical structures within institutions, societies and processes of learning and knowledge production itself. Strands of critical education practice are common in gallery education taking place within institutions, critical pedagogy practices challenging the formal schooling formats as well as within self-organised education initiatives and practices.

To contextualise the notions of critical education practice it is valuable to look at gallery education as Felicity Allen has situated it within the historical socio-political developments. Although she particularly looks at gallery education in Great Britain, many of the values and characteristics surpass geographic boarders and are helpful when grasping the potentiality of gallery education as a critical practice. Allen (2008) notes that since its development in the mid-1970s in relation to radical art practices, feminist and liberation movement ideas, gallery education has been a strategy to "shift art from a monolithic and narcissistic position into a dialogic, open, and pluralist set of tendencies that renegotiate issues of representation, institutional critique and inter-disciplinarity" (para. 6). Influenced by educational theories and social sciences, it has drawn inspirations from movements critical to institutional power, consumer culture, class inequality and cultural hegemony, creating alternative methods of dissemination and engagement. Ideas articulated by feminist artists and activists worked their way into becoming fundamental strategies in gallery education that are topical still today. For example, self-reflexive, dialogical, collective, and egalitarian practices, the necessity to create alternative networks, bring together different disciplines, challenge the aesthetic and technical perceptions of art, present multiple and alternative voices, and hidden histories, develop dialogue with the audience as well as challenge and demand change from conventional institutions. As Allen points out, gallery education has been typically situated on the margins: "at the edge of art and other disciplines, at the edge of other institutions, and frequently at the edge of the lives of the people with whom it engages" (para. 25). Being on the margins is also where education is practiced by the self-organised education collectives that work apart yet in relation to institutions. Furthermore, as Allen notes, gallery education has also been a position of frustration since institutions have prioritized artist projects and exhibitions to gain attention of the public and the press as well as attract funding thus leaving gallery education and its practitioners overshadowed.

However, it is also important to note that not all gallery or museum education projects and practices are critical. Some have lost their criticality due to budget cuts, neoliberal, hegemonic and hierarchical practices of institutions themselves or the prevailing

prioritization of artistic and exhibiting practices over education. Some have never really been critical in their practices at all. These differences of how education is practiced within art institutions is described by Carmen Mörsch (2009). For her, gallery education, depending on how it is positioned and practiced, performs four different institutional functions or discourses. **Affirmative** discourse positions education as a tool to affirm institutional knowledge and structures, conveying information about the collections, artworks, and research in an instructive manner, aimed at experts and a prepared audience. **Reproductive** discourse is usually aimed at children, young people and audiences often not exposed to art to get them engaged and interested in art to ensure the continuation of institution's future audiences. Gallery education that employs a **deconstructive** discourse invites the audience to collectively and critically examine art and the practices of an institution to deconstruct knowledge and taken for granted truths to develop their own critical thinking and become aware of their position. Finally, **transformative** discourse that is most uncommon within institutions is where the public and gallery educators work together not just to engage in critical questioning but to uncover institutional mechanisms to change and improve them, for example, working towards social justice. As Mörsch notes, these four discourses should not be imagined hierarchically or exclusionary as many of them overlap within institutions. Moreover, every one of the discourses carries a different understanding of education, what it stands for, how it is practiced and whom it addresses. While the affirmative and reproductive discourses see education as a predefined and predetermined practice, the deconstructive and transformative education embodies a self-critical approach where education itself becomes the focus point of deconstruction and transformation. Finally, it is also vital to point out the fact that when critical discourses become more pronounced the tension and friction between gallery education and its institution grows.

Thus criticality, as not always welcomed, might not materialise within the institutional settings but find its way to be practiced outside the bounds of institutions. Paradoxically, it feels that institutions both need and wish to be associated with critical education practices to stay relevant as we will see in the case of the educational turn in curating. Yet at the same time institutions are wary of critical education and how it might affect them, so the most free-minded critical directions need to be curbed and managed.

Art world's fascination with education

The growing fascination with education and pedagogical practices that the art world developed is characterised by the ambivalent phenomenon of "educational turn". Theorised by Irit Rogoff in her article "Turning" (2008), educational turn described the growing tendency to adopt educational models, methods, and terms into curatorial and artistic practices. Partly swayed in as a response to the Bologna Accord reform that was planned to standardise higher education in the European Union, the educational turn "provided a critique of the idea of education as one-directional knowledge transfer and training, and the framing of education as a commercialised industry, reduced to the utilitarianism of training for working life" (Graham et al., 2016, p. 1).

In museums, galleries, biennials, and even art fairs discursive practices such as talks, discussions, symposiums and education programmes have long had a supportive and peripheral role to art making and exhibiting practices (O'Neil & Wilson, 2010). Yet with the educational turn, these discursive practices, framed by concepts such as education, knowledge production and learning became central to curating and contemporary art. In addition, these projects often tried to distance themselves from the established forms of both formal and gallery education. Thus, educational turn in curating led to a myriad of exhibitions, publications, lecture series, interventions and both institutional and self-organised pedagogical initiatives. For example, a chain of exhibitions titled "Academy: Learning from Art/Learning from the Museum", documenta 12 with its educational direction and extensive research amassed in several publications, the unfortunate edition of Manifesta 6 that was planned to take shape as a temporary art school, the many free universities and alternative art schools such as "Copenhagen Free University", "School of Missing Studies", "The United Nations Plaza" by Anton Vidokle and "The School of Panamerican Unrest" by Pablo Helguera. Many of the projects and initiatives born at the time of educational turn, such as the numerous free schools, were self-organised in their practices and established themselves as sites of learning, fading the boundaries of formal academic education, creative practice, performance, activism, and socio-political work (Rogoff, 2010). Many more worked towards developing new methodologies to democratise knowledge and access to it, change the positionality of the artist, curator, and the viewer, find new forms of public engagement and participation and even transform art institutions into educational platforms (Lázár, 2012).

Even though some of the projects and initiatives managed to set grounds for challenging the formal perceptions of education, many of them were characterised by almost an obsessive use of pedagogical terms often reproducing traditional and somewhat conventional notions of education and learning. Artistic and discursive projects were named as “universities”, “academies”, “classrooms” and “lessons”. Some white cube gallery spaces even mimicked public institutions when forming “schools”, “libraries” and “laboratories” for education. In addition, curating started to be considered as an “expanded educational praxis” (O’Neill & Wilson, 2010) challenging the role of an educator and the curator-educator relationship.

Even though educational turn helped bring the idea of education as a critical practice to the fore and gain wider acknowledgement within the art world, it also received vast criticism. As Graham, Graziano and Kelly (2016) indicate, many of the projects of educational turn based their formats and pedagogical aspirations on the seminal texts of critical pedagogy, for example, Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and Jacques Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987) to “evoke other forms of knowledge production and new proto-institutions of learning” (p. 1). However, as Carmen Mörsch (2011) notes, the sheer popularity with critical ideas of learning, especially Rancière’s radically democratic, emancipatory idea of self-learning that so many of the curatorial projects adapted without questioning their own position and context in which these projects took place actually masked their “exclusionary actions as a radical democratic gesture” (para. 17). She goes on by saying that promoting the idea of every person being able of self-empowerment paradoxically led to a belief of superiority “as one does not feel obliged or even entitled to make an effort to reach those who do not feel they belong in emancipatory spaces, because that would be paternalistic” (para. 17).

As Graham, Graziano and Kelly (2016) contextualise, most of these curatorial initiatives sprung up while higher education as well as museum and gallery education across Europe went through a vast neo-liberalisation process. Universities raised tuition fees and arts and humanities subjects were de-funded. Meanwhile, gallery education programmes, many of which were characterised by democratic and feminist approaches, experienced significant budget cuts, illustrated by the case of Serpentine Galleries cutting its education budget to fund the architectural expansion designed by Zaha Hadid. In other art institutions education departments got absorbed under ambiguous “outreach” or “customer service”

departments. However, the educational turn with its extensive set of exhibitions, publications and public programmes failed to make connections to these important struggles. Moreover, it did not intervene in the marketization of education and even in discussions about art schools in the art world did not engage with the political processes of resistance that happened in education institutions. Furthermore, educational turn failed to address the experiences of educators working in the institutions that underwent these difficulties. What Graham, Graziano and Kelly ultimately conclude is that

> the art school and questions of pedagogy were instead engaged with and performed as a discrete thematic, another piece of content for the art world to play with, extract value from, and move on. … the Education Turn was a missed opportunity to pose questions and re-shape art curricula and institutions. (p. 2)

Expanding on the experiences of educators, Nora Sternfeld (2010) asks the important question of who benefited from the educational turn? She believes that by instrumentalising education as a curatorial agenda to talk of possibilities and transformation while diverting from its complex internal struggles, the educational turn functioned as a turn specifically for curators positioning them as agents of transformation. In addition, the educational turn in curating and art showed almost no interest in the “unglamourous tasks” of education, the “small, tedious, unpresentable, and strenuous aspects of the educational” (para. 44) practices that educators and art mediators engage with every day. Thus, it marginalised the role of the educator and further highlighted the inequality between curators who were considered as producing knowledge and educators and art mediators as the ones who reproduce it. Carmen Mörsch (2011) builds on this thought by saying that the many discursive events set forth by curators and artists were aimed at and attended by a similar demographic to those who organised them, thus these events were more delimited and exclusive than the contexts in which gallery educators operate. Being part of artistic and intellectual knowledge production that happens in symposiums, lecture series and discussions excels one’s social and cultural capital and sustains the aura of exclusivity. In its turn, critical gallery education

> involves a tremendous capacity for embarrassment. It takes places in rooms that sometimes smell more of sweat and squashed lunch packages than of brand new furniture and freshly painted walls. It requires a willingness to take seriously views that substantially deviate from one's own position and aesthetics much different from

one's own taste; it requires radically alternating between registers of language and aesthetics. (para. 15)

Being engaged in educational practices while remaining detached from the actual problematics and realities of the field is what Graham, Graziano and Kelly (2016) call "pedagogy as spectacle" (p. 3). They state that educational turn in curating rendered "pedagogical interventions as discrete packaged experiences, far from material or institutional politics, and far from the constituencies involved in everyday and long term struggles for radical education." (p. 3) This relates to a more general tendency in many art institutions which, by aligning themselves with neoliberal power structures such as corporations, private collectors, and influential donors, tend to become "sanitised places for staging temporary theatres of public discourse [and] maintaining a strategic distance from the practices in which such discussions might provoke social and political antagonism" (p. 3).

This could be illustrated by the rather recent case of Alistair Hudson, the former director of Manchester University's Whitworth Art Gallery, being forced out because the exhibition of investigative agency Forensic Architecture featured a solidarity statement with Palestine. The statement was removed after UK Lawyers For Israel complained and called the university to take disciplinary action against Hudson (Wolfe-Robinson, 2022). Amidst the turmoil of the statement being taken down, Forensic Architecture demanding to close the show, the university reopening the exhibition with a decision to display "different perspectives on the issues raised by the exhibition and help contextualise them," (para. 9) the gallery was ultimately criticised for silencing public debate and taming political art. This institutional influence over what is shown and how it should be discussed brings me to ponder where does it leave education and its potential to critically engage with these issues? And ultimately question if educators actually have the power to set forth critical engagement projects while being part of the institutional framework?

This calls for further looking into how education is positioned within the institutional art world and exploring some of the problematic institutional working tactics that affect education practices. Before moving on to engage in this discussion, I would like to close this subchapter on educational turn by reaffirming the ambivalent nature of the phenomenon. Characterised by a neglect of the real issues and tensions in the field of education as well as the experiences of those who practice it, educational turn has in some sense functioned as a gimmick or a label "exposing educational strategies to the risk of again being co-opted by

mere commodification … perpetuating its status as a service to whichever policy" (Birchall & Sack, 2014, p. 3). On the other hand, it has also laid ground for many self-organised initiatives and collectives to practice education outside the bounds of art institutions and possibly even helped to reposition what one (the art world and audiences included) might understand with the notion of education and learning. I would also like to believe that developing critical discourses around the educational turn in curating enabled many educators to challenge the conventional perceptions existing within the art world and even expand their own practice.

Navigating institutional patterns and education's place amidst them

My intention with exploring the positionality that education takes within the institutionalised art world is not to engage in institutional critique or provide a thorough analysis of the complex problematics that art institutions both face and cultivate. Nor to assume that all art institutions are monolithic and uncapable of change. I rather wish to map certain institutional working patterns that affect the perception and position of education and may have motivated self-organised art education collectives to form and work aside from institutions.

Departing from the questions posed in the previous subchapter on whether education has the potential and power to critically engage with problematic institutional behaviours, I wish to draw attention to an artwork "Sponsor" (2005, see Figure 1) by Dan Perjovschi that illustrates the common hierarchies existing within art institutions. With larger letters symbolising more power and agency in decision making, on top of the pecking order we see the "sponsor", followed by "director", "curator", "artist", "assistant" and finally "volunteer" in tiny, almost unreadable print. What catches my eye, is that the "educator" is nowhere to be found. This raises questions about the educators' position within the institutional "food chain", their power and say over processes as well as the possibilities to challenge the established institutional structures and discourses.

Figure 1

Hierarchies existing in art institutions. Artwork "Sponsor" by Dan Perjovschi, 2005

Note. Image source: *On Curating* (https://www.on-curating.org/issue-24-reader/sponsor-2005.html#.ZCWrWnZBxPa).

