

# Institutional Deflection in Dutch Art Education and the Heterotopology of Safer Spaces

An Intersectional Analysis of Safer Spaces within Dutch Art Education

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## **Abstract**

This thesis proposes that (the creation of) safe(r) spaces holds radical pedagogical potential. Analysing the circumstances of safer spaces and what they tell us about normative, western art education, this thesis considers how dominant notions of pedagogical value are being queered in a safer space. Building on theories of Queer pedagogy, Critical pedagogy (as put forth by Paulo Freire), heterotopias (as put forth by Michel Foucault), critical reflection and action or *praxis* (as put forth by Paulo Freire) and institutional whiteness (as put forth by Sara Ahmed), this thesis testifies to the subversive pedagogical potential of safer spaces and honours BIPOC students addressing oppressive normativities within an educational institution. This thesis focuses on two case studies of student-based safer spaces and their efforts to reflect on, critique and change their institutional surroundings, as well as the institutional response to these spaces. The research analysis involves two close-readings of interviews with organisers of safer spaces within the School of Arts in Utrecht, and illuminates how BIPOC organisers and participants have had to deal with institutional whiteness, institutional racism and institutional deflection by teachers and staff members as representatives of the institution. In conclusion, this thesis holds space for (BIPOC) students and their embodied knowledges - voices that are systematically oppressed - and can be considered an effort towards more research concerning institutional whiteness or the effects of institutional whiteness on (art) education, as well as the broader spectrum of (the potential of) safer space.

Keywords: institutional deflection, institutional whiteness, institutional racism, safe space, safer space, heterotopia, heterotopology, queer pedagogy, critical pedagogy, dutch art education

I'd like to express my gratitude to the following people.

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To Mallory, we made it. I will cherish our ups and downs.

# Contents

<b><u>Contents</u></b>	<b>4</b>
<b><u>Introduction</u></b>	<b>5</b>
<b><u>Methodology</u></b>	<b>8</b>
<b><u>Theoretical framework</u></b>	<b>11</b>
<b><u>Practical research</u></b>	<b>25</b>
Case Study 1: A steady safer space, with teacher support	25
Case Study 2: A discontinued safer space due to lack of teacher support	33
Conclusion of analysis	36
<b><u>Concluding Statements</u></b>	<b>40</b>
<b><u>Notes</u></b>	<b>42</b>
<b><u>Bibliography</u></b>	<b>45</b>
<b><u>Appendices</u></b>	<b>48</b>
Transcription Interview 1	1
Transcription Interview 2	12

## Introduction

Growing up as a single child in a white middle class family in Rotterdam, a central city in the Netherlands, I had a lot of access to pencils, markers and plenty of paper to craft with. Attending public primary school and secondary school in a program that leads to higher education (universities of applied sciences), crafting was always held in high regard. One could tell crafts were held in high regard, per example by the mandatory crafting (and scrap) classes in primary school, the way the assignments were designed and based on renowned artists in secondary school and the fact that one could take the final central exam in art, if you had followed the curriculum, which included art history classes.

The arts, which were made available to me through my parents taking me to museums, concerts, theatre plays and so on were special occasions and highly valued. My parents allowed me to experiment and grow interested to play instruments, take dance lessons and theatre training. This orientation towards various art forms and the variety of experiences I had, eventually led to my application to art school and graduating with a bachelor of fine arts at the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam. During the final year of my bachelor, I became personally and academically interested in theory about gender, which led to my gravitation towards a masters in Gender Studies. This master-programme has allowed me to dive deeper into theory about gender, feminisms, postcolonial theory and queer theory. The master-programme also required an internship, which I'll come back to at a later point.

During several classes we discussed what we as students would need to learn to be able to discuss theory or topics and that the classroom was a safer space. Outside of class, I attended several events that also mentioned the concept of a safer space. Initially, it struck me as valuable to note, that a space like a classroom could be a safer space since it would put me (and possibly other students as well) more at ease about speaking in class, therefore potentially being able to pick up more of what was being said and contributed by others. However, the fact that someone would call the classroom safe would not consequently make the space safe or even safer, nor did it lower my anxiety. Keeping a space safe seemed to have to be an active doing, rather than a proclamation. As a result, the topic or rather, the concept continued to fascinate me.

### *Internship at Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht*

Considering my experience and interest in art (education) in Rotterdam and my growing fascination for ways of learning (or pedagogies) and safe(r)<sup>1</sup> spaces, it made sense to intern at an educational art institution. Through my personal contacts, I obtained a research internship position at the HKU<sup>2</sup>, the School of the Arts in Utrecht. During this three month period, I was asked to create an overview of HKU's inclusivity and diversity. Since this is such a broad question, I specifically focussed on how diversity and inclusivity is defined and dealt with by management, teachers and students in two different departments (Image, Media & Technology and Audio Visual Media) at HKU's Oudenoord location. With this research project, I developed an understanding of HKU's western norms of whiteness, rigidity, bureaucracy, western-centrism in curricula and top-to-bottom mentality. These norms are not unique to HKU, and generally represent (art) academy principles throughout the country.

