

Spectres of Learning



Learning Spaces: Workshop, Chat, Book

Ask, comment, answer, reply, agree, disagree, argue, wonder, learn. A conversation among friends, that is what this publication is and is about. As the printed version of a discussion, this book has made the conversation about learning spaces possible as much as it is based on that conversation. It is a published conversation and a conversation as a publication at the same time.

The conversation was launched in September 2022. It started in the form of a workshop that took place within the framework of gesellschaften at Vierte Welt in Berlin. A list of questions was compiled by topsoil, a collective formed by Sofía Villena Araya, Deniz Kırkalı and Amelie Wedel, asking about individual and collective

learning experiences, the diversity of learning spaces, as well as the relationships that have grown within and outside of these spaces. It was a conversation about informal learning spaces such as gardens, parties, kitchens, parks, and their important influence on what we learn, how we learn and how we want to learn. It was also a conversation about the hierarchies and forms of exclusion at work in formalized learning spaces such as schools and universities. How and what did we learn in each of these spaces? How did knowledge and learning differ? How have they shaped the way we learn, what we learn and what we don't learn? What relationships have been established in and through these spaces and how do they affect our daily experiences, actions, and ways of living? This conversation was more than a discussion of experiences and learning spaces. The discussion turned the workshop itself into a learning space. By shifting attention to what we value as important forms of learning and where it happens, the discussion became a collective mapping, orienting, and reorienting of memories,

experiences, affects, and relations of knowing and learning.

Workshops are not the only places where conversation and learning happen.

Questions travel and discussion continues.

Posts, shares, replies, and likes are the means of online discussion. They create their own forms of learning spaces. They facilitated discussion after the workshop.

The discussion continued in the chat rooms of chattypub, a tool developed by the Amsterdam-based collective Hackers & Designers. Continuing the conversation, chatting created new learning spaces, new learning relationships, and generated new answers and new questions to share.

This publication is an ongoing conversation about learning spaces as a book. And a book as a learning space. Documenting the workshop that became a question space, that became a learning space, that became an online chat, the book documents the transformations as much as it is a prompt for new discussions to happen. An object to be carried, opened, and read in different places. This book can transform any situation, any space into a space for

questions, answers, responses, and comments. It opens up learning spaces by stimulating a discussion about how we have learned and how we want to learn. In this sense, the book is a tool to open a discussion and facilitate learning every time you open a page, share a question or comment.

– Gerko Egert

Mapping Encounters

After a year of working together in London, members of our curatorial research collective topsoil moved to different places in the world, leading to our long-distance collaboration since 2018. As a result, our methodology has developed with the intention of creating intimacy and synchrony across and through distance. We tend to start our Zoom calls by meeting one another

in a collectively imagined space – a practice we call place-making. Together, we create this place, narrate it, sense it and wander through it with closed eyes. This exercise is meant to acknowledge the different conditions from which we are coming into the meeting while grounding ourselves somewhere that feels common and that makes us feel connected.

Next, impulses follow. In this stage of the process, we bring in stories, anecdotes, feelings, thoughts, texts and references into the conversation – materials that we want to share and invite different perspectives. This is fast paced; we don't want to go deep into it or stay with it too long, it is more about creating a network of associations. We want to bring some motion to explore and share the contexts and influences of our ideas and ways to be present.

After coming into the rhythm of openness and collecting through impulses, we try different combinations and explore ways to map the different ideas and references. Our understanding of mapping, which has been a significant element of our work in the past years, is a tool for generating relationships

and thinking together. It is not a representation of our thinking process but a relational tool. Mapping spurs conversations about the logics of categorization, about how to connect perspectives, about what gets excluded or included, about form and expected outcomes.

The workshop at Vierte Welt was part of opening up our developed method to different groups within the arts and academia in order to see how others might be using it, and in return, expanding our understanding of our own mapping processes. The workshop was inspired by our working methodology as topsoil through our long-term research project Experimental Pedagogies. It was divided into three stages: Place-Making (a grounding practice), Impulses (a reflecting and sharing practice) and Mapping (a relational practice). For “Mapping Encounters”, we wanted to ruminate on the following question: “What if we take care as the organizing principle of learning spaces?” Therefore, we invited the participants to think of specific learning spaces they have been part of and to reflect on expectations, bodily sensations,

relationships, spatial arrangements, comfort and contexts. In the spirit of impulses, we wanted the questions to be answered rhythmically, intuitively and through associations. We hoped the conversations that accompany the mapping process created room to learn from another how differently learning experiences look like. The workshop, as such, aimed to provide a starting point for collective configurations of alternative learning spaces. We believed these questions could spark thinking through how we learn from one another and what else learning could look like. We hope the questions further circulate and allow readers to contemplate alternative ways to come together, map and learn collectively.