Even though we might wish to reason that this hierarchy has been challenged by the educational turn in curating, and to some extent it has, the structural power aspects and educators' place within art institutions are still relevant today. To expand on this thought, I would like to bring forth an argument by Pablo Helguera. Engaging in what he calls unscientific analysis, Helguera (2021) analysed more than 700 news articles published within a year's time on the notable "Art forum" online platform to find only two articles on museum education. Building on this quite surprising fact and noting that the prominent art publication's "news blog can be used as an indicator of what rises to the surface of the art world's consciousness" (para. 3), Helguera states that the art world often perceives education as charity work; a noble undertaking that is expected from public institutions but is not appealing enough to be discussed. Apart from lacking newsworthiness, education is considered to be aimed at non-professionals, children, and novices; to those not belonging to the art scene. He also highlights the paradoxical fact that education and learning is prominently featured in art institutions' mission statements and funding proposals aimed at foundations, government agencies and supporters, while in reality institutions do not follow

through with their stated priorities and the funding often goes to other operations of the institution. Additionally, in times of crisis, educators are often the ones called to ascertain the genuine relationship institution has with its communities: "when museums are accused of white supremacy or plutocratic boards, they need education departments to show that they use their powers for good" (para. 12). These institutional patterns of marginalisation and inequality in power and agency are still an everyday occurrence in many art institutions today, and the lack of critical discussion in the art media continues enabling it.

This institutional problematic is further highlighted by the fact that when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, educators were among the first ones to be laid off in many art institutions across Europe, the USA and elsewhere (Chevalier, 2021; Harris, 2020). While institutions were quickly adapting to re-launch their exhibitions, collections, and programming online and craft new digital engagement formats, the role of educators as the ones that nurture ties with communities outside the institutions and could mediate the insecurities, tensions and social exclusion brought by the pandemic was often not acknowledged. An open letter initiated by Janna Graham and Carmen Mörsch, signed by more than 1500 educators, curators and art historians especially appealed to the fact that gallery educators, whose critical and innovative work is frequently used for attracting sponsors and supporters to institutions, are often

> racialised, working-class people and women … employed to work with communities who are not members of the cultural elite. At a moment when museums and galleries claim an interest in their diversification, why do they de-fund the very people and communities made most vulnerable by the current crisis?" (Open Letter to Museums and Galleries in support of education and other essential workers)[4]

When institutions internalise the critique and wish to implement change, alter their practices, or reinvent themselves, education and social engagement projects usually become the tool of choice. Engaging with communities and implementing participatory practices, has become a solution for institutions to stay relevant and offer content that speaks to their audiences. However, in many cases the good intentions fail to materialise and even become predatory. Isabel Singer (2021) notes that paradoxically institutional practices become

[4] Open Letter to Museums and Galleries in support of education and other essential workers. https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSffndW5BKqpgasNmlkxuTZr58SI7HPM2LAcAiCEy6XgJ7R-RQ/viewform?fbclid=IwAR0FvKensuvn0GzyVTkXHn-lQdhXl9cy3CSmnDVsJA6UGZug0L_LuZNpfSs

predatory when the staff of an institution make decisions that they believe will protect the institution but actually undermine their own community engagement processes. She states that

> the problem is they are inviting visitors to participate in these flawed collection and interpretation practices instead of really changing how they operate. The museum holds community meetings or focus groups where they control what information is recorded and how. Then, the museum staff use the results of these meetings to further develop their own ideas. When sharing these ideas, the museum supports their decisions by stating choices were made in consultation with the community. (para. 14)

This way participation functions as a way to rubber stamp already predetermined ideas that the institution has formed, and motivation of social engagement fades in the unconscious yet conscious misinterpretation and misrepresentation of the audience.

Amidst the problematic and predatory practices of institutions and the growing neoliberal conditions commodifying and capitalising both art and education, there are several initiatives, both self-organised and institutional alike, that try to challenge the hierarchies and non-democratic practices existing in the art world. For example, the exhibition "Death to the Curator" (2021) at Kunsthall Oslo that brought together contributions of 15 artist-run spaces and collectives from the Northern Europe. The overall aim was to discuss the power distribution in the art scene and the neoliberal condition of curators as "gatekeepers for the most lavish production budgets and exhibition spaces" (Norton, 2021, para. 3) and solidifying hierarchies among institutions and artists. However, as Norton notes the exhibition's public programming missed the chance to debate both the position of curator in the Nordic region and what happens when non-institutional initiatives are incorporated within the programming of art institutions.

There are also cases of art institutions looking to reform the institutional working patterns from within and reposition education and social engagement as an invaluable aspect for enacting this change. For example, Chantal Mouffe (2013) notes that from 2000 to 2008, MACBA in Barcelona with its then director Manuel Borja-Villel at the forefront, managed to create a different model for a museum informed by critical pedagogy to "recover the educational role of the museum, and its role as a constituent part of the public sphere" (p. 71). The museum aimed to build relationships with grassroots activist groups uniting in anti-

capitalist political struggles exemplified by the project “Las Agencias” (The Agencies, 2001) and activate local population to critically engage with the pressing real-estate plans to transform the Barcelona coastline in the project “Com Volem ser Governats?” (How do we want to be governed, 2003–2004). As Emma Mahony (2016) analyses, these projects showed the challenging nature of self-criticism within a public art institution. Even though these projects generated heated discussions and a lot of controversy, they proved successful in tackling socio-political struggles as well as challenging the institutional models of operation while being “embedded within the hegemony of the neoliberal order and constrained by bureaucratic institutional limitations” (p. 219). However, it is also important to acknowledge that these changes and strategies were implemented by a critically motivated director, which also allows to speculate of existing institutional power hierarchies because for an educator (or an education department) to push for and realise such projects without the support and motivation of the director would be rather impossible.

Delving further into the institutional ways of working and how those might be altered, it is worth mentioning a collaborative project by artist Annette Kraus and Casco Art Institute “Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)” (2016). The artist and the team of Casco engaged in collective research to pinpoint problematic institutional habits and try unlearning them. The most prominent of institutional habits turned out to be the constant busyness of people or rather the internalised need to be productive, show measurable results and optimize processes (Choi & Krauss, 2017). This institutional behaviour assimilated from the corporate structures of business as “the neoliberal condition of profit orientation and economization” (p. 71) has become a societal pattern that celebrates being busy as a measure for success. The Casco team and Krauss developed 14 unlearning exercises to challenge the obsession with productive work, the embedded hierarchical relationships and divisions, become aware of their interdependency as well as address the politics of authorship within the project and critically engage with the questions of wage and precarious working conditions. In the end, the group understood that they cannot fully fight the busyness as they still operate in a capitalist system. However, they had equipped themselves with strategies to notice and challenge the institutional habits they may again fall into.

The above-mentioned example indicates that unlearning as an act and a strategy is never finished, and it does not concern just the institution but ultimately the individuals that become institutionalised unconsciously. Institutional habits are taken on naturally as they

become routine. And even though we might wish to blame institutions with their often exploitive, productivity obsessed practices for that, Barnaby Drabble (2013) brings on an important thought:

> there is no neoliberal bogeyman forcing us to do things this way and no cabal to overthrow. In fact, if we draw from a comparison of the institution, the organisation and the individual today, we see, more disturbingly, that we are doing this to ourselves; we are willingly ushering in an era of self-imposed micro-management that borders on the institutionalisation of the self. (p. 26)

Taking into consideration that it is still the working environment and the socio-economic conditions that push people to work in a certain way, over-managing, and self-exploiting themselves, it is natural that one might search for different ways of being and working. Being burdened by the problematic institutional ways of operating, one might wish to desert institutions. However, Chantal Mouffe (2013) brings up an appealing reasoning that instead of withdrawing from the institutions, critical art and education practices need to engage with the institutional terrain to create dissent and agonistic spaces where dominant discourses, neoliberal and hegemonic structures could be challenged. With agonism Mouffe means the spaces of conflict that are a precondition for truly democratic societies and social relationships.

Noting this important aspect of the need for critical engagement with institutions as well as considering the problematic institutional attitudes and the positionality education takes within the institutionalised art world paves the way to speculate why self-organised art education collectives have decided to work apart from institutions and their codes of conduct. Yet the need to engage with institutions to challenge the established ways of practice might be one of the reasons why many self-organised initiatives work on the edges or the boundaries of institutions collaborating with them while still retaining power and distance to negotiate their own practices.

Tracing collectives and their self-organising practices

In the last decade there has been a growing topicality of collectives as well as collective working tactics within the artworld. This is illustrated by several cases, for example, four individual artists that had been shortlisted for the Turner prize deciding to unite in a collective to challenge the artworld's value system of praising the single genius artist and come together "in the name of commonality, multiplicity and solidarity" (Basciano, 2019, para. 2). There is also the case of the Indonesian collective ruangrupa invited to curate documenta 15; Frame Contemporary Art Finland organising "Rehearsing Hospitalities"[5] as a gathering to discuss collectivity and decentralisation of power, wealth, and resources, and Iaspis Stockholm initiating a forum "Collectively"[6] focusing on the practices of thinking, working, and living together.

Amidst this proliferation of collectives, I am interested in looking past their growing popularity to examine what could the concept of collective mean, how collectives form and self-organise and how the collective, self-organised way of working affects their practice. While the art world has given much attention to art collectives, the collective practices of art education collectives are less explored. However, both art and art education collectives share similar and sometimes even overlapping ways of organising and practicing. Therefore, I look at the concept of collective and its defining characteristics as a phenomenon in whole without differentiating between art and art education collectives. Furthermore, rather than offering strict definitions, the first two subchapters serve to map the various concepts of collectivity and collective practice, their origins, motivations, and tensions. Finally, the last two subchapters explore the concept and structural aspects of self-organising and its relation to art institutions to lay base for further studying the art education collectives.

What makes up a collective?

As one could imagine the concept of a collective is rather ambiguous and its meaning depends largely on the context in which it is used and the historical, social, and political

[5] Gathering for Rehearsing Hospitalities, public programme, autumn 2022: https://frame-finland.fi/en/programme/rehearsing-hospitalities/gathering-for-rehearsing-hospitalities-autumn-2022/
[6] Collectively: a forum on the art of thinking, working and living together, 2019: http://www.council.art/inquiries/1383/collective-practices/1794/collectively-a-forum-on-the-art-of-thinking-working-and-living-together

connotations it has acquired through time. Collective as a concept can be looked at through political theory, sociology, and anthropology and in some way is inseparable from these fields of thought but for the benefit of clarity and wholesomeness I will attune my focus on the wider field of art and art education.

The idea of a collective, both as an organisational form of people coming together and as a practice, most often emerges as a way "to establish an agenda, an alternative economic structure and a way to overcome the limitations of isolation" (Vaughan, 2018, p. 8). When pondering the defining aspects of a collective, Laurene Vaughan states that such concepts as collective, collaboration, co-operative and community are commonly used to describe the processes and structures of collective work. A collective is a group of people undertaking a joint action, characterised by cohesion and a mutual intent. Co-operative as a term is employed to talk about the structure of the organisation, established on the idea of mutual assistance, a common aim, shared ownership of the organisation and shared benefits from the endeavour. Collaboration is the act of working together, often in a joint intellectual effort; "it is both a methodology and a political position" (p. 10) to challenge power relations and hierarchy. To elaborate, working collaboratively is thus not only sharing resources and responsibilities but also a political engagement with the predefined and solidified perceptions of work, authority, and knowledge to bring forth more inclusive, collective, and supportive practices. Lastly, community, as Vaughan notes, is used as a concept to describe the formations of groups based on common characteristics, for example, locality, identity, common interests, and political ideas, as well as shared intention, action, or outcome. Following this train of thought, collectives are communities of intent.

When trying to pinpoint what ideas, values, and ideologies fuel people to come together as a collective, it is helpful to look at the art collectives that have formed through art history, highlighted by the 20th century modernist avant-garde movements but especially the artist groups of the 1960s that established collaborative and activist forms of working that we know so well today. As Maria Lind (2007) indicates, the collaborative working practices of the artists and other creative workers that developed around the 1960s and continued well into the 1990s and the millennium were characterised by the ideas of redefining art, critiquing institutions, and challenging the position of the individual artist genius. Moreover, the collectives engaged in politics and activist endeavours, socially engaged and participatory

practices, and in the last couple of decades after the millennium strived to find alternative ways of producing knowledge.

Today, these ideas, especially the desire and need for different ways of learning and creating knowledge, infused with and expanded by practices of decolonization, decentralisation of power, accessibility, counter-hegemony, critical pedagogy and others, are at the core of many art and education collectives. For example, the artist group WochenKlausur who create social interventions to improve the socio-political issues in society, the activist collective Decolonise this Place that strive to decolonise art museums, the education collective BFAMFAPhD who use pedagogical tools to analyse and reimagine the power relationships in art, advancing cultural equity, as well as K-oh-llective who cultivate critical conversations around art and have set up a resource-sharing platform to build a more collective and supportive infrastructure in Egypt and the Arab world. On top of that, for some collectives such as the curatorial collective WHW (What, How & for Whom), working together has been a political stance for challenging the dominant systems in culture, art, politics, and their institutions (Önol, 2010). These are just some examples of collectives that can help us imagine the multitude of collective practices spanning social, cultural, and political spheres.

Collective, as the word suggests, embodies a team effort and can be seen as a network of members that, depending on their specific organisational structure, aims for horizontality and rethinking of the hierarchical models of working. As Amalie Ørum Hansen (2022) has expressed, networks might appear to work in an institutional way, but they are not institutions. Networks have the freedom to reshape their practice along the way, move at a faster and more sensitive pace than the bureaucratic institutions.[7] And this can also be said of collectives. Thus, it would seem that collectives have a greater capacity for critical self-reflection embedded in their form of organisation, which allows members to keep each other accounted and true to their ideals of practice, as well as adapt more quickly to re-shape the aspects that no longer serve their practice. This agility and adaptability to re-negotiate one's position also enables to bring more diverse thoughts and experiences to the table.