Art education in the Netherlands is shaped in such a way that it must be able to meet the same competences as any other higher professional education course. This means students take exams in different forms to be graded on their competence. How the exams are shaped differs per course and institution, however, this is all broadly comparable to a legal standard. I will elaborate more on how classes are generally shaped in the chapter on Pedagogy.

In one of my interviews during my internship I learned that a student I had come into contact with had attempted to organise a safer space; a gathering of students to meet and discuss personal and political topics, sometimes with regards to the school. However, the safer space did not last long, due to a complex situation involving a teacher, which I discuss in the chapter on practical research. This testimonial led me to start this research, focussing on the politics and problematics of institutional responses to student-organised safer spaces, as well as the unique pedagogical potential of these spaces.

Mariana d'Aboim Inglez Amaral Fernandes, in her master thesis "The possibilities of integrating queer pedagogies in a fine art curriculum", states that western art education should, in many ways, be about the self-development of the student, on the level of

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<sup>1</sup> I've adopted the notion of safer spaces from the organisers of Gender Bending Queer Party, among others, whom have discussed this notion in the podcast 'Ongehoord'. I'll further elaborate on this in the theoretical framework of this document.

<sup>2</sup> HKU stands for Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht, this is translated to School of the Arts Utrecht. I will use the acronym HKU from here on out through this document.

intellect, creating skills and artistic growth (Fernandes, 2016, 6). Even though generally teachers might agree with this, academies do not always allow for an acknowledgement of differences within background, identity or life experience. The lack of this acknowledgement of experiences of marginalised students allows for the continuation of intersectional oppression during their education and shows us the urgency of creating spaces by and for these students to enable them to speak on their experiences.

### *Research question*

In continuation of these words, it is important to accentuate that a safer space is never organised without reason. What are these reasons? Under what circumstances are safer spaces organised? And most importantly, what do safer spaces tell us about normative, western art education? What pedagogical value does a student-organised safer space hold? How are dominant notions of pedagogical values queered in a safer space? And what does an institutional response tell us about the institution where the safe space is being organised?

In the following chapter I will elaborate on my methodology. Subsequently, this will be followed by my theoretical framework and analysis, after which I will conclude. The notions of queer and critical pedagogy, together with the principles of heterotopia, have allowed me to show how student-organised safer spaces have a queer pedagogical value through critical reflection and action (praxis) on normativities within the institution.

## Methodology

In the following paragraphs, I will give an indication of the research, the material and how I went about my considerations and so on. For this thesis, I frame my research to two case studies, both of which haven taken place at HKU in two different locations. I have conducted semi-structured interviews to analyse the description of a safer space participants/organisers from HKU. I prepared several questions beforehand and asked questions of clarifications. The interview was informal and additional questions of clarification were improvised. I consequently analysed the transcriptions of these interviews through close-reading. I would like to make clear that my analysis has been informed my own experience in western art education, attending actively held safer spaces in education, queer spaces dedicated to various purposes. Both interviewees will remain anonymous in this document and will be referred to as interviewee 1 and interviewee 2. Anonymity was chosen to protect their identity within the institution, since this document may but should not influence their position within the institution. The interviews can be found as appendices and are in Dutch.

The first of the two interviews is a semi-structured interview, which I conducted after my internship at HKU ended. I came into contact with this person via interviewee 2 and I will refer to this participant as interviewee 1. Interviewee 1 organised a safer space for the span of a school year. The origin of this safer space was a collaboration between interviewee 1 and an undergraduate fine art student writing their BA thesis on culture and identity. Sharing an urgency of speaking on these topics, the organisation of the safer space was created.

The second of two interviews is a selected part of a semi-structured interview I conducted during my internship at HKU. In this interview, the topic of safer space came up. The participant of this interview is a student at HKU, who has had multiple problematic experiences with the implicit racism and the bureaucratic consequences of asserting this within HKU; this was what our interview was initially about. The topic of safer space was not a matter of coincidence, but an urgent consequence of events that took place, due to the norms within the HKU institution. After three meetings about institutional racism, intersectionality and queerness, the safer space was discontinued. I will refer to the participant of this interview as interviewee 2.



I chose to interview the *organisers* of two different safer spaces. To obtain a perspective on how these gatherings were organised, how they were shaped, dynamics and so on, it would not have been ethical to gather students (who participated in a safer space) myself, i. e. as a focus group. In this case they would have been gathered for the sole purpose of this research. The power and potential of the students gathering from a place of urgency and commitment is of essential value. It has the potential to illustrate or design a counter-narrative to educational authority and hegemonic ways of teaching and could align with activist projects such as protests and demonstrations, since normativities of any kind can be oppressive and dysfunctional to marginalised groups. I consider both safer spaces to be exemplary of this. Considering the infringement of the safer space, possible differing dynamics and feelings of unfamiliarity due to the influence of my attendance, an interview with a participant/organiser allowed me to inform about the gathering in a more ethical way, detached and personal way without the infringing consequences as stated before. As a researcher, I would want my subject of research to be influenced as little as possible by my attendance, nor would I want to take away from the space by my attendance. Even though I might have permission to join, the possibility of making the space unsafer would be counter-productive.

