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## CHAPTER THREE

### **Regulation, Resistance, Readiness and Care: What Can Be Learnt by Performing the Peripheral Behaviours of Artists?**

Jo Addison and Natasha Kidd

The *Inventory of Behaviours* proposes that the ordinary behaviours of artists may have much to tell us about how art is made and learning is experienced. Unfolding from a curiosity about the habits of artists, it is a collection of responses to a callout and the staged events where those behaviours are enacted by students and public alike. It is a handbook. It is a method.

Through an open call, first made in February 2017, artists at all stages in their career are invited to consider their own behaviour, in the physical, digital, or psychological spaces in which their art is made, and to devise an instruction to enable someone else to imitate or re-enact their rituals, traits or habits. Through a series of public performance events the *Inventory of Behaviours* manifests as a facility for collecting and generating these behaviours; live and constantly updated it is shaped by the ordinary daily routines of artists. Ready to accommodate the comings and goings of scheduled groups and passers-by, its temporary locations are carefully prepared; with chevron flooring and teams of boiler suit clad assistants welcoming and guiding visitors, there is the logic and aesthetic of stage direction and factory production. The behaviours, formatted as instructions, are broadcast across the floor with text to speech software. Everyone knows where they should be...

#### **62. Be both in and out**

By reflecting on some of the patterns of behaviour that have been made visible through the *Inventory* this chapter seeks to understand how they might be integral to the activity of artists and what can be learnt from them. Might these preparatory, interruptive or reflective

activities have been subjected to hierarchies that need to be reassessed and can the institutional methods that have evolved for appreciating, evaluating and enabling creativity be reconsidered to accommodate them? If these patterns are indeed integral to the interior creativity of artists, yet frequently disregarded during, for instance, assessment, what might be afforded to Fine Art practice teaching and learning by embodying and performing them? In order to consider these questions we must first set the scene...

#### **10. Preamble:**

**i) Go for a run.**

**ii) Check emails**

**iii) Check jobs.ac.uk.**

We are a small group of artists, lecturers, students and alumni, and various combinations of all of these, who have come together on the vast 5<sup>th</sup> floor of the Blavatnik Building of Tate Modern. We are a team. You can tell because we wear red overalls. Employing the logic of stage direction and borrowing the principle and aesthetic of the factory floor, we have stayed up late to divide up the floor, using bright blue tape. On a clothes rail in each of the three making zones, we've hung ten blue overalls, each arranged in order of size: small, medium, and large. We busily collect, collate and edit instructions (Figure 3.1), occasionally breaking away from our tasks to welcome visitors to the space, some invited, some strayed from other floors of the museum: several groups of undergraduate students, a group of school children from West London, an academic over from the US on a research trip, a retired dancer, two former architects on a day out...

**72. Make a bunch of things without any forethought in an excited but technically sloppy way until you feel faintly hopeless.**

Rachel, an undergraduate Fine Art student, arrives at Tate to take part in the *Inventory of Behaviours*, flips through a rail of blue overalls, and puts on a medium set. She quietly

leaves through the instructions, grabs a chair and embarks on five dedicated sittings in which she fixes a steady gaze on parts of the upright fabric of the space: a wall, a pillar, a window. Ten minutes, twenty minutes, thirty; people come and go, she sustains her vigils, dutiful re-enactments of the behaviours of an artist she doesn't know.

#### **90. Stare at the wall.**

Another young woman is hunkered by the window, exposed to residents of luxury high-rise apartments on one side and our collective frenetic activity on the other. We don't notice her at first, or the fact that she is crying, quietly but genuinely crying. As one of us approaches, we realise Caitlin, a research student, is dutifully enacting one of the instructions – it is simultaneously thrilling and alarming that she has summoned real tears. Should we go to her, comfort her?

#### **100. Cry.**

Shortly after, she is gliding across the floor, flute to mouth, playing single steady notes in a repetitive sequence and, close by, a recent graduate moves bizarrely yet gracefully in an apparent call and response.

#### **8. Real Life & How to live it: The Studio.**

**Play the 3 chords G, C and D in any order at any tempo in any style on any musical instrument over and over.**

On day three, when there are a large number of people in the space, there is a rally cry from somewhere that no one seems to have directly witnessed. Within minutes we have all abandoned our tasks and are shuffling up and down the longest wall, organising ourselves by order of height. With a few last minute adjustments we prepare for a photograph – no giggling, straight faces. Moments later we are disbanded.

**35. ii) Pencils should be sharpened by hand, blade eased over the wooden body by thumb and index finger in shallow curved turns, paring back to reveal a lethally long but silent lead.**

Perhaps it is a straightforward proposition that artists' everyday physical behaviours might be linked to complexity of thought and, in turn, the things they make and do. Associations between movement and perception, the physical and psychological are not unfamiliar to artists. But which activities count as integral to their interior creativity and which ones have been dismissed? How have the boundaries of creative process been drawn, in for instance education, such that the sketches towards a performance or painting are scrutinised but the laborious and overly attentive sharpening of pencils is disregarded?