[7] Amalie Ørum Hansen, co-founder of the Nordic Network for Norm Critical Leadership in a panel discussion 'Towards Inclusive Leadership In The Nordic Artfield' organised by Globe Art Point in Helsinki, Finland, 21.04.2022. https://www.globeartpoint.fi/towards-inclusive-leadership-in-the-nordic-artfield/

However, it is also important to note that not all collectives challenge the status quo. Grégory Castéra (2020) notes that “many historical values from collectives – such as inclusion of cultural diversity, horizontal governance, alternative ways of living and awareness for societal and environmental concerns – have also been assimilated by capitalism and most political movements” (p. 167). The idea of collective as a self-organised practice has surpassed the fields of artistic, cultural, and socio-political activism and today is not necessarily a synonym of subversion or emancipation as Anne Klontz and Johan Pousette (2020) indicate. This form of working, underlined by collective methods and values, has been assimilated by such fields as management, marketing, engineering, and technology, as exemplified by the community-driven start-up scene. Similarly, also art institutions have benefited from the collective spirit and practice and have appropriated and capitalised them, even absorbing them into their own institutional structures. This is illustrated by the popularity of teen boards within institutions or inviting collectives to direct art institutions, curate biennials or devise education programming. These tensions between self-organised collectives and art and culture institutions will be examined further in the subchapter on self-organising.

Motivations and challenges of collective practice

Circling back to Vaughan’s (2018) idea of collectives being communities of intent, it is important to ask what are those intentions and motivations that ignite people to work collectively? Motivations for collective work are as many as there are ideas about what constitutes a collective.

> The catalyst for forming or joining a collective varies with each individual. From economic survival to creative impetus, accounts for the establishment of a collective are grounded in the belief that there are gains to be made through connection, and that the collective will be greater than the sum of its parts. (Vaughan, 2018, p. 11)

The idea of coming together as a way of multiplying power to take on the everyday challenges and find mutual support is reflected also in Jennifer Beth Spiegel’s (2019) thoughts. She states that since the millennium collective practices have become the tools for dealing with austerity measures, social exclusion, and the growing alienation of individuals. Spiegel notes: “Whereas policies within this late capitalist (neoliberal) era tend to promote individuality, many of those resisting market-driven governance advocate for collectivity –

that is to say, for acting *together* to navigate the various challenges and possibilities encountered" (p. 3). Collectivity, however, as Eszter Lázár (2012) highlights, is not just a way of working together and practically carrying out an idea. It embodies the notion of thinking together, and as such it becomes a strategy for taking a critical stance against the prevailing preconceptions both in the socio-economic, political structures and the art world and its institutions.

This aspect of collectivity, of being, doing and thinking together, versus the growing ideology of individuation is also in line with what Thijs Lijster (2018) in conversation with Franco 'Bifo' Berardi have come to define as "organized loneliness" (p. 211). This isolation from one another, advanced by competition and deliberately organised through precarious work is at the basis of creative capitalism – a form of social exploitation that has been organized through appropriation of worker's creativity. For Berardi creative capitalism is built on the "stimulation of competition among individuals, especially in the field of cognitive work, where people have to be singular, creative and different" (p. 198). The social exclusion that underlies so much of the creative, cultural, and educational work, especially (but not only) within the bureaucratic institutional settings, begs to ask the question whether establishing a collective practice could help to challenge and imagine alternatives to these institutional, competitive, and capitalism-oriented routines?

A possible answer might be found within the practices of the education collective BFAMFAPhD for whom the motivation to work, think and learn together lies at the basis of their work as a collective. They articulate their collective practice as follows:

> we believe that learning together is fundamental to a meaningful life. As members of a collective, we learn, labor, and take action in continuous dialogue with one another. A collective is an example of what the social learning theorist Etienne Wenger calls a "learning community," defined as a group "of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly." We recognize one another as learners and as teachers. We yield to one another as our individual and collective aspirations shape us daily. … We cherish spaces of individual and collective transformation, where people show up to grow and listen deeply enough to transform. (Woolard & Jahoda, 2021, p. 117)

The statement of BFAMFAPhD reveals not only a fascinating articulation of what it means to practice collectively but that the collective practice organically relates to education and

learning as exemplified by the concepts and language they use. This suggests that collective practice embodies learning at its core and in its turn, education embodies a shared, collective engagement. This relation is evident within the practices of the art education collectives I have decided to research and thus, I will reflect on this matter when discussing these collectives later in the thesis.

When collectives decide to work together, based on their own reasoning, intentions, or actions to be taken, collectives take many different forms and are very heterogenous in how they organise their practice. Lind (2007) differentiates among stable multi-authorship duos, larger groups that have been working together for decades, “single-issue groups” (p. 25) that end their work after achieving a certain goal, groups that imitate the structure of a musical band or a business-like operation, and collectives made up of practitioners of different professional fields. Then there are groups of creatives, culture and education workers who live and practice side by side, share similar ideas, approaches and attitudes but have never considered themselves a collective or organized themselves under a certain structure. There is also a difference between informal and formal working models of collectives: “those with a fixed number of members and a common name, and those without any general plan who gather like a flock of birds, cropping up in different formations for different occasions” (p. 27). The structures of collectives can be improvised or thoroughly organised, individual members can pursue their own separate work while still being part of the collective, and other members can be fully and only immersed in the collective practice. Lind goes on by stating that many of the collectives today operate horizontally, are formed by practitioners of different fields, and situate themselves between artistic, activist, and curatorial activities, to which I would personally also add education practices. This omission of education from the art, activism and curating-focused discussion is another example that hints at the ambiguous position art education takes within the art world and its prioritisation of artistic and curatorial work. That being said, I would like to argue that education deserves an equal acknowledgement as a collective, critical practice.

Circling back to the characterisation of collectives, Lind (2007) notes that the aspect that ultimately and most commonly characterise these groups of practice is that they are self-organised. This brings me to think that self-organising and collective practice are akin, intertwined concepts that help explain one another. Moreover, examining self-organising allows to learn how collectives form and operate on the inside of their practice.

Self-organising, its intentions, and entanglements

In the context of art and education, self-organisation refers to groups of individuals that tend to be independent of institutional or corporate structures and operate in an open, non-hierarchical way based on participatory decision-making (Bradley et al., 2006). Self-organisation in all its different forms is a social process that initially is bound to a shared condition or a problem that is addressed collectively, and in that way, it is a "collaborative tool, a means to mobilise skills, experience, support, resources and knowledge" (Davies et al., 2013, p. 34). Mika Hannula (2006) goes further into the meaning of self-organised collective practice, describing it as "an abstract phenomenon, … a meeting of different, often collaborative forces, but also conflicting desires, wishes and fears. It is a transaction, a kind of platform, or an intersection of flows of information, capital, attitudes, amusements" (p. 207). These characteristics position self-organisation as a mode of practice and a method of working.

To illustrate self-organised practices, Maibritt Borgen (2013) uses the concept of "rhizome", borrowing it from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Derived from the world of botany, the concept could be understood when compared to a system structured like the roots of grass. Instead of being a structure of solidly defined positions and points, rhizome is a map of interconnected and modifiable threads that are crossing one another and are in a constant mode of becoming. With this analogy in mind, she describes self-organising as a "rhizomatic condition, [where] strategies, negotiations of power and relations are constantly changing. … a structure that privileges sideways ordering and movement over centre-periphery relations" (p. 39). This rhizomatic condition is what sets self-organised practices apart from the institutional structures that often have a hierarchical structure with segmented spheres of power and agency.

Self-organising emits the need and quest for working differently than the institutions have been functioning as it is echoed in many of the collectives doing artistic, socially engaged, and educational work. Anne Szefer Karlsen (2012) indicates that what separates self-organised practices from institutional ones is the intentional lack of the role of authority. However, lacking an authority figure does not mean that there is a lack of power structures within a self-organised collective. Noting that self-organised groups are held together by solidarity, shared interest and need for developing networks of collaboration and knowledge exchange, Karlsen also states that conflict and collaboration are the two important aspects in

self-organised work. These aspects are crucial as they set the grounds for collective practice. Collaboration is not possible without acknowledging conflicting opinions or interests and conflict cannot be resolved if there is not a firm desire to continue working collectively.

Self-organization has long been connected to non-institutional practices. Barnaby Drabble (2013) suggests that seeing self-organisation as a tool with which to work in spite and in opposition to the dominant system, where the artist would work in opposition to a predetermined context of labour ushered by an institution, the market, or the academy, is a very traditional way of viewing self-organisation. The logic of "us" versus "them", fuelled by conflicting ideas of how power should be distributed, has led self-organisation to be seen as a "rallying call for anti-institutional projects, often with little analysis of whether any real, operational differences exist between the structures developed by artists and those developed by state or the market" (p. 24). This statement is important as it indicates a long-standing dichotomy between self-organised and institutional practices that has been worn out and no longer characterises the current conditions in the art world.

Today, we cannot help but to see that the relationship between self-organised and institutional ways of operation is entangled and complex. One indication of this is that due to the current landscape in the art world, the growing need for professionalisation, productivity and creative capitalism, where one needs to survive, many self-organised collectives willingly or unwillingly adapt to the organisational structures that are present also within art institutions. According to Drabble (2013) these "administrative trappings" in the form of funding applications, project planning, workflow and strategy documents and meetings, although set up in a counter-bureaucratic way, still appear in successful self-organised structures. He calls this paradox a "self-imposed bureaucratic approach" (p. 23). This statement becomes evident in the example of Clusterduck collective (2021) who acknowledge that when it comes to projects that are done in collaboration with culture institutions or when it involves receiving funding from governmental actors, it comes at an expense of adjusting to the institutional rules, deadlines and templates that they have known from their previous corporate jobs and that have led to certain frictions within the collective. Drabble (2013) also recognises that unlike art institutions who often have rigid structures and exhibitions planned years ahead, self-organised collectives have the capacity to work from "a sense of necessity rather than provision, and to replace planning with initiating and to start providing an impulse or starting point without claim to ongoing control" (p. 23). He states

that such de-organisation can happen within collectives, but it calls for critically questioning the logics of internal organisation.

Another indication that visualises the entanglement between institutional and self-organised practices is the fact that art institutions have adapted the practices of self-organisation yet often without altering their own intentions and working patterns. As Maibritt Borgen (2013) notes, around the millennium self-organisation as a term substituted previous versions of collective practice that carried the labels of “artist-run” or “alternative”. As self-organised collectives moved away from being described as alternative, “the institution started paying attention” (p. 45). Around the same time cultural institutions started to work on market terms quickly absorbing every critical gesture, capitalising it. As a result, self-organising lost its anti-institutional position. Borgen goes on by saying that currently self-organising shares many similarities with the labour market, in which qualities like dedication, flexibility and creativity are in demand. Self-organisation represents the perfect worker and thus runs the risk of being profited from. Furthermore, self-organisation has already become an everyday practice within cultural institutions, illustrated by an “ever-increasing list of symposiums, panels, talks and ‘critical interventions’. All these events simultaneously operate in a self-organised way within an institutional discourse and thus give critical legitimacy to the institution” (p. 46).

This thought is further illustrated by Stine Herbert (2013) who gives an example of her participation in an event for the 10th anniversary of Tate Modern called “No Soul for Sale – A Festival of Independents”, featuring 70 non-institutional initiatives. She recalls this as a very contradictive experience as the institution did not offer contributors any financial support and their organisational assistance was insignificant, yet most participants accepted these terms without objections. She states that it demonstrated how the institutional artworld tends to sustain itself:

> the value of the institution’s embrace still offers enough prestige and power to compensate for the problematic conditions on offer. However, we have to concede that this dependency is mutual, as the institution in this case desired to be associated with the energy and free spirit only found outside of its own heavy museum bureaucracy. (p. 13)

These examples show the dynamic of institutional and self-organised practices and how interconnected and symbiotic they have become. One might argue that self-organised

collectives have become or soon will become institutions themselves. Although that might be true on some occasions, there are still differences that set self-organised practices apart.

I would tend to think that self-organised collectives nowadays are not that focused on creating a radically different structure from the institutions just for the sake of being in an anti-institutional opposition. Self-organised collectives are rather formed to reconsider the status quo and to make their own, self-determined, alternative structures holding their own power to organise as they see fit while maintaining a critical stance on their own condition as well.

Structuring self-organised practice

The characteristics, ideas, and values of self-organised collectives that I explored above indicate valuable directions that can help analyse how art education collectives organise and structure their practice. Structuring the practice deals with both the inner and outer workings of a collective: collaborating with institutions, constituencies and audiences of their projects as well as negotiating decision-making processes and power relations among the members of the collective. It is also important to consider how collectives situate their practice, what concepts and ideologies they build their practice on, and how they sustain their practice financially as well as creatively and intellectually. And ultimately, how these structures and the self-organised, collective way of working might affect their education practice.

The collective WochenKlausur (2020) give insight into some of the aspects that play a role in either making or breaking the structure of a self-organised collective. They state that one of the most significant aspects in self-organised collective work is discussing and establishing how the collective will make decisions and who has the power to speak on which issue as this affects the power dynamics within the collective. Whether everyone is responsible for all matters of the practice (from ideas to their execution and even administrative tasks), or certain members of the collective are delegated to make decisions and take responsibility on defined areas of work, or if only one member takes the ultimate responsibility, makes a vast difference. So does if decisions are made based on consensus or majority. Coming to a consensus often delays decision-making and leads to compromises, slows down implementation yet collective members can be relatively happy about the direction taken. In its turn, majority decisions are made quickly but risk the possibility that a

dominant group forms within a collective that ultimately leads to tensions. It is also important to consider to what extent some decisions affect some of the collective's members more than others. Finally, it matters if everyone in the collective is paid the same or if the remuneration is based on any criteria, for example, professional skills, specific work tasks, personal liability, or the length one might be a member in the collective.