I will juxtapose these case studies to queer en critical pedagogy (Shlasko 2005, Freire 1970), the notion of heterotopias (Foucault 1984) and intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989) to illustrate pedagogical value within a safer space. I will also illustrate the positionality of the institute through institutional whiteness (Ahmed 2007) and institutional documents such as that of the Advies HKU Werkgroep Diversiteit. Through queer pedagogy I will elaborate on the value of non-normative didactics. Through a heterotopology (a study of a heterotopia), I will illustrate which principles of a heterotopia are useful to think about safer spaces. Through the notion of intersectionality I will illustrate the urgency of analysing established power relations and potentially navigating these power relations through this analysis. I will elaborate more on the theoretical framework later.

### *Final Notes*

This thesis is located in the discussion(s) around western art education, but it is not a dismissal of western art education. Rather, it is meant as an exploration and potential expansion to how we approach ways of learning within current notions of normative education. My research is specific to the context of the HKU. The safer spaces, which I will

discuss in the practical research chapter as case studies, are not part of the curriculum. This underlines the queer and critical (pedagogical) potential of these case studies. This research is bound to its situatedness within a geopolitical location, as well as within the realm of education and art, but remains applicable in different educational contexts, such as different art schools in the Netherlands.

In this document, I will use the gender neutral pronouns *they/them* to refer to various scholars to avoid (mis)gendering them. This is a conscious attempt to introduce readers (for whom this is not yet established) to gender neutral pronouns, the application of gender neutral pronouns and to follow the example of the queer and trans\* community. There are different sets of gender neutral pronouns, in English as well as Dutch. I have chosen to use *they/them*, since these are being increasingly used, pushing towards gender neutral language, are taken up in the American (online) dictionary Merriam/Webster and are currently my personal preference.

## Theoretical framework

In the following paragraphs, I offer the theoretical framework for the research of this thesis. I will juxtapose research that has been done on queer pedagogies, the notion of heterotopia and the methodology of intersectionality. By briefly introducing intersectionality, I will illustrate the potential of learning through hearing about different experiences. Intersectionality will also allow me to illustrate the importance of analysing power relations within one contextual space, which will be essential to understanding how normative western art education disregards marginalised students. After this, I will shortly introduce the notion of whiteness through phenomenology as offered by Sara Ahmed. Following, I will introduce queer theory, through which I will elaborate on queer pedagogies and why the overlap of queer pedagogy and critical pedagogy offers a necessary critique to normalcy and holds potential to our normative (art) education. I place this thesis within the realm of queer pedagogies, since it centres a queer perspective on learning. Through this, I will illustrate how there is potential in students exchanging (embodied) knowledges through sharing their experiences and organising space for themselves. I will touch upon several scholars who wrote on queer pedagogy, among which are G.D. Shlasko and Mariana d'Aboim Inglez Amaral Fernandes, two authors who made the field of queer pedagogy more accessible to me. Next, with an analysis of safer space through three principles of heterotopias<sup>3</sup>, or a *heterotopology* of safer space, I will argue that safer space has value of fluidity and potential of development. A heterotopology also allows reflection on the function of the safer space as well as the space in which the safer space takes place.

### Safer space

The concept of a safe space is a broad one, one that has become somewhat of a buzzword in and outside of academic and communities. However, there is no set definition for a safe space; what makes a safe space, or a space safe, is contextual and nuanced. Although one might consider the basic principle of a safe space to be that everyone (literally everyone) should be able to feel safe in this specific space, in practice it turns out not to be this simple. The concept of a safe(r) space vaguely stems from activism, or could be considered a small activist intervention.

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<sup>3</sup> I have to thank Nychenda Antonia Adela Fecunda for inspiring me with the notion of heterotopias by Michel Foucault, through her thesis "Reinventing Realness: An Oral Ethnohistorical Study of Gender Practices in the Dutch Ballroom Scene", Erasmus University College, 2020.

It is hard to pinpoint when the first safe spaces were created. However, the American scholar and activist Moira Rachel Kenney, in her book *Mapping Gay L.A.*, dates the emerging concept of a safe space back to gay and lesbian bars in the 1960s in the USA (Kenney, 2001, 11). These bars were not necessarily a safe space, considering active anti-sodomy laws and public scrutiny for “sexually deviant” behaviour, but the bars were a *safer space* for people to express themselves and meet others people, often on a time limit due to police raids. The bars and possible other places to meet LGBTQIA2+<sup>4</sup> people were not safe in the sense of being completely free of social constructs, risks and norms, i.e. racism and internalised homophobia<sup>5</sup>, but they functioned as practical spaces to meet, talk and resist political and social oppression (Kenney, 2001, 11). Safe spaces were not and are not solely bound to the LGBTQIA2+ communities, but are found all over, for example churches, hair-salons, classrooms, bedrooms and so forth. The concept of a safe space is not limited to physical space, although it does involve physical and psychological safety. It can be a place to breathe or vent, to seek refuge from a racist, sexist and homophobic society (Kenney, 2001, 12). From here on out, I will use the term *safer space* rather than safe space. This term has been taken up in activist spaces to underline it is virtually impossible to create a space where *every-body* feels safe, and that a safe space for some can be an unsafe space for others.