– topsoil

1.
List some
learning
spaces that
you have been
and are still
part of.

school, home, friends, bars,
museums, theater, reading
groups, travelling

all of the above and art collectives,
studio spaces, university, research
projects, mostly on my computer

agree with already
mentioned, adding dance
studio, podcasts, email-
lists

university and academic
research groups. a writing
collective. a knitting collective.
a pottery workshop. also, the
gym. most of all, friendships.

other than the above conversations
on street corners and courtyards,
social media some times (even
though not sure about learning, or
more getting certain ideas or
information - does that count as
learning? then again speaking ideas
out loud for me is always different
from just writing them down alone
in silence, thinking, learning
happens in dialogue)

Political organizations,
volunteering, art academy.

uni, nocturne-platform, bar,
cinema

Collaborative and collective projects, cinemas, bookshops, studio, informal conversations with friends and colleagues which can happen anywhere. Universities, as student and as teacher.

School of Commons Network
Floating University Free
Radicals Network
Glasgow School of Art Student
& Alumni networks
Virtual Reading Group
Whatsapp group for local
people to meet up and play
basketball together
Royal College of Music - music
conservatoire
Desperate Hobbies, bi-weekly
live broadcast rehearsal with a
friend

I love the street corner as a learning
space





2.

Which one
was the
longest time
ago (e.g.
where you
have been the
youngest)?
Think of the
space of the
learning
context.
Which objects

can you remember?

kindergarden - and I remember
a rabbit we had to take care
of.

also a kindergarten - i was part of
the "daisie" group whose entrance
door with a picture of a painted
daisie i remember vividly

garden, my grandma
showed me different types
of flowers / another
memory: some kind of
daycare (it must be earlier
than kindergarden): My
task was to do a colouring
in of a picture of a zebra. I
was the only child there.

my fathers computer, whose keyboard made great clicking noises. my gymnastics class, which was taught by a fierce lady and that we would sometimes escape from by climbing out the window. I remember the CD-Player for which we could bring our own music, also the equipment: rings, parallel bars, horizontal bars, medicine balls.

also: the library, where I copyprinted pictures I liked from books that I couldn't read yet. I particularly remember prints of mushrooms. the livingroom, where I made paintings with letters that I found interesting (the small "i" particularly often)

my kindergarden was in a container and self-organized by parents. my best friend Philipp and I often wanted to stay inside and draw pictures, instead of playing outside with the others. His plan (he was a year older) was that we draw images of everything we know and then sell it as an encyclopedia to his neighbor for 100 Deutsche Mark – that of course never happend"

Was placed in a preschool where I was two years younger than the other children. The strongest memory is of not speaking the language and therefore having to read the body language of other children and teachers. I remember watching from the sideline a group of children playing with dolls made out of folding a single piece of textile in specific origami forms.

Different rooms and objects at home, like the kitchen table where I listened to other family members; a room with toys, or things that could be used as toys, and a record player; the garden and the farm next door, where I encountered different animals and plants.

Royal College of Music - music conservatoire. The

Desperate Hobbies - the radio studio. lots of cables, different keyboards, microphones, music equipment.

in my team at the
university I was the
youngest, computers. In
my childhood it was the
kinderzirkus and I was
probably one of the
youngest. There, I had a
one wheel bike.

i remember taking part in
"kinderbibelwoche." it was
quite fun as it was an
exceptional learning space...
so not in school but in the
pfarrhaus. they had kakao and
sweet brötchen. they made it
very playful, my older sister
was also there to help out and
i remember riding on her back
as if she was a camel. in
retrospect i feel i was tricked
and indoctrinated.

who is desperate hobbies?
what a great name. i
wonder if a hobby is
always desperate.



3.

What sensations
and associations do
these objects
transmit to you?

I liked the rabbits and at the same time was a bit overwhelmed by it. A lot of regulations existed that controlled how to interact with rabbit. From today's view it seemed like a holy animal.

I remember the picture of the daisie to be very big and a "gate" to the room of my group. i knew i was a "daisie" and was allowed to enter which made me somehow proud.

My memory of the time in the garden with my grandmother is very positive, warm. Lots of yellow. The memory of the zebra is negative. I misunderstood the instructions and coloured the zebra 'wrong'. I was ashamed and hid the picture.

Mostly homeliness, when
spending hours and
immersing myself in
writings and paintings. My
gymnastics class was
always in the evening, so
sometimes we had to walk
there in the dark. It was
only two minutes away,
and I wasn't alone, but
that made it weirdly
clandestine.

the coloring pencils I liked, but
was often disappointed that
my drawings did not look like
the real things and animals or
people.

The textiles were brightly colored or with strong geometric forms, and when folded into an origami, it was an abstract from that one could still recognize or pretend to be a "human" form.