Apart from discussing and negotiating questions of power, practical and ideological directions, and ways of working together, another important aspect that influences how the collective organises itself is the ability to sustain their practice. When thinking about what sustaining one's practice means, the collective BFAMFAPhD (2021) brings forth a couple of important questions that self-organised groups need to discuss: "What is the difference between a job, a friendship, and a collective? What expectations do you have about this collective on emotional, intellectual, and financial terms? How does the group's structure and conditions of collaboration reflect this?" (p. 124) It is also necessary to consider how a collective situates itself in relation to institutions and other sources that might offer financial means since that might influence the inner dynamics, the organisational structure, responsibilities and ultimately the collective's practice. BFAMFAPhD illustrates the multitude of aspects that lie at the core of sustaining their practice as follows:

> we recognize that our individual and collective needs for livelihood are far more complex than our salaries. We try to speak openly about what we need to give and receive in terms of time, money, and support in order to feel a sense of equity in our work together and in our personal relationships. (p. 124)

Pondering sustainability ultimately leads to also acknowledging the fact that a collective might come to a moment in time where it needs to dissolve, hibernate, or change their practices completely to stay alive. K-oh-llective (2022) reflect on this stating that the possible reasons for their collective to cease existing would be if their "personal/collective purposes become misaligned, the drive is lost, we lack funding or the willingness to work without getting any tangible reward, or we lose the engagement and appreciation from the audience" (p.76). However, they also point out that their activities and they themselves can change, adapt, and take on a different form since they do not feel the pressure to hold on to certain structures or ambitions forever. Thus, sustaining a collective practice is not just about securing financial stability but it is also about sustaining personal, social, political, and creative aspects of collective work.

Solidifying all these structural aspects and sensitivities expressed through theoretical writings and by practicing collectives themselves, I would like to establish four defining elements that make up a collective, self-organised practice: situating, practicing, assembling, and sustaining. These elements allow to explore how a collective decides to **situate** their practice in relation to the social field and art institutions; what concepts, pedagogies and methods form their **practice**; how they **assemble**, work together, and structure the inner working models and how the collective, self-organised way of working affects their education practice; and finally, how they **sustain** their practice. These elements will help me examine how the three education collectives that I have chosen to research form and self-organise their practice while navigating the interdependent relationships with art institutions.

Approaches to research: conversation as critical inquiry and knowledge production

In this chapter I will describe the process and practicalities of my research, offering insight into my reasoning, intentions, and choices for conducting the study. I will position and discuss conversation as my methodological approach for inquiring and producing knowledge on the self-organising practices of art education collectives.

Conversation as a methodology of inquiry

Setting the grounds for my research into the self-organised practices of education collectives, I have chosen conversation as my main methodological approach of inquiry. Conversations and interviews as research practices share similar practical grounds, structures, and intentions, however because of the nature of this research I am more draw to employing conversation as my direction of engagement with the collectives. Conversation as a methodology is often used in Indigenous strands of research because of its inherently communal relationality and focus on narrative and orally transmitted knowledge. It implies an open, dialogical approach where the researcher and the participant (-s) are co-creators of knowledge (Kovach, 2010). Thus, conversation as a research methodology organically relates to the subject of my research – the collective practice, as well as to how I perceive education – as a process of collective knowledge building.

As Feldman (1999) notes, conversation inherently embodies a shared, collective behaviour. This collaborative and collective effort allows the conversation to have a direction, but in contrast to an interview, the direction is not predetermined by one of its participants. The direction rather emerges during the conversation through interpretation and a growing understanding. Furthermore, interviews are usually "conducted" but a conversation cannot really be conducted by either of the participants. Instead, as Feldman likes to think, we fall into or become involved in conversations. We engage in them. As conversation takes its own turn and reaches its own conclusions, the individuals engaging in a conversation are "far less the leaders of it than [the ones being] led. No one knows in advance what will "come out" of a conversation" (Gadamer, as cited in Feldman, p. 133). Still, as Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale (2018) indicate, in research, there is a systematic approach to a conversation, characterised by a focus on specific themes or questions that anchor the conversation and are discussed with the aim of making meaning, acquiring knowledge, and understanding. The

conversation is not strictly structured with standard questions, nor is it non-directive; the questions are open and the person responding decides what dimensions about a certain phenomenon to bring forth.

I consider conversation to be the most meaningful approach for inquiring and engaging with the phenomenon of self-organised collective practice. Not only because it allows to explore the complexities of the phenomenon in great detail but also because conversation is a collective learning situation, where a contribution of experiences, insights and discussion allows to build a common pool of knowledge. Here I would like to bring forth an argument by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) who state that conversation is an intersubjective and social process of co-producing knowledge. Expanding on this thought, they indicate two approaches to how knowledge is produced in conversations and interview research, characterised by the metaphor of a "miner" or a "traveller". Researcher as a miner approaches the conception of knowledge as something that is waiting to be unearthed and dug out of the subject's experiences uncontaminated by the miner and unpolluted by leading questions. Here, the knowledge might be seen as objective data or subjective meanings and is approached as already existing. Whereas in the traveller metaphor, the researcher approaches the landscape of inquiry as an unknown territory, exploring many domains and engaging with certain aspects, unfolding their meanings through interpretation. Here the journey not only leads to new knowledge but might also change the traveller and make them question preconceived conditions and truths. Moreover, the traveller sees knowledge as socially constructed. My approach to this thesis and the process of examining the self-organising practices of education collectives is aligned with the traveller approach to knowledge creation.

Framing conversation as a process of learning, a situation in which a person engages to gain new understanding through talking, listening, reflecting, responding, and questioning, is what makes conversation a critical inquiry (Feldman, 1999). It is a process related to the "hermeneutic circle and the interpretation of texts [where] the understanding shapes the conversation, and the conversation leads to new understanding," (Dreyfus, as cited in Feldman, p. 140). As such, conversation is an interpretative methodology (McDowell, 2010), and when it comes to interpretation, it is important to acknowledge the power relations embedded in the processes of interpreting and representing the knowledge shared by the participants of a conversation. Even though in my research I approached and engaged with

the education collectives on equal grounds, the position of a researcher still holds certain power. This power lies in defining the terrain of research and setting the stage for a conversation to happen. Moreover, it lies in bringing forth certain themes and questions, critically following up on statements and directing the conversation with a purpose of building knowledge on a certain phenomenon. In its turn, the power of the collective lies in framing how to speak about that phenomenon, what dimensions of their practice to reveal and how openly to engage in certain matters as they are framing the discourse of their practice that I will be interpreting and reflecting on.

Thus, when discussing interpretation and the process of critically engaging with the statements to reflect on them, it is important to acknowledge the situated knowledges me as a researcher and collectives as participants of the conversation are embedded in. Donna Haraway (1988) has challenged the concept of objectivity in research and science by proposing the notion of situated knowledge, which implies that our positionality, worldviews, and knowledge is bound to the socio-political, cultural, and historical contexts in which we have been situated in. Thus, the views, thoughts, experiences, and knowledge shared by the collectives, or the "data" of my research, is situated and respectively subjective. This is not to say that it is in some way less valid. On the contrary, these personal and professional experiences, insights and knowledge are extremely valuable for my research as they constitute the self-organised, collective practices and allow to explore their entangled relationship with institutions. Critically reflected through theory and vice versa, these situated knowledges allow to explore the practices of art education collectives that until now have not been engaged with in academia that specifically or thoroughly.

Practical and structural aspects of the inquiry

As previously established, conversation has been a meaningful tool for critically inquiring, producing knowledge, and learning about the self-organised practices of the collectives through their own words. Conversations allowed to hear from the collectives themselves, how they situate and frame their practices, what concepts they use to describe their work, which issues or subjects they bring to front and what dimensions they reveal about their practice.

In my research I set forth and engaged in open-ended, in-depth conversations with three art education collectives, holding separate conversations with each of the collectives. In

two of the conversations several members of the collective were present, and one conversation was held with the founder of the collective as a designated speaker on behalf of the whole collective. The conversations were semi-structured, allowing for more freedom to explore certain aspects in more detail, pursue different avenues and be redirected to notions and questions previously unexposed.

The conversations were structured based on specific themes; and every theme was expanded with questions to retain a focused outlook on the subjects I wished to inquire about. The themes and their underlying questions were guided by the four elements of self-organised practice that I have defined and explored in the previous chapter: situating, practicing, assembling, and sustaining. In more detail, these four elements dealt with such aspects of self-organised collective practice as:

- situating – discussing how collectives situate their practice in relation to art institutions, what concepts they use to name and describe their collective and their practice;
- practicing – discussing how collectives approach and practice education, what themes, methodologies and contexts they engage with, how they work with art institutions and the positionality that education takes within institutions;
- assembling – exploring the reasons behind forming a self-organised collective, how they organise the structure and relationship within the collective, deal with power relations, conflicts, distribution of labour and roles, and other crucial aspects of self-organised practice, as well as how the collective, self-organised way of working affects their education practice;
- sustaining – discussing the complexities of sustaining a self-organised collective practice and the models that collectives have adapted to sustain their practice, touching upon the social, creative, and intellectual aspects of sustaining, as well as ceasing to exist as a collective.

Finally, I discuss and critically reflect on the statements of collectives and the knowledge produced in the conversations through theoretical writings, structuring the discussion chapter on these four previously established and elaborated elements of self-organised practice. These elements should not be considered as mutually exclusive or

distinctively separate from one another because in reality of a self-organised collective practice these elements too are interconnected and correlate with one another. They are rhizomatic: aspects dealing with situatedness are intertwined with aspects of sustaining, the same as tactics of assembling relate to and affect the modes of practicing and sustaining. However, I have implemented this structuring as it will help to highlight, focus on and discuss the core organisational aspects of self-organised collective practice.

Although I engage with and discuss the collectives' statements with the utmost respect and ethical consideration, retaining critically towards their opinions and my own situated knowledge and biases, I acknowledge that my reading will still be affected by my own researcher's subjectivity and judgement of what I consider important to be described, discussed, and brought to the front of this research.

Selecting art education collectives

My reasoning and criteria for selecting these three art education collectives was based on their collective and education practice. It was important for me to research collectives that are engaged in critical approaches to education and gallery education, that are self-organised in their structure and practicing apart from art institutions while still engaging and collaborating with them. These criteria were important as they could reveal important knowledge about the motivations and practical structural aspects of self-organised collectives, while also help examine how they negotiate their relationship with institutions and navigate the complexities of sustaining their practice. In addition, I chose collectives that have been practicing for several years as that could offer broader and more in-depth knowledge of the particularities, intricacies, and specifics of self-organised collective practice.

All three education collectives are practicing in Europe, and although there are other inspiring education collectives working in Asia, Africa, and the South and North America, I chose to focus my research direction to the context in which I situate myself and my practice. This intention was also partly motivated by the interest in seeing how education collectives form and operate in the complex socio-political context and the institutional art world that is often characterised as Western or Euro-centric but at the same time has nourished democratic, activist, and counter-hegemonic initiatives and movements. Therefore, as I am personally and professionally situated amidst these influences and relate to the local socio-political and cultural landscape with its many characteristics and challenges, it was important

to learn how collectives that situate themselves similarly deal with the questions of self-organised work and institutional problematics.

The collectives I chose to research are trafo.k, microsillons and Invisible Pedagogies (Pedagogías Invisibles). **Trafo.k**[8] is an art education collective formed in 1993 in Vienna, Austria, by Renate Höllwart, Elke Smodics, and Nora Sternfeld, recently joined by Simon Nagy. The collective works at the intersection of research, education, and critical knowledge production. Their long-standing practice has materialised in youth and media projects, art interventions and education projects in the public space, scientific studies and participatory research, workshops, and training courses as well as gallery education projects and consulting for institutions. In their projects, trafo.k question and intervene in the predefined conditions, revealing the structures of institutions and media, aiming to raise critical awareness in the public. They are interested in merging different forms of knowledge, artistic strategies, and socio-political questions in a collective, emancipatory manner to investigate what perspectives and spaces for learning might emerge.

Microsillons[9] is an art and education duo formed by Marianne Guarino-Huet and Olivier Desvoignes in 2005 in Geneva, Switzerland. Microsillons create collaborative artistic projects engaged in social transformations, based on strategies borrowed from critical and feminist pedagogies, eco-pedagogies and socially engaged art practices. Their interest lies is developing collective, artistic, and pedagogical approaches that make visible and challenge dominant norms and various forms of oppression present in schools, art and culture institutions and the public space. The collective has collaborated with cultural institutions in the form of gallery education and art mediation as well as carried out numerous non-institutional, grassroots projects and collective interventions. Since 2015, as a collective they have been directing the master's degree programme TRANS – Socially Engaged Art Practices at HEAD – Geneva, focusing on questions of social transformation and engagement and applying pedagogical practices as a tool for collaborative artistic production.

Invisible Pedagogies[10] was formed in 2012, arising from a collective education research project as part of the Art Education PhD programme at the Complutense University of Madrid, Spain. The current members of the collective are Andrea De Pascual, Eva Morales,

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[8] trafo.k, https://www.trafo-k.at/en/
[9] microsillons, https://microsillons.org/
[10] Invisible Pedagogies, https://www.pedagogiasinvisibles.es/

Carmen Oviedo, and Antonio Venegas. Their practice is shaped by three intersecting fields: research as an underlying aspect of every of their actions, art education projects for schools, and cultural mediation for institutions and non-institutional initiatives alike. Their engagement with educational institutions includes working with schools and pedagogues, setting up teacher training and residencies where art seeps into educational methodologies to question preconceived learning settings and propose critical and transversal approaches to knowledge. Their work with institutions and non-institutional initiatives takes shape as culture mediation that strives to expand the transformative potential of pedagogical practices, ingraining them both within the programming and the organisational levels of an institution. They see mediation as a catalyst for the transition to a more critical and emancipated citizenship. Invisible Pedagogies work as intermediaries among institutions, organisations, government, the public, and other education practitioners.

Discussing the self-organised practices of education collectives

In this chapter I will discuss the self-organising practices of education collectives by highlighting and reflecting on their statements about their situatedness in relation to art institutions and the social field, their practice, organisational structure as well as the complexities of sustaining their practice. These statements anchored in the collectives' situated knowledge, experiences, and their practice in the field, will be reflected on through theoretical writings and practice-based resources I have explored previously. Moreover, while engaging in a critical reading, I am also describing their accounts to bring forth new knowledge about the self-organising practices of art education collectives through this research. Their knowledge and correspondingly my reflection and discussion within this chapter is structured on the four elements of self-organised practice: situating, practicing, assembling, and sustaining. Finally, rather than aiming to provide answers or solutions, this discussion is an invitation to think together with the practices and statements of the collectives to critically reflect and bring forth new questions, ideas, and discussions on the phenomenon of self-organised education practice and its relations to art institutions.