## **Intersectionality**

In 1989 Kimberlé Crenshaw, American lawyer, civil rights advocate, scholar in critical race theory and professor of Law at the University of California, coined the term ‘Intersectionality’. Working from a critical Black feminist perspective, she illustrated how single axis discrimination was and is dominant in her field, as well as the problematic consequences of the separation of experience and analysis (Crenshaw, 1989, 139). Her article “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” builds on Black feminist epistemology and illustrates how oppression of “gender and race are not mutually

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<sup>4</sup> This acronym stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit. The acronym as well as the plus sign are used here to ensure inclusivity toward other non-normative gender identities, sexualities and expressions. The usage of this acronym is in no way an attempt to speak for others or to conflate gender identity with sexual orientation or sexuality. I use this acronym also for historical events where other authors might not. This is to consciously refuse normative, racist, homonormative telling of (queer) history.

<sup>5</sup> Homophobia means hate towards a person based on their sexual orientation. I use phobia rather than phobia, since phobia entails prejudice and power, rather than an extreme or irrational fear.

exclusive categories of experience and analysis” (Crenshaw, 1989, 139), through structural, political and representational frameworks in legal context (Puar, 2012, 51). I will use the methodology of intersectionality to address power relations at work in the case studies. What is important to keep in mind when speaking on intersectionality, is the axes of difference and their particular oppressions at hand, as well as the privilege on the opposite end of this oppression. In case of the HKU, it is important to not only focus on the oppression of BIPOC<sup>6</sup> students and/or students that are queer, but also analyse the power relations between teacher and student, cisgenderism and whiteness of the institution. This allows for a broader analysis of power relations at hand.

### **Whiteness**

I follow Sara Ahmed in considering (institutional) whiteness. In her paper “A Phenomenology of Whiteness”, she approaches institutional whiteness as a phenomenon. Ahmed explains: “Phenomenology helps us to show how whiteness is an effect of racialization, which in turn shapes what it is that bodies ‘can do’” (Ahmed, 2007, 150). Ahmed illustrates that spaces are shaped, orientated towards and influenced by certain bodies into certain directions. These bodies gravitate toward what is ‘familiar’ or historically ‘at home’ in these surroundings (Ahmed, 2007, 153). Ahmed: “Whiteness gets reproduced by being seen as a form of positive residence: as if it were a property of persons, cultures and places. Whiteness becomes, you could even say, ‘like itself’, as a form of family resemblance” (Ahmed, 2007, 154). At the hand of reproduction and repetition, white bodies become habitual in institutions, since whiteness is not limited to skin colour, but to people, culture and locations (Ahmed, 2007, 156). Through this phenomenon, institutional whiteness becomes an invisibilised, oppressive doing.

Whiteness functions as a form of public comfort for those who inhabit whiteness. This comfort is reproduced within “white” spaces, therefore simultaneously leaving non-white bodies uncomfortable, othered<sup>7</sup> and hyper-visible or invisible (Ahmed, 2007, 157).

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<sup>6</sup> This acronym stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour.

<sup>7</sup> Othered comes from the verb Othering, a notion of a binary opposition between the “Self” en the “Other”. The *other* or *othered* is used denote the stranger, minority or the deviant to the norm.

Comfort is about an encounter between more than one body, which is the promise of a ‘sinking’ feeling. To be comfortable is to be so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends and the world begins. One fits, and by fitting the surfaces of bodies disappears from view. White bodies are comfortable *as they inhabit spaces that extend their shape*. The bodies and spaces ‘point’ towards each other, as a ‘point’ that is not seen as it is also ‘the point’ from which we see. In other words, whiteness may function as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape. (Ahmed, 2007, 158)

The analogy of recognition, similarity or familiarity and whiteness shows a particular notion of “likeness” which becomes a matter of ‘shared attributes’ (Ahmed, 2007, 154). We can consider shared attributes as functional in art school admissions, in recruitment of staff and even the curriculum. In Teana Boston-Mammah’s 2017 research paper “The Entrance Gap”, we read about admission procedures at the Willem de Kooning Academy in Rotterdam. The presupposed neutrality and “normative” notions of these procedures are examined by Boston-Mammah and thus addresses how whiteness functions as “the unmarked marker”(Boston-Mammah, 2017, 2). A safer space can function as a place of comfort for bodies that are “othered” in opposition to what is “familiar” in the institution. It would be too quick to assume that the safer space would be detached or disconnected from institutional whiteness, or that it could be considered non-white by virtue of its opposition to the institutional whiteness, or because of its non-white participants. This erases internalised norms of whiteness and the perpetuation of institutionalised whiteness within the safer space. It has not been my objective to go into notions of internalised whiteness or how institutional whiteness can be found seeping into safer spaces in the academy. Rather, this research focuses on the pedagogical potential of BIPOC student-organised safer spaces within institutional context that could be considered (predominantly) white.