A mix of adventure, space on my own and being overwhelmed.

Performance anxiety,
performance giddiness,
timidity, vulnerability,
silliness, playfulness,
kindness

4.

Is one of them a hostile object, if so, please name it.

the picture of the daisie
was definitely hostile to
the kids that weren't part
of the group, as much as
the dandelion sign of the
other group felt kind of
hostile toward me

I wouldn't say that the zebra itself is a hostile object, in my memory. I even had the feeling that I had to protect the object.

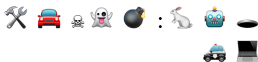
My father's computer wasn't hostile then, but my current computer sometimes feels like an adversary.

other kids sometimes crinkled the drawings or take a large felt-pen and just scrawl over it

The object itself wasn't hostile but
the context of not being included
was registered.

the vague sense of danger in
buildings, where many animals
are squeezed into a small
space.

No hostile objects, but all
intimidating.



5. Which learning space are you currently most invested in?

Self organized learning
spaces, reading groups
and my desk.

university and research
projects on my computer

also university, self
organized learning groups

University, academic research
groups, a writing collective,
pottery class, the gym.

University, ICI, b_books,
formal and informal groups,
sometimes just consisting of
two people

Emotionally, the self-initiated semi-
fictional learning institution,
financially and time-wise an art
academy.

Desperate Hobbies – I've only listed this one, as it's the most current.

Shared studio, the folder on my desktop with writing project, a self-organised virtual school

University, reading groups, nocturne-plattform, podcasts, newspaper

6.
Who are the people
that surround you?
What is your
relationship to
them?

we try to create a network of
peer learning and teaching.
sometimes people teach too
much, often it works fine.

there are a number of
different people around
me. there is kids, partners,
friends, collaborators,
professors all surrounding
me in different ways.
because i work also
artistically / practically, it
is obviously impossible to
draw a line in which way
they interact with how and
what I learn.

I also have a lot of different
people around me: colleagues,
friends, partners.
Relationships depend on the
context, I interact with them -
professional, personal.

Within my learning spaces,
relationships vary from distant
or non-existent to very
personal.

sometimes there are no people
around and I have to seek them
out, then there are colleagues,
acquaintances, friends

I have core group of
collaborators with whom
I've worked over many
years, while I have
institutional colleagues
that change every couple
of years.

Desperate Hobbies -
Angelica Falkeling, and our
various listeners every
other week when we are
live on radio.

Mainly friends and collaborators

7.
If you had to locate
the experiences
from this learning
context in your
body, where would
it be?

at the moment in my head.
after a very heady time a
school and university I tried to
shift learning more to the
body. In recent month it
focussed again more on the
head.

in my belly.

Head, Shoulders

Belly!

hands and head

Stomach and heart-rate

Desperate Hobbies – my
chest.

Head

shoulders and back, chest

8. What gives you comfort in that context?

friendship and knowing the people I talk with. To know the way the words I say are recieved helps me a lot to develop my thinking and doing. Otherwise I feel lost and shy away from entertaining a thought up to its end.

Having warm feet, soft
textiles around me and
knowing or feeling the
people to whom I speak.

Friends, "support groups" -
I have more than one
Messenger-Group with
that name.

Knowing that I can participate
on a self-determined basis,
having the freedom to leave or
exit.

getting feedback and having someone listen to some idea or think in dialogue, also being able to advice others, e.g. students with their projects, can make one realize that there may be some useful knowledge one has gained.

When working in an institution it's important to have allies.

Desperate Hobbies – not being alone or judged.

Laughter

9.

Care comes from the old English word Caru, which also means grief, sorrow, trouble. What troubles have you brought from outside?

I am not sure what
"outside" means, resp.
what is the "inside"? If the
inside is the learning
space, then I wouldn't say,
that I have to bring
anything "in" - there is no
threshold for me.

Unsure. I think of trouble as
something that stays with you.

yeah, also don't quite
understand, I think there is a
lot of trouble inside of me
already.

The "outside" of the learning context I think is embodied inside every participant that is bringing each of their pasts and experiences from the outside in, including the sorrows, troubles, challenges, pre-conceived ideas. The prejudices or struggles one experiences in society is brought into the learning spaces, so racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism and etc are the troubling angles and awareness I bring from the outside.

Desperate Hobbies – normative notions of beautiful sounds, self-judgement, timidity.

trouble deciding right now about the future - too many big decisions cause a lot of trouble

10.
What is a learning
space for you?
Name some
contexts.

friends, nocturne, reading
group on capitalism

it is a place that changes
something, changes me,
when I have been there.

A place where I experience something new, or gain a new perspective on something I think I've already known everything about.

a place of concentration and surprise

In addition to the above, a place of challenge and dialogue.

A space where production, product and productivity are secondary or irrelevant to the activities.