Situating

When discussing how the collectives situate their practice, it is important to inquire into and establish the concepts and language they use to describe their practice. Do they call themselves a collective, a group, a community or perhaps an organisation? Do they practice education, pedagogy, learning, mediation, or social engagement? Do they consider themselves educators, pedagogues, curators, or artists engaging with education? These concepts help to learn about their positionality and approach to education as a practice. Moreover, discussing how they situate their practice in relation to art institutions sets ground for further discussing their entanglements with the artworld and its institutions.

Trafo.k define themselves as a collective while acknowledging that so much of the language used for describing one's practice is commodified and employed as branding, especially in the context of collectives and their proliferation. They describe their practice as "critical education at the intersection of art, politics, activism, and history", stating that all these themes confront one another since what makes sense in activism might not work in artistic or education practice. Invisible Pedagogies call themselves a collective although

legally they are a non-profit association and situate their practice in-between “art + education”, with the “+” emphasizing the transdisciplinary context of their practice. Finally, microsillons define themselves as a collective of “artists engaged in pedagogy,” aligning themselves with the concepts and practices of transformative gallery education coined by Carmen Mörsch and socially engaged art as theorised by Pablo Helguera. They state that although they engage with pedagogical practices and their work is similar to practitioners that define themselves as gallery educators and practice gallery education, they call themselves artists because they have been trained as such and art constitutes an important part of their practice. What is interesting is that associating their practice with art allows them “quite a lot of freedom because this definition is broad enough to put different practices in it [and] it allows to agglomerate tools, and know-how knowledge from different disciplines”. Moreover, they state that it is important for them not to appropriate the competencies of educators as they have not been trained as pedagogues or social workers and “recognize the work of those people who are specialists and that we call allies, colleagues and participants in our projects”.

The way how collectives choose to define their practice draws attention to the relationship between art and education. Even though artistic and educational practices intersect and merge, loosing clear distinctions in their projects, there is still a dualism illustrated by microsillons’ statement. On the one hand it illustrates an embodied critical self-awareness and ethical consideration to specific practices and experiences of educators that the educational turn in curating and art did not fully acknowledge or engage with. On the other hand, the wording and statements chosen to describe one’s practice still alludes to the boundaries of specialisation and the power that artists have to freely engage in education and social practices while educators are presumed to stick to their own field and are bound to practice solid perceptions of what might be understand as education.

When I started my research and looked into the practices of art education collectives, I had the presumption of them being independent from institutions. This perception was partly influenced by the aspect that they practiced education “outside” the institutions and partly because often they were called as independent, non-institutional collectives by themselves or other actors in the field. And while at some capacity this sense of independence is true, the relationship between self-organised collective practices and art institutions, as I have previously discussed through theory, is complex and entangled.

When it comes to situating themselves in relation to art institutions, trafo.k works both apart and with art and education institutions, arguing that an independent or an autonomous practice does not exist. On an institutional level they try to intervene into the institutional discourses and structures investigating together with project participants the role, conditions and hierarchies within institutions and their own positionality. They state that they have "as much as a critical as a prefigurative relation to institutions", meaning that they do not just acknowledge what is problematic with institutions but collectively imagine how they could be different and try to enliven that imagination. Invisible Pedagogies, on the other hand, state that their practice is independent because the institutions perceive them as coming from the outside of their institution. Invisible Pedagogies articulate their situatedness as being "in-between": practicing in-between art and education, in-between cultural and educational institutions and in-between all the different profiles of museum staff. Finally, microsillons describe their relationship with institutions as "mutualist", explaining it as "two organisms helping each other [with] a common interest to do something together [and] benefit from the other". In their work with institutions, they integrate Chantal Mouffe's idea of agonism on the necessity of conflict and see their own and institution's relationship as being "adversaries rather than enemies". Situating one's practice in relation to institutions in such a way corresponds with what Mouffe (2013) has argued about the necessity for artistic and educational practices to engage with institutions rather than withdraw from them. What also illustrates their entanglement with the institutional ways of operating is that for several years as a collective they were working within the Contemporary Art Centre in Geneva doing critical gallery education, and currently they are directing a master's degree programme TRANS – Socially Engaged Art Practices at HEAD – Geneva, also as a collective. Characterising it as a conscious decision to focus their energy "in a project that is completely institutional", they have less time and attention for their self-organised practice. What is interesting is that when pondering their relationship and work inside the institution, they say that they look at it as a residency, borrowing this idea from the Artist Placement Group, an artist-run organisation that placed artists within industrial, governmental, and business settings to later create artwork around those experiences. Microsillons also believe that their institutional experiences feed into their self-organised practice.

While this is a truly captivating idea and perhaps a progressive way to see collaboration with an institution, it makes me ponder if treating an institution as a residency

is a way to retain some power over the discourse of how one's practice is called and perceived while actually it has become institutionalised? This, of course, does not ultimately mean that they are not self-organised or that their practice outside the institutional bounds does not exist, because it still does. But perhaps what this illustrates is the tendency I explored in the theory chapters that collectives and education initiatives have been absorbed within institutions. A phenomenon that happened both throughout the educational turn and with the growing proliferation of collective practices and their capitalisation and commodification by the art world. Another interesting aspect is that this "absorption" if one could call it as such has happened willingly and, on the collective's own terms. This brings back what Stine Herbert (2013) has said about the consensual entanglements between self-organise initiatives and institutions, stating that "the institution's embrace still offers enough prestige and power to compensate for the problematic conditions on offer" (p. 13), and in turn, the self-organised initiatives offer institutions a free-spirited novelty and criticality.

However, the fact that all three collectives situate themselves differently in relation to institutions shows that there are so many subtleties when aiming to define the relationship between the institutional and the self-organised. It shows that there are various ways how self-organised collectives collaborate with institutions, and the way they see their own positionality is very subjective. What is clear is that none of the three collectives are working against or in opposition to the institution; in the case of microsillons, they are even embedded in the institutional system. Yet what characterises the stance of all the collectives is that they wish to challenge the institutional frameworks and perceptions and enact some kind of a change. Perhaps the difference is that some believe that this change can be achieved from the position of outside while retaining one's own power to organise as they see fit and some believe change can occur only from within. The case of these collectives also illustrates what Maibritt Borgen (2013) has said about self-organised practices losing their anti-institutional position. Furthermore, it also indicates what Barnaby Drabble (2013) has stated that the perception of self-organised practices as being a tool to work in spite and in opposition to the dominant system has become outdated. This proves to be true since the boundaries between institutional and self-organised forms of working are blurred, complex and in the current landscape of the art world cannot be juxtaposed.

Circling back to the question of language and definitions the collectives assign to their practice, makes me think how to call these practices that work apart from institutions since

being called as independent, autonomous, or non-institutional prove not to be correct nor productive. Perhaps these notions are too ephemeral to be pinpointed and are used freely according to one's own situated knowledge. Perhaps they do not even matter. Yet what seems to be a somewhat solid definition is that these forms of working are self-organised collective practices no matter if they take place within or apart from institutions.

Practicing

To examine the collectives' education practices, it is important to explore not only the themes, methodologies, and contexts they engage with but also how they work with institutions and the perceptions of education within these institutions. When discussing their education practice, all three collectives share similar points of departure, seeing the power of education to transform established views, perceptions and structures of knowledge, society, and institutions. They position education as a critical and collective practice that embodies contradictions and questioning of one's own condition.

Trafo.k strives to work with questions of critical knowledge production in a collaborative manner, involving audiences, artists, theorists, and activists in the beginning of the project to form it together. Part of their methodology is to reflect on their projects to see what was missing or got overlooked:

> the idea of equality is extremely important to us, and we know that it is unreachable. Every time in a project you might think that everyone is equal, but it's not true. So, our projects are based on examining who was less equal, who was left out and how can we change that, knowing that the next time there will be something else missing. And from there we can change our approach and push to go further.

Invisible Pedagogies in their various projects are working to change the perception of education and the role of the educator, and transform the way people and institutions alike think about art mediation. Part of their work is trying to establish a more relevant position for education and mediation in the cultural field. This includes doing research into the educational infrastructures and practices of individual educators as well as publishing material to position education as a critical and "intellectual practice" to be taken seriously by the cultural institutions and the wider field of art. Microsillons are interested in approaching artistic and educational practice in a political and dialogical way, engaging with different social groups often not connected to art. They are challenging the idea of art mediation and

the common perception that mediation is about flattening the conflict through the concept of agonism. They see conflict as something productive rather than something that needs to be reduced or erased. However, they also note that building an agonistic relationship takes a lot of energy to navigate the different views, accustomed ways of thinking and power structures, while also taking away space from other relationships that could be built. It is a “position of frustration” where one also needs to learn “to go beyond the conflict and find a way to rebuild relationships”.

Practicing education as a self-organised collective and working as an educator within an art institution both have their freedoms, possibilities and precarities. Trafo.k thus sees education practice as working and thinking from a space of contradiction. They state that working within the institutional structure gives space and resources to try out many things, but it is precarious, and the possibilities are often confined. Whereas working aside from institution gives more freedom to experiment and build one’s own way of practicing, but the collective has to finance and direct all the aspects of the process themselves. The paradoxical and contradictory aspect that the educator embodies in a self-organised practice is that:

> you can't say, now I'm just an educator or just a manager or just a communicator, or just making a political activist strategy. You're always all of those positions at the same time. In our projects we are involved with many people, we work with art institutions and schools, and when working together you always need to realize that you’re a part of a multitude of contexts. You are involved with the school, with the institution, the field of art or cultural history and thus also tied to what the government finances and what it doesn’t, and what the media communicates.

This perspective brings me to think that the role of an educator is no longer a position of teaching or setting up learning structures. Educator has become a multi-tasker who manoeuvres amidst situations of precarity and sustaining oneself, challenging the prevailing power discourses and maintaining a relationship with the public and the institutions, mediating contrasting views and developing methodologies, all while retaining a self-critical position and unlearning. Here I could draw parallels to Nora Sternfeld’s (2010) conceptualisation of unglamorous, strenuous, and unpresentable tasks of education that are often not acknowledged and are even marginalised. Moreover, when practicing in relation to institutions the educator needs to navigate in between going along with the institutional rules and conditions and at the same time engaging in institutional critique to alter them.

When working with institutions it is crucial to negotiate one's position, power, and the critical direction a project could take. Discussing the positionality that education has within the institutional art world and the possibility to engage critically with it as a collective, Invisible Pedagogies state that education within art institutions is often considered to be the "small sister" when compared to "curatorship or management that are more significant". Thus, "when you work from the outside, the relationship with a museum is different. You are able to propose things that might be riskier. And since you are not someone on the inside of the institution, they give you that risk, because if you fail, you are just someone from outside." This practical working tactic that Invisible Pedagogies have adapted as well as the paradoxical situation where an education collective that comes from the "outside" is given more power than the educators that are already part of the institution, allows to speculate about institutional thinking patterns. It seems to be a strategy for the institution to protect itself because if the collective fails in their aim and approach or carries out something controversial or problematic, it is not the institution that failed or went rogue, it is the collective. This might also be a tactic to share responsibility or evade it altogether. If so, it connects to what Isabel Singer (2021) had argued as predatory institutional behaviour whereby trying to benefit or protect itself the institution actually harms its own critical and social engagement processes.

Trafo.k bring forward an important thought by saying that when negotiating with institutions, one has to do it on all levels, starting from planning a project up to the point of putting a nail to the wall. Moreover, one can never predict if the approach chosen for a project will be a success or a failure. To illustrate this, they bring forth an example of an exhibition they developed in an Austrian museum with an approach that was quite radical in terms of cultural history and politics. Many people loved it, and many conservative people and politicians had a problem with it. On the one hand, the collective sees it as a success because they had never realised anything that radical and had not seen any other projects that would have been as daring, but on the other hand, they are not sure if it was not a failure. Even though successful, it might be seen as a failure because

> after that it was very difficult to do something progressive in that institution again, and they will take care that some things that we did will not be done again. … of course, [they] cannot censor the project when we are there and we have a good concept that makes sense, and they [have accepted it] … They have to live with it. But

> then in the future, there is a pre-censorship … of not inviting people that would do something challenging.

Therefore, they believe that sometimes a small decision that is made in a meeting, for example, changing the perception that only artists can work with art to a thinking that everyone can do art, is "a stronger move, or might last longer than a huge radical project that you can be proud of".

This aspect of choosing one's battles is also evident in the practices of microsillons. They state that when they are developing socially engaged projects, they are not trying to transform neighbourhoods or open a healthcare centre as other socially engaged artists would aspire to when creating social projects. Microsillons are working on a micro level and in dialogue with culture institutions by questioning:

> who is producing discourse, how can we be more inclusive and polyphonic in the ways the discourse is produced, and how people who usually are not represented or present in the art institution can get access to the institution. But not only in terms of getting a pre-existing content but building new content as cultural producers too.

As implied by their name "microsillons", working on this micro level sometimes leads to "small, often temporary changes in an institution. … For us it's more about being experimental, trying things and working as artists on those questions than pretending to radically change the institution or social situations".

Trafo.k bring forth another interesting idea when stating: "the less responsibility you have, the more critical you can sometimes be", reflecting on their start as gallery educators in a "classical education team in a kunsthalle in Vienna" where they had "no power in the institution". They say that "without that power, in the shadow of the institution, we had more possibility to say critical things than the curators sometimes, because they have all this responsibility, like politicians, who have to take care of what they say". They state that being an educator within an institution sometimes gives a bit of freedom of expression because this expression is not contractual:

> if you're a curator in an institution, you are classically contracted in what you can say or not. Some things are forbidden to be said officially. We as educators have never been contracted not to say things. So, in that sense, it can also be that in the shadow, you have more freedom than in the light.