### **Queer and Critical Pedagogy**

If we want to discuss queer pedagogy, we will have to start with the notion of *queer*. In this section, I will illustrate how queer pedagogy was derived from queer theory to critical pedagogy, to then assert how this relates to an organised safer space within the context of (art) education.

Over time, the word “queer” has acquired multiple meanings or interpretations due to its history and because of how the word is currently used by individuals. Following G.D. Shlasko (2005) in their disquisition, the arguably most well known definition of queer is shorthand or an alternative to the acronym LGBTQIA2+. What is interesting however, is that both queer and the acronym LGBTQIA2+ can be used to describe gender as well as sexuality. For example, one can identify queer and bisexual or one could identify transgender and define their sexuality as queer. In other words, one does not simply define queer, not as an identity marker, nor as a sexual orientation. Shlasko follows Morris (1998) in defining queer into two general ideas; queer as a subject position and a political position. Morris adds another idea, which is “queer as an aesthetic sensibility, based on conceptualisations of reading practices [...]” (Shlasko, 2005, 123). This queer subject position put forth by Morris would entail describing people whose gender (identity) and/or sexuality is non-normative. These norms do not just include sexual orientation or gender expressions, but also forms of intimate contact or relationships, gender identity and sexual behaviour, etcetera. Non-normative forms of intimate contact or relationships would, per example, include a heterosexual people with non-monogamous relations or other sexually marginalised people (Shlasko, 2005, 124). Queer as a political position involves challenging the notion of “normal”. Shlasko elaborates:

Queer accepts neither its exclusion from the realm of the normal (which would confirm the legitimacy of such a realm), nor any attempt to recuperate it into the normal (such as assimilationist politics). A queer politic asserts itself as both outside of gender and hetero-norms and also opposed to the existence of these norms and the structures that serve to police their boundaries (Morris, 1998) (Shlasko, 2005, 124)

Queer in this sense challenges notions of normal as opposed to reifying structures such as heteronormativity; to think beyond, broaden or re-imagine norms. Shlasko goes on to argue that the subject position and political position are, at times, mutually exclusive. Their example, referencing Fuss (1991), is that homosexuality does not necessarily challenge heteronormativity. This resonates with Lisa Duggan’s notion of homonormativity, which entails “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized

gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (Duggan 2003).

Shlasko indicates that by being non-heterosexual, one is not necessarily challenging or countering heteronormativity (and by proxy homonormativity), since a more elaborate critique on heteronormativity would be necessary to assert a political position. In short, this does not mean that people who identify queer as a subject position are also queer in terms of their political position. This produces tensions, which we can see, per example, between LGBTQIA2+ activists and mainstream (gay rights) organisations. In 2019, activists<sup>8</sup> protested the Rotterdam Pride's declaration of being 'for everyone,' in response to the fact that the organisation of Rotterdam Pride did not critique or take a stance against the systemic violence of heteronormativity (not to mention xenophobic and racist parties involved) enacted by cooperative partners, such as sponsor companies. Rather, the organisation publicly claimed to not be political, negating the history of LGBTQIA2+ people. Here I refer to historic movements such as gay rights movements, feminist movements and events such as the Stonewall Riots (in New York) in 1969, which generally led to more internationally organised Pride marches. This history has always intrinsically and simultaneously been personal and political. Another example would be Pride Amsterdam, allowing Dutch political parties to participate in their established Canal Parade, even though their political agendas include little to no LGBTQIA2+ issues<sup>9</sup>. These two examples show that as a subject position, both Pride organisations might be considered 'queer', but do not politically critique heteronormativity or other intersecting problematic norms, such as racism, homonormativity, ableism or capitalism of their geopolitical location, which creates tensions between the activists and mainstream (gay rights) organisations.

Finally, Shlasko goes into Morris' argument about doing "un-queer" things. Morris argues that purposefully hiding one's queer subject position or, for example, passing as straight, would be an un-queer thing to do. This would not erase one's queer positionally, but (purposefully) attempting to hide it would, in itself, not be a very queer thing to do. The

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<sup>8</sup> This was a collaborative effort of an anonymous activist group called Resist Their Rainbow and political party Rotterdam Bij1.