**13. Sit down. Stand up. Sit down. Stand up.**

The execution of an action by no means proves that we know, even superficially, what we are doing or how we are doing it. If we attempt to carry out an action with awareness - that is, to follow it in detail - we soon discover that even the simplest and most common of actions, such as getting up from a chair, is a mystery, and that we have no idea at all how it's done (Feldenkrais, in Pallasmaa, 2009:145)

In 1977 physicist and engineer Moshé Feldenkrais (2005) devised a therapy combining movement and learning. The *Feldenkrais Method* (ibid) proposes that psychological, biological and cultural influences contribute to the shape and pattern of an individual's ordinary movement, which in turn might be linked to complexity of thought and perception. As a result, deeply embedded patterns or habits are played out in everyday physical behaviours. The Method, based on physics, neurology and physiology is predicated on the idea that these habits, though still practised, have become obsolete and that they generate unnecessary physical, and psychological limitations.

**32. Sort Things: by width, by height, by colour, by type, by any other arbitrary system.**

In the book *The Shadow of The Object*, ‘unthought known’ is the term the psychoanalyst and writer Christopher Bollas (1989) gives to patterns of experience that are known at some deep level but possibly not at the level of conscious thought. It seems a fitting term for the often unaccounted-for activities in which artists engage, alongside those that one might recognise as more fundamental to the production of art. Bollas goes on to describe how as individuals we organise our lives around ‘unthought knowns’, which often originate during formative years, when we are continually “impressed” by the object world. When we ask artists about why they perform these customs, or where they originated from they can’t always account for them but Bollas’ psychoanalytic explanation provides us with an interesting analogy. How might the formative years of artists be shaping our behaviours and what role might cultural, social and economic factors play? Ranging from elaborate tics to sustained and deliberate inactivity, from curious to prosaic, the behaviours at once reinforce and debunk myths about the eccentricity of artists. How were these artists ‘impressed’ by the world and how might it have shaped their behaviours? How, in turn, do these behaviours shape their work?

**63. On a cold sunny day, make a hot water bottle and get into bed fully clothed. Set the alarm on your phone for 22 minutes and see if you can go to sleep.**

When we have enough Behaviours for the exercise to seem meaningful we begin to group them in an attempt to understand if there are commonalities. We draw up lists and, as with teams, we give them names: Regulation, Resistance, Readiness, Deviation, Care, Sabotage. Many fit in to more than one category and most, although not all, seem to happen in advance of ‘making’; preparatory exercises, manoeuvres, even tricks.

Michel de Certeau, in *L’Invention du Quotidien*, talks about ‘tricks in the art of doing’ that enable individuals subjected to the global constraints of modern – especially urban – society to deflect them, to make use of them, to contrive

through a sort of everyday tinkering to establish their own décor and trace their own personal itineraries. (Augé, 1995:38)

Certeau's deflection might be an appropriate way to think about these behaviours as activities designed to make the transition between the constraints of everyday life and making art. Portals perhaps. Crying, sleeping, staring, running, surfing would appear to be strategies, conscious or not, which have become integral to the itineraries of artists; necessary, even fundamental patterns of experience towards creativity. So, can they be considered as work?

**38. Clear your sight with your left hand and rub your face, palm open, concentrating on the areas of forehead and eyes. Look down, 20 seconds, rub face, 5 seconds, look down.**

Within the context of current educational preoccupations with evidencing and measuring production, what type of 'work' is valued and who is allowed to do it? Can this new acquaintance with the conditions that precipitate, encircle, or influence the act of making bring into focus and legitimise what is otherwise seen to be non-productive activity?

Writer Brian Dillon (2018) talks about the filing system he keeps for different texts he has written, in order to demonstrate to himself his own productivity as a writer. In a short essay, he appears to confess to the inadvertent invention of a 'vexing schedule' towards the production of 'chunks or gobbets' of short texts. Admitting to a dependency on production and completion in order to maintain his significance as a writer, he talks of a keeping a 'killing anxiety' at bay (p35).

What is it all for exactly? To keep certain kinds of fear at bay, or to cultivate anxieties, to replicate the same fear a thousand times and more, as if it were the only thing keeping you alive? Which it sometimes seems it might be, and especially now, when so much has fallen away, when there is so little to hold

on to and I find myself counting the pages darkened and the files saved.