All these statements illustrate the complex and somewhat paradoxical relationships that education practices have with the institutional context. This leads me to ponder, if one cannot practice critical education in its full potentiality within an institution, as illustrated by censorship, lack of power and marginalisation explored both through theory and these examples from collectives, where does it leave the educator who wishes to engage with critical knowledge production? Does the educator then decide not to be invested with institutions as their direction of practice? Or chooses to diversify which ideas fit for institutions and which should be realized as part of their own self-organised collective practice? Whichever format and framework educators decide to work in, it still positions critical education practices as operating on the margins of institutions as Felicity Allen (2008) has described it. Operating on the side lines of an institution has its strengths and its vulnerabilities. Working on the margins might offer more legroom for developing a critical practice but it might as well not help dismantling the problematic institutional structures and habits that place education on those margins in the first place.

When discussing the power relations between self-organised collectives and art institutions, I wish to bring forth a thought expressed by microsillons. They state that they develop their projects "with validation of the institutions … and in dialogue with them. But, to keep a more experimental and free practice, we also continue to regularly run projects with no institutional bounds. The outcomes of these more experimental projects are often useful to feed our work inside the institutions". This statement illustrates the reality of self-organised practices and their relation to institutional forms of working; and while being an honest it is also a controversial statement. The ambiguity lies in the fact that one's practice whichever framework it might be situated in – the institutional or the self-organised – still comes from the same source – the situated knowledge of an individual (or a collective). So, the work done for an institution feeds into the self-organised practice and vice versa, and thus the two become inseparable. On the one hand, this allows to bring critical, previously tested educational approaches within the institution with a possibility to solidify those practices on an institutional level. But on the other hand, it also implies that the collective, self-organised practices are willingly appropriated and commodified within institutions by those who practice them. My thinking here is not to take sides, criticise the practices of microsillons or put an imaginary blame on them for institutionalising self-organised education practices. This critical reflection is rather about acknowledging and shining a light on the

more complex entanglements of institutional and self-organised practices, and that often those entanglements form unconsciously.

It also brings me to question where lies the boundary between self-organised practices and the institutional ones when a collective decides to collaborate with an institution? Does their work become institutional once they step over the threshold of an institution? Or is it institutional and self-organised at the same time? Because even if a collective works with an institution, it still at some capacity does so in a self-organise manner since it is the collective's model of operation. Or perhaps it is the way how microsillons have said when stating that their work as a collective is sometimes not distinguishable from the work they do for institutions: "sometimes it's more about who is paying for what than the content itself". Yet one of the aspects that might set the self-organised practices apart from institutional ones could be the way how collectives form, structure and organise themselves on the inside of their practice.

Assembling

In this subchapter I will discuss how the education collectives assemble. Meaning, their reasons and motivations behind forming a self-organised collective and how they organise, focusing on the relationship, conflicts, distribution of power, labour and roles, as well as other crucial aspects of self-organised practice. Lastly, I will explore how the collective, self-organised way of working affects the way they practice education.

When reflecting on the motivations for establishing a self-organised collective, microsillons state that it was not a career plan but happened unconsciously when studying at the university and being invited to collectively develop courses. Being interested in pedagogy as well as the political aspects behind art and education, a collective was a way for them to challenge the common perceptions of an artistic practice that were ingrained in them through their art schooling. As they note, around the millennium it was "still very reproductive in terms of how the position of the artist was seen and what kind of practice you could develop. Also, the kind of pedagogy that was proposed there was superior, hierarchical, top-down". Realizing that their artistic practice did not have to be aimed at production but could rather be about building a dialogue and through that dialogue producing something together with people not exposed to art, was "a strong kick to continue

working that way". Also, "the idea of developing a practice outside of the art market was something very important for both of us".

Another important aspect that solidified their practice is that it started forming around the time when the educational turn in curating reached Switzerland. Thus, with the growing interest in educational practices, methods, and discourses, also their practice took off. As they say, they were "super lucky to be in a country where those practices and theories were not so visible, and we could benefit from a lot of interest and also have the financial means to develop projects." Working as a collective quickly and naturally took over and left no room for an individual practice. This fact about their practice illustrates the ambiguous character of the educational turn in curating that I explored previously. The overall fascination with education that it caused within the art world made evident not only the problematic and superficial aspects of it but also proves that it helped solidify and even catapult important critical education practices into existence.

In their turn, trafo.k started self-organising because of the working conditions they as educators experienced within institutions, exemplified by the hierarchy and heaviness of the institutional grasp and inability to practice education critically. They worked not only as a collective among themselves but also in collaboration with other collectives: "It was in the 1990s in Vienna, and we worked on building discourses and practices for different working conditions." Thus, collective work was a critical move and a possibility to assemble power to enact change within the field. This is in line with what Jennifer Beth Spiegel (2019) has said about collectivity becoming a tool for dealing with market-driven, institutional structures, the growing individuation of human beings as well as a way to accumulate power to take on common challenges.

When discussing the motivations why people form a self-organised collective practice Laurene Vaughan (2018) has said that it is rooted in a belief that the collective will be greater, more influential, and stronger that the sum of its parts. This conception profoundly resonates with how trafo.k describe their practice and understanding of a collective. They state that by being a "classical association" which is different from the capitalist company structure where a member needs to be bought out of the company if they decide to leave, the association stays and continues working. Being "based on a democratic, civic, collective idea that something is stronger than its members" is how the association functions and how trafo.k see their own collective practice. Existing for more than 20 years and having a long-term

perspective, trafo.k state that they have built something stronger than themselves. Even if members have come and gone, some have relocated or work in other cities and one of the members has passed away, they say that a collective is

> a context that is able to remain even if the lives of the people who are part of it change. This is the idea of the collective – something that is stronger than just the individuals. And this gives us force, and it gives us a belief that the collective will continue when one of us takes a different path.

For microsillons being a collective helps to dismantle hierarchies and balance out power. They note that speaking as a collective rather than an individual gives different weight and is a way to protect oneself from "all kinds of institutional complexities and pressures [and] limit conflicts that could be directed towards you as an individual." What is more, they believe that in a learning situation, being a duo and having a duality of opinion is a method of unbalancing power and reflecting on one's own dominance, statements, and actions to "protect everybody from microaggressions that could take place if you were an individual. Also, being the two of us, sharing problems and our thoughts, is a good way to keep our head cool".

Invisible pedagogies as a loosely defined collective started forming as part of a PhD programme and after graduation three of its original group of 15 decided to continue practicing as a collective and work in the field of museum education. However, in their minds Invisible Pedagogies "was a space where you could do whatever you want, try new things that motivated you, but you still needed a real job". After a time having worked as gallery educators in institutions and educators in schools, they decided to turn the collective into a living, developing a practice that would operate on the "outside" to have a different relationship with institutions and more power over the projects and approaches they wished to initiate. Realizing that education and cultural administration in Spain were going separate ways and not really collaborating, they became captivated by the idea of being mediators and working in the "in-between".

Pondering about the reasons that motivated these collectives to form a self-organised collective practice, brings me to what Vaughan (2018) has said about collective work being both a method and a political position. Engaging with an issue or a subject matter collectively is a method of sharing work, responsibility, resources and setting forth alternative scenarios and practices through collective effort. Operating as a collective becomes a political position

when it takes a stance against the dominant, predetermined, and prevailing social, institutional, and political structures by questioning, challenging, or taking an action to dismantle and transform them. What has become clear from the practices of collectives thus far is that their motivation to self-organise and work apart from institutions has in part been influenced by the problematic institutional habits and the positionality education takes within the institutionalised art world.

However, working in a collective manner is not always smooth and effortless. Collectives still need to define their own structures of operation, manage their relationships, and agree on how they make decisions, share power, and distribute labour – the practical, social, and emotional aspects of a collective practice. Microsillons reveal that being just two in the collective has made the organisational process fluid in terms of communication, making decisions, and carrying out projects, however, they also acknowledge that "from time to time we say "yeah, we need to be more organized," but we never succeed in organising differently". Also using digital apps for organising their work has never worked. They state that they have never established who will do what in a collective, and although they sometimes split some tasks they are always "working in the mode of Ping-Pong". They have a particular way of working through a common to-do list, a common email and one document for every project where they elaborate an idea in a constant exchange.

> Every text that we write, be it very small like a biography to send to a conference … [or] an email to a person or an institution, one of us makes a draft … shares it with the other and we only send it when we agree on what is says, which is sometimes a bit tedious.

They even propose ideas to one another through an email draft and laugh that "[publishing] our email exchanges would really explain how we work". For bigger projects and proposals, they meet to discuss the ideas first and try to reserve spots in their agenda to discuss concepts, future projects and organize their work even though it is complicated because of their busy schedule of directing the master programme. What is interesting about their way of working is that they "never formalize the birth of a project. It's never like, "let's do a meeting to invent a new project". It's always through discussions and often through commissions because suddenly there is a context that we need to respond to". As they state, they work in an organic, rhizomatic way which means that it is also impossible to distinguish

who had the idea for a certain project; for them it is a "mix of things that crystallize into a project".

Invisible Pedagogies are working horizontally, fluidly, and in a non-hierarchical manner, and state that strict organisational models have never worked for them as well: "at the beginning we tried to make all these protocols and structures, but they never worked because we never followed them, we always forgot about them". What has proven to be more productive and important for them is to meet twice a week face to face to discuss and work together: "it's a way of maintaining control over the projects, but also meeting the needs and wishes that come up unexpectedly". Unlike microsillons, Invisible Pedagogies have defined specific areas they work in, for example, performing arts and education, education institutions and teacher training, critical mediation projects, and every member of the collective takes responsibility and care for a specific line of work based on their interests. However, it does not mean that others will not be involved; every project is cared for by at least two people and sometimes even all four of them. As a collective they are aware of each other's strong suits, skills, and capacities and, although fluid, certain roles have formed among them. Nonetheless, they state that they have retained an open and free structure that allows to adapt, react quickly, and invite other practitioners for projects when needed thus expanding the boarders of collective work. Because of this, they see their way of organising as different from the institutional structures characterised by "bureaucracy … [and] difficulty to be innovative". This thought resonates with what Amalie Ørum Hansen (2022) has expressed about collectives being networks that, although possibly appearing to work in an institutional way, are organised horizontally and non-hierarchically with the freedom to reshape, expand and adapt faster to the necessities than institutions. What is also interesting is that both in the case of microsillons and Invisible Pedagogies, they have aimed and tried to develop specific organisational structures and protocols of practice, mediated by digital tools and perceptions of an ideal organisational structure, but they have ditched them for more fluent, improvised ways of organising their day-to-day practice.

Trafo.k state that a crucial part of their organisational structure is giving time and energy to the process. Their approach starts with "ideas [and] thinking about strategies, methods, aims and the role that the project has in the larger sphere of education, culture, and politics. It's a whole process and you need to give time to the process". More often than not it means going back and forth, rethinking, dealing with issues that interfere with the

process and sometimes even starting again which might not always be possible within an institution. In regard to both the institutional working habits and the self-organised practices, this idea of giving time and energy to the process resonates with the perception of productivity and being productive as a measure of success. Productivity as the need to be efficient and show measurable results is what Anette Kraus and Casco Art Institute had explored in their research project "Site for Unlearning (Art Organization)" (2016) as one of the institutional habits and the current status within capitalist societies. This, however, does not mean that self-organised collectives are miraculously exempt from the need to be productive, not at all. Especially since the projects are still valued as being successful or not, and in that regard, productive or not for collective's practice. What this pondering rather brings forth is a consideration that process is often not acknowledged as a value when it comes to being productive. What is more, process is both a privilege as the collective is not restricted to delivering measurable results and delivering them fast, and at the same time a vulnerability, because it comes at a cost of time, energy, and resources that if not made sustainable can bring precarity to the collective.

Another interesting aspect of the self-organised, collective practice is managing the relationships on the inside of the collective. Anne Szefer Karlsen (2012) has expressed that collectives are held together by solidarity, shared interest, and a desire to exchange knowledge and work together; therefore, conflict and collaboration are integral aspects of collective, self-organised practice. Expanding on this thought, it seems that collaboration does not come without conflict or rather negotiation because a collective is still formed by individuals each having their own reasoning, thoughts, ideas, and opinions of how certain aspects of the practice need to be dealt with.

Part of negotiating relationship within a collective is levelling the individual desires and collective aspirations and bringing that balance into decision-making. Trafo.k contextualise this aspect of the relationship through a real-life example from an art academy where one of them teaches. Because of the growing trend of the "new collectivity" everyone wants to be a collective "but don't know how to do it because they have always been subjectified as individuals." Whereas trafo.k could never have imagined working any other way. According to them this means that

> our decisions are not based on some kind of give and take: "if he gets that, I want it too". It's more based on what actually is needed, what all of us want and what is

> possible. So, let's build everything we do around that. In the beginning, this is complicated and full of frictions because there is still this individualistic logic: everybody wants what the others have plus what one actually desires. And then the others want what you desire, so nothing is possible. But with years, you realize that she will always desire something that I don't really want. And actually, there is enough space for the way she imagines to live, how I imagine to contribute and how another imagines to invent or change a project. There's enough space for all of us if we learn to express it, to listen to each other and to build honestly around that.

This conceptualisation of building and negotiating relationships eloquently brings out the individual and the collective subtleties that constitute a self-organised practice.