<sup>9</sup> This phenomenon is also known as pinkwashing. For more information on this phenomenon, I refer to S. Schulmans' 2011 article "Israel and 'pinkwashing'" in the NY Times, which coined the term.



problem with this statement is that it disregards the possible safety reasons for 'passing straight' (in itself a particular construct which relies on heteronormativity and bi-erasure) or the multitude of how queerness can be expressed. The statement also endorses the gatekeeping trajectory of “coming out”, which is used as a validating policy<sup>10</sup>, rather than pushing for a normalised spectrum of identity. Policing “doing queerness” or being queer in such a way is thus destructive and contradictory, since the notion of queerness is to intentionally or unintentionally deviate from “normal”; normativity is what already does the policing for queerness.

### *Queer to queer theory*

There are several ways to approach queer theory, since queer theory, like queer, does not have a singular meaning. One approach of queer theory is to approach queerness as a verb, through which queer becomes a doing: “to queer”. Furthermore, queer theory can be approached as theory on queers or queerness. Shlasko emphasises that “By placing queerness and deviance at the center of analysis, queer theory can gain a unique perspective on normalcy, and on the processes by which normalcy and deviance are constructed (Britzman, 1998; Green, 1996; Sullivan, 2003)” (Shlasko, 2005, 124). Another approach to what queer theory can be is using queer as an adjective, which would make queer theory ‘weird’ or ‘deviant’. An example given by Shlasko is that queer theory can give an analysis of the world in an attempt to understand it, whilst acknowledging one’s own situatedness and the impossibility of undoing bias. (Shalsko, 2005, 124). In the article “Is There a Queer Pedagogy? Or, Stop Reading Straight”, Deborah Britzman explains: “Queer Theory signifies both queer subjects *and* queer theories, [...] as it questions the very grounds of identity and theory” (Britzman, 1998, 213). Shlasko goes on to point out that queer theory recognises its own queerness, and is also critical of how theory is ought to look or to be done. Finally, Shlasko refers to Greene in approaching queer theory, through using queer as a verb. This approach could be considered as ‘queering’ theory, i.e., to look at underlying ideologies, assumptions or possibilities.

As queer theory problematises concepts of gender and sexual identities, as well as the concept of identity, queer theory emerges from the study of and perspective of people who

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<sup>10</sup> The notion of “coming out” creates a binary, contrary to the alternative of being “locked in”, which invalidates a sexuality if not made “public”.

have been marginalised on the basis of gender identity, and gender expression and sexual and romantic identities; those historically violently described as queer. However, queer theory is not limited to theories of gender and sexuality. It also critiques notions of normalcy and processes that are defined and policed as normal; which extends to notions of heteropatriarchy, racism, transmisia, homomisia and more. Finally, queerness can be applied to notions of pedagogy. Simply put, the way queer theory questions norms or normalcy on a societal level or theoretical one, also applies to pedagogy. Fernandes argues that in educational norms, queer could mean ‘an active attempt to dismantle the limitations brought upon identity, the embracement of ignorance and failure as part of knowledge, the struggle for a social inclusion without imposing knowledge, norms, or names’ (Fernandes, 2016, 7). This could take shape in questioning who education is designed for, who it includes and who gets left out. This practice can be considered queer pedagogy.

### *Dutch Banking Education*

This thesis poses safer spaces as holding pedagogical potential for the educational spaces they inhabit. First, it is important to frame what is meant when speaking about western art education and its norms. Western education, and Dutch education specifically, physically characterises itself through a formal notion of classroom-based learning for students under the guidance of one implicitly all-knowing teacher. This is what Paulo Freire calls “Banking Education” (Freire, 1970, 73). The notion of ‘banking’ regards a mental state of what is expected of students; it stems from the metaphor of students being containers, needing to contain or bank the knowledge being sent by the teacher. This notion of a one-way direction of knowledge also becomes evident in the context of classroom arrangement. Classroom arrangement is traditional in the sense that the students, throughout various educational levels, sit on chairs at a (personal) desk that could be adjacent to one or more desks of other students who all face the teacher, who is positioned in the front of the class. This reiterates an authoritative and hierarchical position of the teacher. The teacher, not unlike a ruler, has an overview of the classroom. This ruler-like position of the teacher calls to mind a Foucauldian power of sovereignty; “the right to make live and to let die” (Foucault, 1976, 241); the teacher educates the students so that they can excel in life, but if the students do not comply to the teachers method, there will be consequences either short term in punishment or long term in expulsion. Foucault: “By assigning individual places it made possible the supervision of each individual and the simultaneous work of all. [...] It made the

educational space function like a learning machine, but also as a machine for supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding” (Foucault, 1977, 147). Students are seen as docile bodies through systems of discipline, among which is the arrangement of the classroom. The position of the teacher catches the attention of the students, which allows the teacher to deliver their knowledge on whichever subject at hand for the class, or, in other words teach. However, the elements of Banking Education are not exceptional when it comes to higher art education in the Netherlands: students attend lectures and practical classes and are expected to reproduce the knowledge obtained through theoretical tests and practical exams.