11.

What kind of roles
do you find
yourself taking
within learning
contexts?

I realized recently that I tend to push thoughts quite far, sometimes in order to provoke things I perceive as "givens" in discussions. Sometimes that is good. Sometimes I lose overview on how important that actually is in the context and end up at a place I don't feel entirely comfortable.

I am a teacher, that tries to learn all the time.

That depends. Sometimes, I take the role of an observer, watching closely and following, but staying quiet. Other times, I am more engaging, acting as organizer, or host. Also, sometimes I act as if I was more uninformed on a subject than I really am, asking very basic questions. That I do because I believe it gives other more courage to ask questions they think of as dumb.

I was never so much into teaching but have gotten to like it very much now, but am mostly interested in creating situations where dialogue and exchange can happen. am also learning more from my students. or maybe am somehow certain that for them to learn how to talk in the seminar is also an important step, not just the content. Sometimes it takes a lot of effort and energy to get everybody to talk. With what is said, I am also critical or try to ask a lot of questions, I think some students find that unnecessary or they seem to be doing other things on their laptops, have tried to counteract that

with more small group work, it seemed to work. maybe a seminar is too big for everybody to engage and be listening to each others?

I am taking on more organizational roles, writing curriculums, exam format and procedure. It is challenging in different ways than working in the classroom with students, since I am encountering the structural parameters of an institution and following rules and regulations that seem to be impartial but are in fact arbitrary because of how persons interpret and misuse the power.

Most often, I take the role of listener.

I am often an organizer
and feel responsible

12.

What emotions and
fulfillments do you
seek in learning
spaces?

The feeling that my
thoughts (feelings) have a
place or matter to others.

The feeling that we can create
new thoughts and possibly
things together.

The feeling of collaboration,
togetherness, thinking together.

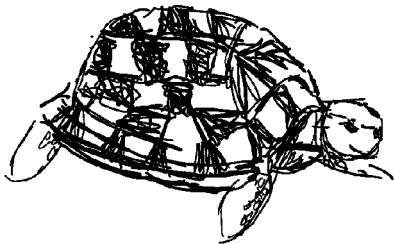
A pretty corny thought:
making a difference,
changing and reflecting on
existing structures.
Emotionally, I think I am
looking for connection.

Thinking in dialogue, have a
shared space of concentration
where everybody feels
comfortable participating. A
feeling of "Zugewandtheit"
within the group.

It depends whether I am participating as a student versus if I am leading it as a teacher. The difference in responsibility or degrees of responsibility determines my expectations.

Friendship and epiphanies.

feeding my curiosity, thinking with others, ask myself about myself, exchange about political struggle



move slowly otherwise ghosts
won't see you

Note! Usually turtles move
very fast which most
people don't know.

Scriptothek

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For a detailed documentation of the workshop The Radical Teaching Workshop: Feminist Practices of Writing and Mapping (23.-24.9.2022) at Vierte Welt see: online.fliphtml5.com/yzolp/jzdb/ (in German)

Hackers & Designers (H&D) is a conglomerate of practitioners from different fields and backgrounds (technology, design, art, and education) currently operating between Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Brussels. Along with organizing participant-empowering hands-on workshop H&D builds and maintains free and open source tools, self-hosts technical infrastructures and produces on - and offline publications.

www.hackersanddesigners.nl

ChattyPub is a design tool in the making – leveraging a chat interface (Zulip) to apply styles and formats to the content of a publication. The tool is activated and further developed through workshops. The workshops explore, in a practical manner how a process of co-designing a publication unfolds, specifically when several people are designing at the same time using a chat

interface. Through workshops H&D tried to open up the process of making this tool, and explores together with participants its possibilities and limitations and build community around it coming-into-being.

www.hackersanddesigners.nl/s/Tools/p/Chatt

topsoil is a transnational curatorial and research collective formed by Sofia Villena Araya, Deniz Kirkali and Amelie Wedel in 2017 in London. Individually engaged in research areas such as material feminism, critical ecologies, postcoloniality, and geopolitics and based in different geographical contexts – San Jose (Costa Rica), Istanbul (Turkey) and Berlin (Germany), together we seek to bring into conversation this multitude of contextual and disciplinary perspectives. Through creating a process of prolonged conversation, we ask how to work and think with each other through an approach that prioritizes care and sensibility to what drives our research and practice.

www.topsoilcollective.com

Gerko Egert is a media and performance studies scholar, writer and educator. He is Privatdozent at the Institute for Applied Theatre Studies, Justus-Liebig-University, Giessen. His research deals with philosophies and politics of movement, dance and performance, radical pedagogy, process philosophy and (speculative) pragmatism. He is co-founder of Nocturne, a platform for experimental knowledge production. www.gerkoegert.net

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