When discussing the individual-collective relationship, the aspects of collective authorship and compromise become increasingly important. Microsillons state that collective work sometimes is challenging for the artistic and creative part of the practice because a collective must find "ambitious, specific and experimental forms [of practice]" that all of the members agree on. Thus, "the more there are members in a collective, the more there is risk of producing things that might be a compromise." Negotiating one's ideas and thinking might be challenging but then again, they also acknowledge that this challenge might bring a more interesting and meaningful outcome "because it's a result of an exchange." Compromising and negotiating individual ideas, needs, expectations, and how different members might see the future of the collective goes hand in hand with tensions, trust and, how microsillons describe it, "being confident that the other isn't going to betray what we want to say or what we want to do as a collective. That doesn't mean that we don't have conflicts, but the trust and confidence in each other has to be there". Invisible Pedagogies laugh that they have "a lot of conflicts with each other, with ourselves, with the world, with our families". They note that over the years working in a structure that is so different from what they have experienced before has made them grow together:

> we are friends, I love them and know them so well. I know the weaknesses and the strengths, and the problems that they are going through. Of course, we have conflicts, but we never get into a fight. We have grown enough to be able to talk through the things and realize that maybe at some point someone can be lost or not do the work, but it's because they are going through a bad time.

Thus, working amidst all these sensitivities where boundaries of individual and collective, personal, and professional blur, the collectives are not just "communities of intent" as Vaughan (2018) has beautifully described, but are also intentional communities of friendship. As such, collectives embody a different kind of relationality and a way of being together that is not commonly associated with the institution.

Considering that collectives have stated that working aside from institutions has allowed them to practice education at a different capacity than they could within institutions, it is interesting to discuss how the collective, self-organised way of working has shaped how they practice education. For trafo.k the values that are at the core of their practice as a collective are also at the core of how they engage with education. They state that they

> cannot imagine in an educational project, or even at the university, to not see the learning situation as a shared situation where people bring in what they know, realize what they want to know and challenge each other. Sharing is not enough for learning. Of course, you learn a lot when you share knowledge, but in learning you want more, you want to be challenged and learn something that you couldn't do before. Seeing learning situation like this is how we also practice in the collective.

This also means challenging oneself and confronting one's own knowledge that is as vital in learning as it is when working together. Invisible Pedagogies state that working in a collective way has helped them to check on each other and address the inertias they have accumulated from being educated in a particular way themselves: "because you always tend to teach the same way you have been taught, it's very difficult to change the way you practice because you have been told what education is". Therefore, engaging in education as a collective has allowed them to notice and bring out those aspects that they call "invisible pedagogies" – all the implicit, unconscious things and patterns one learns from the educational context they have been situated in. Reflecting on this statement subjectively from my own experience, I cannot help to think that often when working in business, teaching in schools, universities or working in art and culture institutions, the employee is considered to be a specialist with a certain expertise in their field. While it is, of course a necessity for doing a job and progressing as a society, it still somehow implies that one should know everything and unlearning or challenging one's own "expertise" to do things differently is not really desirable because it is a long, burdensome, unpredictable, and, in a way, an unproductive process.

When it comes to microsillons and their practice, they believe that working collectively and in a self-organised way has "fundamentally shaped the way they practice education". They teach and engage with learning "in a dialogical way without hesitating to bring two different points of view on a single subject. This helps students to understand the content in a less monolithic and a more critical way and encourages participation in a discussion." They state that the projects that they set forth are also collective and self-organised in their form and that they help participants and students alike to "invent specific collective strategies and modes of organization for each project".

Exploring and reflecting on the multitude of aspects that shape how collectives form, practice and organise themselves, brings me to think that both critical education and collective practices share similar, if not the same, values and characteristics: horizontality and a dialogical approach, critical knowledge production and unlearning, challenging dominant and aiming for heterogenic structures, and facilitating diversity, inclusion, and equality of voices, thinking, and practices. Education and collective practice are both characterised by a shared condition, which makes it interesting to speculate that perhaps in the case of these collectives, being interested and practicing critical education made way to adapt a collective, non-hierarchical thinking and form a collective.

Sustaining

When examining the self-organising practices of education collectives, it is crucial to discuss the matter of sustaining. The way how collectives sustain themselves is intertwined with the aspects of how they situate, assemble and practice as a collective. Moreover, the approaches and models chosen for sustaining a self-organised practice not only determine how and if the collective will survive and grow but also at what capacity they will engage in education as a critical practice. Additionally, when discussing the aspects of sustaining, it is important to acknowledge not just financial sustainability that is usually associated with making a living and a profit, but also the creative, intellectual, and social aspects of sustaining as those influence the inner dynamics of the collective. In this subchapter I will discuss the complexities and challenges that sustaining a collective practice entails and explore the different models of sustaining that the education collectives have adapted. Finally, I will touch upon the social, creative, and intellectual aspects of sustaining and the possible reasons for a collective to cease existing.

As established thus far, the relations between the institutional and the self-organised practices are entangled, complex and at times ambiguous. And so is the subject of sustaining the practice as a self-organised collective. Both practicing as a self-organised collective and working within an institution entail a deal of advantages and difficulties. As learned from the collectives themselves and through theory, working within and with institutions sets certain limitations and conditions to one's practice, critical engagement, and the ability to negotiate those conditions within the institutional structure. Yet it often offers a certain safety in the form of financial stability, established resources of funding, publicity, as well as institutional weight to make things happen. In its turn, self-organised practice offers more power and decision-making freedom to build and organise the collective's practice as they see fit and set forth more critical and experimental education approaches that can challenge the dominant social, political, and institutional structures. It is characterised by solidarity, collectivity, and support structures that often overpower the institutional safety. However, self-organised practice has its own deal of uncertainty and precarity. A common reality in self-organised practice is sustaining one's work by constantly applying for grants and finding other sources of funding as well as gaining a certain level of recognition to be commissioned to develop projects. Sometimes, as in the case of grant proposals, these mechanisms of sustaining are inconsistent and even fall through. As microsillons note: "there is a chance that you work for two weeks for an application, and you don't get anything." This correlates to another challenging aspect that all three collectives have brought up, which is the need to accept projects that might not be that interesting or beneficial for the collective's practice but are needed to sustain themselves. As Invisible Pedagogies note:

> some projects give you all the freedom you would want, and some projects you need to accept because you need the money. And some projects you take on because they are very interesting and give a different kind of capital that you want to incorporate in your practice, but they don't pay that well.

Manoeuvring these uncertainties is an unavoidable part of self-organising and sustaining the collective's practice, at least in the beginning.

Additionally, sustaining a self-organised practice at times might get frustrating as collectives need to manage and deconstruct the perceptions that exist around collectives and collective work and that often affect their financial stability. As microsillons note, sometimes they are contacted as a collective but only one of them is invited for a job. This is either

because there is not enough budget for the both of them or there is a perception that the work can be done by just one person. Sometimes it is not even about the work to be done: “there is a research project with an all-female team, and they are looking for a male researcher or the other way around”. Microsillons say that “it can be a bit annoying because we are identified for our collective work but just one of us is invited. So, it creates a question: why would one of us be favoured if this is collective work?” The way they deal with this complex issue is that very often, if they are interested in the work, they accept the fee intended for just one person and split it. Other times they try to negotiate by stating that the collective is made by the two of them and the work is important for both, so both of them should be paid; and when working with big institutions, they usually succeed in this negotiation. They also acknowledge that being more advanced in their career makes it easier to influence the negotiation process. These challenging aspects lead me to think that when it comes to sustaining one’s practice, it is never just about negotiating the financial stability for the collective. It is also about negotiating space to be a collective and to be acknowledged as such in its entirety. It is about achieving an acknowledgement for the joint effort, contribution and knowledge that goes into collective work and surpasses the fixation on individuality or separate accomplishments.

When discussing the financial aspects of sustaining a collective practice, it is important to consider not only how the collective gains funding for their projects but also how it is distributed within the collective. As WochenKlausur (2020) have noted, the working relationship within the collective is greatly affected by whether everyone in the collective is paid equally or the pay is based on specific, predefined criteria such as skills, work tasks, responsibility, or the length of a member status. Microsillons believe that the discussion about income and pay “puts a lot of collectives in danger and even ends the relationship”, and state that since the beginning they have always shared their pay equally and have never considered it to be otherwise. Also trafo.k and Invisible Pedagogies share the idea of equality in all aspects of their practice. A fair distribution of pay affects the inner dynamics of a collective, the motivation of its members, their sense of purpose and the feeling of being acknowledged for their contribution. This is especially crucial when facing the complicated matters of sustaining a critical education practice. As stated by the collectives, engaging in critical education as a self-organised collective is challenging. Microsillons highlight the necessity of constantly looking for funding and ways to sustain their work “because these

practices will not find their place in the art market". Invisible Pedagogies note that education is not a job that one gets into to become wealthy: "we're not going to be rich, we knew that from the beginning. This is not a job that brings a lot of money or power". Finally, trafo.k have expressed that being able to sustain themselves is directly linked to the themes they work with, meaning it is harder to sustain oneself when engaged in critical education practice. Even though collectives find various ways of funding their practice and manage to gain financial stability and growth, these statements once more hint at the positionality that education takes within the art world and the wider socio-cultural field and how the educators and their work is often marginalised. Furthermore, it allows to speculate that having a self-organised education practice can be twice as precarious because the group has to make it both as a self-organised collective and as an education practice.

Navigating amidst the challenges, complexities, and possibilities of self-organised practice, all three collectives have adapted different models of sustaining their practice. Moreover, their statements illustrate the various approaches to both working within the field of art education and securing finances to continue their practice. For Trafo.k, in addition to having a collective practice, every member of the collective is engaged in other projects and most of the time sustain themselves from other work. As they state: "we would like to live off of this practice, of course, but because of the dynamic of the work and the topics that we work with, it's not possible". Yet, an important aspect to note is that trafo.k as a collective "is sustained by its own projects", meaning that individual members never put their own finances into sustaining the collective's practice and they fund the collective's projects through commissions, grants and collaborations with institutions. As they have previously acknowledged, operating as an association allows them to both engage in collective practice and individual endeavours, while still securing the continuation of the collective. They say: "if our practice doesn't bring enough money, people will do something else, but the collective will still exist". Although this statement illustrates a noble and solidary mindset that the collective will prevail no matter what, it brings me to think about what BFAMFAPhD (2021) have said about addressing the individuals' emotional, intellectual, and financial expectations when engaging in collective work. Specifically, about how a collective sustains their practice when some of the members might wish to put all their effort in growing the practice and making a living out of it while others might want to pursue other endeavours in addition to collective practice. And ultimately, how they might negotiate the questions of participation,

authorship, acknowledgement, responsibility, as well as distribution of work and pay to achieve a sense of equity and equality among its members.

Microsillons have sustained their collective practice by balancing between the self-organised and the institutional. They say that they have "always added some institutional work that would build the basic income" for their own self-organised practice. This tactic has allowed them to engage in non-institutional, experimental and grassroots projects while still sustaining their practice from the institutional work. For a period of time between being employed as gallery educators and being drawn back to an institution as directors of a master programme, microsillons decided to focus all their energy on initiating their own projects and expanding their practice. But what they later realised is that "doing projects on our own took so much energy and didn't necessarily make us happier than if we would be doing them for an institution." Although this realisation did not directly affect them to go back to work in an institution, this statement helps to understand both the motivations behind working with institutions and why sometimes institutional work takes lead over the self-organised practice. However, they also acknowledge that while working in an institution they are "in a quite secure situation and earn enough money to live", the institutional work "absorbs all the activity … [and] makes it difficult to initiate our own work." Furthermore, the institutional workload does not leave much time for sustaining themselves creatively: "it's getting difficult to find time to visit exhibitions together, meet artist friends or reflect on our practice … to discuss and nourish ourselves because it forms the ground on which we can build our practice further." This statement illustrates the reality that, although it is important to have financial stability for the collective, it is equally vital to sustain the artistic, creative and intellectual processes that make up the collective's practice so they can set forth new ideas, approaches and forms of learning and engagement.

In the case of Invisible Pedagogies, all of the members are working full time only at the collective. They say: "we are our own bosses, no one tells us what to do, and now we can pay good salaries for every one of us. … and every year, we can raise the salary a little bit, so it's working". They believe that the success behind being able to sustain their collective fully by its own practice has been due to various intersecting reasons. Firstly, because they moved away from "doing small projects in an institution" to "building networks and working between administrations". Secondly, they decided to risk and expand their practice rather than keeping it small: "we have grown to work on another level, not just working as

educators but more like an organisation that works between institutions”. Finally, a key aspect in sustaining their practice has been working within two fields: “having one foot in education and the other in the cultural scene”. They state that although at some point there was a lot of interest in education from the cultural scene, as exemplified by the educational turn in curating, working with cultural institutions does not secure stability in the long term. Nonetheless, they have been working with schools and teachers since the beginning of their practice and because many foundations wish to invest funds in formal education, it has allowed the collective to continue working with schools as well as sustain their practice. They believe that working in these two spheres has been the right direction for their collective practice: “if we had focused only on the cultural scene, looking for funding at organizations that support cultural projects, we wouldn’t have been able to grow or to survive”. Furthermore, as they believe that “it's important to be sustainable by your own means”, they have launched their own projects such as teacher training courses that are not connected to institutional or governmental funding but are self-financing their practice directly through teachers engaged in the training.

Discussing together with the collectives their tactics and approaches to sustaining their practice, brings out valuable knowledge on the various modalities of collective practice. As illustrated by the cases and statements above, there are collectives such as Invisible Pedagogies who can sustain their practice fully and solely as a self-organised collective; there are collectives like trafo.k who alternate between their collective practice and other projects and work engagements; and there are collectives such as microsillons, where working as a collective within an institutional system has taken lead while their self-organised practice appears to be hibernating. Nonetheless, it is important to note that these models of sustaining are current, and similarly to the nature of self-organised collective practice, they are not static and can be altered if the collective decides to change their direction of practice. In line with what Hansen (2022) has said about collectives having the freedom to reshape their practice along the way and Drabble (2013) has expressed about self-organised collectives having the ability to work from “a sense of necessity” (p. 23), this agile ability to adapt and shift the directions of working is what helps collectives to sustain their practice. More importantly, in some cases sustaining is securing the financial stability of the collective to continue their practice, and in other cases sustaining might be choosing to hibernate so

the practice could be once again activated when the time is right. And sometimes sustaining might also mean choosing to dissolve the practice and cease existing.