### *Critical Pedagogy*

Unlike the aforementioned banking education, critical pedagogy characterises itself through the critique on a normative approach of learning. In his book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire argues for, in his own words, critical literacy. Contemporary scholars call his work foundational for critical pedagogy. Paulo Freire does not distinguish politics from education. Freire argues that, building on Frantz Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), even though colonised nation-states have become autonomous states yet again, colonial discourse still remains. In other words, colonial discourse does not leave with the oppressor. Colonialism remains embodied and lives on through institutions and ideologies, such as ideologies of cultural or linguistic superiority<sup>11</sup>. Freire offers “two distinct stages” in the pedagogy of the oppressed (Freire, 1970, 54). The first is that oppression exists. The second is that transformation of the oppressed is possible. Freire also illustrates two goals of critical pedagogy; to locate the causes of oppression and the transformation of that reality (Freire, 1970, 54). To acknowledge that oppression exists might not seem like a challenge. However, there are discourses that oppress, these become explicit through economic and social forces. One of these subjugating discourses is the aforementioned Banking Education. Freire argues that it is possible to transform this reality of oppression through what he calls ‘praxis’: “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.” (Freire, 1970, 51). This thesis takes (the organising of) safer spaces and its contents as an example of this praxis.

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<sup>11</sup> Cammarota, J. Critical Pedagogy: Learning from Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed, April 10th, 2012 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRiL7YSzMjg>>

### *Critical and Queer pedagogy in safer spaces*

Britzman poses the question “[...] what if gay and lesbian theories were understood as offering a way to rethink the very grounds of knowledge and pedagogy in education?” (Britzman, 1998, 211). Britzman here imagines the knowledge and pedagogy in education as grounds on which western (art) education is built on. We can parallel this to the lots of land where institutions were built and have existed. Yet, these grounds of knowledge and pedagogy in western education can also be thought of as correlating to (implicit) norms and values implemented from a western societal scale that constitutes the institution as such.

If we look at the institution through the lens of phenomenology of whiteness, as put forth by Ahmed, we know the art school in the Netherlands are generally and historically white and cis-male dominated. Through the lens of critical pedagogy, a safer space organised here could function as a critical reflection with the potential to undertake action. The critical reflection the safer space would offer involves students reflecting together on (shared) experiences from in- or outside the institution. These shared experiences could potentially uncover and illuminate injustices, upon which the students could decide to take action, i.e. to discuss this with teachers, course leaders or educational managers to trigger change. Through its existence and the potential for future action, the safer space functions to reflect and expose what is missing for these students in the institution. The institution has the option to take action to improve upon this. The lens of queer pedagogy allows us to look critically at which norms play a role in the institution, among staff, teachers and students and in the curricula, which resulted in the organisation of the safer space in the first place. We can see the organisation of a safer space, especially student-based, as a queering of (institutional) space and a queering of education in the sense that it critically reflects on and questions its surroundings as well as problematics and normativities with regards to oppressive power relations at hand in a particular educational setting.

### **Heterotopias**

In 1984, Michel Foucault wrote the article ‘Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias’. In the text, he describes the principles of various heterotopias. Following a historiography of how the concept of space has been approached since the Middle Ages, Foucault argues that arrangement “has taken over from extension, which had once replaced

localization” (Foucault, 1984, 1). Arrangement here is defined as the arrangement of “relationships of neighbourhood between points and elements, which can be described formally as series, trees, and networks” (Foucault, 1984, 1). The arrangement of space is not just a matter of whether there is enough space. Rather, space is a concept we now approach as having different elements that ought to be ordered in a form of patterns (Foucault, 1984, 2). Mentioning the work of Bachelard, Foucault states that we do not live in homogenous spaces; our spaces are not empty, they are saturated with qualities and elements. Foucault focusses on “external space” in particular, such as “the space in which we live”, and argues that we do not live in a vacuum, but rather a space with sets of relationships or arrangements, which makes space heterogeneous. What is interesting about a few of these arrangements, Foucault states, are the ones “which are endowed with the curious property of being in relation with all the others, but in such a way as to suspend, neutralize, or invert the set of relationships designed, reflected, or mirrored by themselves” (Foucault, 1984, 3). Foucault divides these arrangements, which are harmonious with the others and yet contradict them, into two general types of arrangements; utopias and heterotopias.

Utopias function on the bases of certainty and represent notions of a perfect society. Utopias are spaces that are fundamentally unreal. Heterotopias would, contrary to utopias, “constitute a sort of counter arrangement, of effectively realized utopia, in which all the real arrangements, all the other real arrangements that *can* be found within society, are at one and the same time represented, challenged, and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable” (Foucault, 1984, 3, my emphasis). According to Foucault, a heterotopia is absolutely other to the arrangements it reflects; a place both mythical and real and simultaneously a contestation of the space we live in. In short, heterotopias are spaces that (attempt to) come closest to a utopia, or are instrumental in the development of a utopia. In some cases, one could argue that heterotopias are created to dispose of anything that could be considered dysfunctional in striving towards a utopia.