(Dillon, 2018:35)

The *Inventory* amplifies such devices, the contrivances of artists that seem to be designed consciously or not, to enable, postpone, demonstrate and confront *real* work. And by way of recognising this as legitimate labour, another form of *real* work is being carried out by those who gather, process, enact and document instructions in the performance event. Here, all are protected from risks and spills by full-length overalls (either blue or red, depending on the nature of their work) and they carry out their tasks in dedicated zones. So, does all of this activity help us, back in the art school, to recognise such contrivances as the legitimate labour of our students?

**3. Unroll approximately 4 ft of bubble wrap on the floor, fashion a pillow, lie down and snooze.**

In *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts*, Graeme Sullivan (2005) describes art making as a complex system, which incorporates a range of constituent activities as part of a ‘dynamic learning life’ (p119). He concludes that:

Artistic practice can be seen to comprise a critical coalition of practices that involve an on-going dialogue within and across, between and around, the artist, artwork, and context, where each has a role to play in the pursuit of understanding. (Sullivan, 2005:119)

The *Inventory of Behaviours* attempts to identify the conditions in which individuals’ creativity is made possible, to recognise even the most banal functions and acknowledge their potential value within the ‘critical coalition’ (ibid).

**46. Heat and light:**

**9.01 plug socket**

**9.02 timer to 9**

**9.03 dial to 6**

**9.04 Instant heat system button: on**

**9.05 stretch clothes hanger**

**9.06 stretch clothes hanger to left hand vertical window blind pulley**

It is one thing to locate these functions but what is gained by objectifying them through the lens of instruction, by dramatising them? In translating this action (or often more appropriately inaction) into an instruction for someone else, the removal of 'I' from the first person appears to be of twofold benefit: it enables us to both observe our activity more closely, and to offer it up to others. It becomes a key characteristic of the invitation to another in the form of instruction and it is in this new form that the behaviours transform into something more than an intriguing personal account and can be meaningful for teaching and learning.

**22. Record the sound of the word *revolution*.**

To learn another language is to re-form the shape habits of one's speaking, to take on those of another. (Hamilton, 2010:67)

We have observed that, by turning their behaviour into an instruction, the instructor appears to be unconcerned about potential embarrassment, sufficiently so to offer up what, in other contexts, might be deemed time-wasting, obsessive, indulgent behaviours. We have also witnessed that each enactor is game, willing to subjugate their own choices in honour of another's idiosyncrasies, with the curiosity of the onlooker appearing to sustain their courage.

So, might the performer of these instructions be learning the language of another, a physical one in which they take on their habits as suggested by Ann Hamilton (2010). Might we, by enacting another's behaviour and staging these small dramas, be permitted to share the same field of vision and, in turn, to share the operations of our creative minds? And it is not just the enactor who is learning the language of another, those of us who watch them, artists or not, are inquisitive about that language and its purpose.

#### **79. Sing 16<sup>th</sup> Century choral music.**

But, by turning the behaviours that are more often than not about inaction, avoidance, procrastination or paralysis into performances ...or work, is there an inherent contradiction at play? Why the need to amplify them, render them larger scale, theatrical, comedic or tragic; repeating them and revelling in them? That paradox seems to have been important in both procuring and enacting the instructions. Not merely the subject of a dry study, they are the confessions and gifts of makers that have been offered and shared with generosity, wit and, on the whole, humility, which are enacted in a spirit of the same.

#### **86. Meditate for one hour.**

##### **Instructions cited:**

Instruction no 3. Adam Gillam

Instruction no 8. Ross Sinclair

Instruction no 13. and 90. Steve Dutton

Instruction no 22. Alan Dunn

Instruction no 32. Natasha Kidd

Instruction no 35. Carl Rowe

Instruction no 38. Garry Barker

Instruction no 46. Sarah Kogan

Instruction no 62. Melanie Stidolph

Instruction no 63. Lucy Clout

Instruction no 72. Bill Leslie

Instruction no 79. Tom Woolner

Instruction no 86. Ivan Andrade

Instruction no 100. Jo Addison

It could be suggested that the *Inventory of Behaviours* provides evidence of the strategies artists use to suspend their own ‘goal oriented action’ as proposed by Glenn Loughran in his provocation *The Swerve*. Perhaps consciously or not these behaviours act as a way for artists to free themselves from the ‘dominant evaluative terms’ of ‘efficiency’ and ‘effectiveness’ he mentions. Loughran’s ‘swerving’ and ‘wandering’ are appealing descriptions of some of the activities that populate the inventory but how might we recognise the subjective validity of, for instance, crying, sorting and waiting? How do we make space for them or account for them within an educational setting ... particularly if they look very unlike one’s own received ideas and experiences of knowledge making, culturally or ethically? This needs to be approached with care and we must recognize that for some there is a danger that these behaviours could lead them, not towards creative freedom and a productive encounter with educational risk but towards exclusion, mental illness or alienation. As teachers, how might we, or indeed should we be entrusted to tell the difference and to support students to do so?

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