Pondering the reasons that might lead a collective to hibernate or close their practice altogether, brings forth other crucial aspects that affect the longevity of a collective and are not necessarily connected to financial stability. The K-oh-llective (2022) have stated that the possible causes for dissolving their practice could be the misalignment of personal and collective purposes and expectations, losing motivation or willingness to work without a financial or a tangible reward, and losing engagement from the participants of their projects. These reasons illustrate that sustainability is an interplay of financial as well as social, personal, creative, and intellectual factors. The sustainability of a self-organised collective practice substantially depends on the members' ability to sustain their creative and intellectual work. This is illustrated by microsillons' statement that the institutional workload takes away time and energy from nourishing and reflecting on their own practice and other practitioners' work to develop their collective. It is also about the social aspects of sustaining: being there for each other even through conflicts and difficulties, maintaining personal relationships and building friendships, support structures and a sense of community. It is about managing the personal and collective needs, and sometimes even adjusting one's own life to sustain the practice as in the case of Invisible Pedagogies who laugh that three of them had to calculate when to have children and "organize ourselves to be mothers because if all three of us would become mothers at the same time, the collective wouldn't have survived".

Thus, sustaining the livelihood of a self-organised collective is never just about the money or even the sheer willingness and motivation to operate collectively. Sustaining is as much about the practical as it is about the emotional labour. It is about balancing the multitude of social, financial, practical, political, and even ephemeral matters of collectivity. Thus, in this light, it is challenging to view self-organised collective practice as a solution or a magical cure to the problematic and ambiguous institutional ways of working and living, and it should not be viewed as such. It is more important to acknowledge that even with the substantial contribution that sustaining a collective practice requires from its members, it offers even greater possibilities to think, learn, work, and relate to one another than previously imagined individually.

Conclusions

My intention with this research into self-organised art education collectives was to examine, learn and bring forth knowledge on **how education collectives form and self-organise while working aside yet in relation to art institutions**. Additionally, I also explored **how the self-organised, collective way of working affects the education practice of these collectives**. To examine and respond to these research questions, I grounded my study in theoretical and contextual practice-based writings, discussing concepts and subject matter of education as critical practice, educational turn in curating, institutional problematics as well as collective practice and self-organising. Employing conversation as my methodological approach of inquiry, I engaged in conversations with three art education collectives: Invisible Pedagogies, microsillons and trafo.k. These conversations were not only a tool of inquiry to investigate the complex phenomenon of self-organised education practice but also a learning situation where new knowledge was produced together with the collectives. Engaging in a critical reading of theory and statements of the collectives, I came to define four structural elements of self-organised practice: situating, practicing, assembling, and sustaining that helped me analyse, discuss, and reflect on how collectives practice education and organise themselves amidst institutional entanglements.

Discussing self-organised practice critically beyond its current popularity in the art world and in relation to art institutions, their often-problematic working tactics and how education is positioned within the institutional mindset brings out a great deal of subtleties. This research has shown that the phenomenon of self-organised collective education practice is embedded in a contested discourse, characterised by ambiguity, contradictions, and paradoxes. Engaging with a contested discourse means maintaining a critical reading both of the institutional patterns of operation and the self-organised practice, acknowledging and addressing dichotomies that might form unconsciously, and thus, calls for critically re-evaluating one's own position and thinking as a researcher. Engaging with a contested discourse requires being comfortable "living" within this contested landscape and ambiguity, acknowledging that the research might not result in clear cut answers or universal truths but will rather bring forth complex knowledge that becomes clear when seen in the context of the multi-layered phenomenon that is self-organised collective practice.

This contested discourse is illustrated when discussing how collectives situate themselves in relation to art institutions and if they assign the notion of being independent to their practice. The contradiction lies in the fact that although collectives have decided to operate apart from the structures, hierarchies, and limitations of art institutions, which implies a wish to practice and organise independently, they are still working with institutions. This research has illustrated the paradox of independence and proved that there are frictions in how collectives see their own practice. Invisible Pedagogies state that they are independent from institutions, microsillons describe their relationship as "mutualistic" while currently being embedded within the institutional system and trafo.k argues that an independent, autonomous practice does not exist. This ambiguity sets challenges towards how such practices that operate aside from institutions could be defined and called, allowing to further consider alternative definitions and notions of interdependence. Additionally, the paradoxical relationship amidst institutions, self-organised practices and education is exemplified by Invisible Pedagogies who say that when working with an institution as a collective from the "outside" they have been allowed to be more critical and riskier in their projects than the educators who actually work inside that same institution. Furthermore, the contested discourse is also evident in how education is positioned within the art world and its institutions. Even though the educational turn in curating helped to bring forth critical practices and ideas of knowledge production, it did not much change the position and power of the educator within the institutional structure. Many art institutions still condition education to be affirmative and reproductive of institutional agendas (Helguera, 2021; Mörsch, 2011; Sternfeld, 2010) and, as noted by Invisible Pedagogies, see it as the "small sister" when compared to curatorial, artistic and exhibition making practices.

Considering how collectives situate themselves in relation to institutions and how they practice and sustain themselves has made clear the intricate entanglements that exist between self-organised collectives and institutions. The more these entanglements are examined, the more the boundaries between the self-organised and the institutional become blurred and even seem to disappear. This can be seen in the case of microsillons who currently devote almost all their capacity to working within an institution and acknowledge that their practice as a collective feeds into the institutional work and vice versa becoming almost indistinguishable from one another. This entanglement also relates to the broader discussion of institutions absorbing self-organised initiatives to benefit from their collective

spirit and criticality, appropriating, commodifying, and capitalising them (Borgen, 2013; Herbert, 2013). Yet it also indicates that sometimes self-organised collectives get absorbed willingly due to the need to sustain themselves, solidify their practice on an institutional level, reach broader audiences, gain recognition and credibility. Or even because of wanting to change the dominant institutional structures from the inside. The reasoning might also be connected to what Chantal Mouffe (2013) has said that instead of withdrawing from institutions critical art and education practices should engage with them to create agonistic spaces where the dominant discourses and structures could be challenged. And when this engagement happens, it is almost impossible not to get entangled. Considering these nuances, it can be concluded that the relationship between self-organised collectives and institutions is a symbiotic one with both sides gaining from this mutual engagement.

Even though collectives have formed their practice apart from institutions because of the problematic institutional habits, hierarchy, power structures and the often-marginal positionality education takes within art institutions, they are not doing so for the sake of being in an anti-institutional position. They rather form under a common purpose to critically engage with the status quo and have the power to make decisions, practice education and organise themselves as they see fit. They assemble based on values of friendship, support, horizontality, equality, and equity to take on issues that cannot be solved alone in the social, political, institutional, and educational realms. Therefore, the collective practice is both a method of working and a political stance. Finally, by embodying these values, collectives live and work in a relationality that is not commonly ascribed to the institutional structures.

When it comes to self-organising as a collective, the aspects of situating, practicing, assembling, and sustaining intertwine and influence one another. Even though all three collectives organise their inner processes and work differently, none of them have strict organisational models. The way how they organise is fluid, rhizomatic, process-oriented, and to borrow a phrase from microsillons: in a constant “mode of Ping-Pong”, which might not seem productive in the capitalism-oriented working environment. Moreover, operating as a collective means dealing with the practical, social, and emotional aspects of collective work, and sustaining their practice both on the inner and outer spheres of the collective. Inside the collective, the group needs to manage their relationships, establishing a common ground for decision-making, sharing of power, labour, and responsibilities. Although complicated, the question of “what is the difference between a job, a friendship, and a collective?”

(BFAMFAPhD, 2021, p. 124) must be asked within the collective because boundaries tend to blur, and it is necessary to discuss the expectations every member might have towards the collective on an emotional, creative, intellectual, and financial level. Moreover, even though sustaining is often understood in the context of financial stability, it is important to acknowledge that sustaining a practice also means being able to nourish creativity, criticality, and self-reflection so that the collective can develop their education practice. Finally, it is essential to sustain the two integral aspects of collective work – collaboration and conflict (Karlsen, 2012). As noted by the collectives, conflicts can be necessary and productive for voicing opinions, ideas, and needs, and maintaining a non-hierarchical structure that leads to trust, support and confidence in one another. And without collaboration there are no solidary support structures, no chances of repairing conflictual situations and no collective work to begin with.

On the outer sphere of self-organised practice, collectives navigate the challenges of sustaining their practice financially, often dealing with precarious situations and unpredictable sources of income such as grants. What this research has brought forth is a valuable insight into the different models of sustaining that collectives have adapted to ensure the continuation of their practice. There are models such as the one of Invisible Pedagogies where a collective manages to sustain their practice fully and solely through their own work as a collective. There are collectives such as trafo.k who balance in between self-organised practice and other work engagements to sustain themselves. And there are collectives like microsillons who are almost fully invested in institutional work that their self-organised practice is at times hibernating. These models illustrate the complex landscape of how education collectives finance themselves that might be very familiar to other collectives practicing in the field but have not been discussed in detail in academia or theoretical writings. What these findings also show is that there is not a one ultimate way of operating as a self-organised collective and sustaining one's practice, similarly as there is no singular, "right" way of doing education. These different models have also brought me to conclude that sustaining as a way to secure the continuation of a practice might also mean choosing to go into hibernation and reactivating the practice when the timing is right or the circumstances are better. In fact, because of their agile ability to adapt and reshape their practice along the way (Hansen, 2022), collectives, in contrast to institutions, have the privilege to make that swift choice of reorganising. Finally, sometimes the sustainable option

might also be deciding to cease existing as a collective and invest the practical, emotional, and intellectual labour elsewhere.

These findings on the aspects of sustaining not only illustrate the challenging contexts that self-organised collectives operate in but also hint at the subject of their work itself – education practice. As collectives have indicated, being engaged in critical education, a practice that is challenging in its own right, is often marginalised within the artworld, does not fit into the art market economy and deals with uneasy subjects such as politics, power, dominant and hegemonic discourses, makes it even more difficult to sustain a collective practice. Sequentially, it brings me to a conclusion that operating as a self-organised education collective can be twice as precarious because the group has to sustain themselves both as a self-organised collective and as a critical education practice. Moreover, the role of an educator in a self-organised collective is not just about teaching and devising learning situations. The educator has become a multi-tasker who manoeuvres amidst being an educator, a manager, a communications specialist, a mediator, and an administrator. Being equipped with all these capabilities and qualities such as creativity, dedication, and flexibility, has turned the educator into the perfect worker exposed to creative capitalism and the risk of being profited from (Borgen, 2012).

Examining how the collective, self-organised way of working has influenced the collectives' education practice, I have come to learn that working collectively aside from institutions has allowed collectives to practice education in a different, more critical, and freer capacity. Practicing education as a collective has enabled them to challenge the existing power structures not only in society and institutions but also in the learning process itself, addressing and unlearning certain ways of teaching that they have accumulated from their own schooling. What is more, collectives see learning situation as a shared process, anchored in wanting to know more and challenging one's knowing, similarly as it is with the collective practice, where members join in a shared intention to learn, contribute, and change the status quo. Interestingly, the education projects that collectives develop have become collective within their own structure and form, meaning that their learning projects mirror and encourage collective and self-organised tactics of being, thinking and doing. The relationality that is immanent to their collective practice, seeps into their education practice. Ultimately, this leads me to conclude that critical education and collective practice share similar characteristics and values such as horizontality, a community-orientated mindset and

dialogical engagement, critical approaches to learning and knowledge production, as well as unlearning and deconstructing dominant structures of thought and practice to aim for inclusion, equality, and equity. Collective practice embodies learning, and education embodies a collective engagement.

Reflecting on the process of this research, I believe that it has brought forth valuable insights and knowledge about the multi-layered intricacies that a self-organised education practice entails. By defining and analysing the four elements of self-organised practice: situating, practicing, assembling, and sustaining, I have managed to wholesomely explore the inner and outer processes of collective practice, their organisational structures, and models of sustaining with a specific focus on education as a collective, critical practice. Moreover, reflecting on the conversations through theory has helped to bring forth new knowledge not only about the self-organising practices of collectives but also about the multitude of ways education could be perceived and practiced. Thus, I believe this research is a valuable contribution to the wider discussion of collective and self-organised education practices – a subject matter that has not yet been engaged with in academia that specifically. As to the possible directions for future research, I see the possibility to explore the different elements of self-organised practice in more depth. For example, focusing specifically on a collective's education practice through case studies to bring out more nuances and differences on how collectives develop education projects independently and as part of institutions. Additionally, it would be interesting to dig deeper into the aspects of sustaining in relation to critical education practice. Furthermore, as I have established a connection between collective practice and critical education, it would be fascinating to further research critical art education as collective practice. Acknowledging that this thesis has been approached from the perspective of education practice, self-organised collectives, and my own situated knowledge as an educator, it would be interesting to examine the side of the institution. To involve institutions to learn about their attitudes and experiences of working with collectives, their thoughts on the entanglements and absorbing of self-organised practices within institutions, as well as their reflection on problematic institutional behaviours.

Throughout this research it has been challenging yet rewarding to immerse myself into the contested discourse with all its complexities and potentialities to learn directly from the collectives and their entanglements with institutions. Being exposed to the multitude of critical, social, professional, and emotional aspects of collective practice has brought a more

subtle knowledge on the challenges that educators experience both within the institutional setting and self-organised practices. The research process has enabled me to confront and expand my own thinking on the relationship between the institutional and the self-organised. Finally, it has been an enriching experience to think, discuss and reflect together with the collectives, and I hope that the knowledge that emits itself through the pages of this thesis has become a process of learning for the reader too. All in all, this thesis should be read as a roadmap into the complex yet fascinating phenomenon of self-organised education collectives.

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