Foucault describes six principles of heterotopias in his text. In order to study a heterotopia, Foucault proposes to look at it as an “other space” which can be studied, analysed, described and “read”. Foucault states that this form of study might be called a heterotopology (Foucault, 1984, 3). Any given society or superimposed arrangement might function as the object of study; therefore a safer space within the HKU can be the object of study. To

illustrate this, I will give a short heterotopology of safer space using three principles of a heterotopia by applying the first, fifth and sixth principle to the concept of safer spaces.

### *Principles of heterotopias*

In the first principle, Foucault argues how any given society is in itself a heterotopia, since heterotopias "assume a wide variety of forms, to the extent that a single, absolutely universal form may not exist" (Foucault, 1984, 3). Foucault divides the first principle into two types of heterotopias; heterotopias of crisis and heterotopias of deviance. So-called "primitive societies", which Foucault would describe as that of crisis, would have certain privileged or sacred places that would function for certain individuals in 'crisis' in relation to the given society. This could entail individuals such as adolescents, people during their "menstrual period or in labor, the old etc" (Foucault, 1984, 3). Foucault believes many of these heterotopias of crisis are disappearing, especially in 'our own society', only to be replaced by heterotopias of deviance, "occupied by individuals whose behaviour deviates from the current average or standard" (Foucault, 1984, 4). In the description of the heterotopias of deviance, Foucault gives us examples like rest homes, psychiatric clinics and prisons (Foucault, 1984, 4). This list entails places for individuals who indeed deviate from certain standards or norms in our society, in a somewhat explicit way. We can generally see this principle as an explanation of spaces that are created to harbour non-normative subjects, to have a place for them to go. If we apply this to safer spaces, one could argue that a safer space is a place for a similar kind of deviance, in this case within an institute.

The fifth principle entails a notion of a system of opening and closing. This notion of opening and closing makes the heterotopia isolated and "penetrable at one and the same time" (Foucault, 6, 1984). There is a somewhat esoteric notion of knowing how and when to enter the heterotopia, that could entail a password, a (number of) hand gesture(s) or special permission. Per example, an Airbnb, where hosts and guests make arrangements of availability and public and private areas within a space. Other heterotopias might have "curious exclusions", where it seems like anyone can enter, but in reality not everybody is not included. These are dynamics that come back in the organisation of safer spaces when that space appears to be open to all, when in reality specific rules and/or politics might be in place in order to protect or safeguard its participants or topics of conversation.

The sixth and final principle is that the heterotopia has a position in between a binary opposition of a utopia, or perfect space, and one that is chaotic and real:

On the one hand they perform the task of creating a space of illusion that reveals how all of real space is more illusory, all the locations within which life is fragmented. On the other, they have the function of forming another space, another real space, as perfect, meticulous, and well-arranged as ours is disordered, ill-conceived, and in a sketchy state. (Foucault, 6, 1984).

The position of the heterotopia is not that of an illusion or the ambition for perfection, but rather a space of compensation. Foucault offers a reading of settler colonialism as an example, which, broadly speaking, entails creating a sort of utopia in opposition to a disfavoured country of origin. Another example would be a type of festival, which is often created out of a lack of, or something being missed. In that sense, the safer spaces in this research exemplify this form of heterotopia in how it has been an effort of compensation for something that was lacking in their original surroundings.

### *Safer space as heterotopia*

In my reading of the safer spaces in this research, I approach the concept of heterotopias to emphasise the value of the fluidity and potential of the development of safer spaces. Reading safer spaces through heterotopias entails reflecting on the function of the safer space within the space and context in which it is taking place. First, we can state that a safer space can indeed not be a utopia, since if it were, the safe space would be completely safe for everybody, always. However, a safe space, or rather safer space, cannot be safe for everyone and is dependent on and influenced by its arrangements and surroundings. The people creating safer spaces are not homogenous, and thus the space is influenced by heterogenous elements. It is as real and a localisable space as it is counter arrangement, seeking to reflect and contest the space it was created in, which makes it similar to heterotopia. Like a heterotopia, as seen in the first principle, safer space does not have a universal form. The safer space is influenced by its surroundings and time. Much like a heterotopia of deviance, the participants are part or feel part of a group of individuals whose behaviour or identity marker(s) deviate from a dominant norm. Although we cannot simply and without nuance group these people together based on their presence in the space, it is fundamental to recognise their “deviance” to the

norm that influences (and creates the need for) the creation of a (safer) space. The curious exclusion of the fifth principle resonates with the notion of institutional racism and the way this functions within an institution, or to be specific, an art school in the Netherlands. A black student or student of colour's work might be rejected at admissions<sup>12</sup> or evaluations, because their work is being evaluated by white teachers that are looking for and judging by a "universal" notion of talent<sup>13</sup>. However, this notion of talent is informed by whiteness and so the BIPOC student is at risk of being excluded. Now let us imagine the BIPOC students that are in the institution. They will keep having to face the phenomenon of whiteness through notions of "talent" throughout their academic career; a continuation of exclusion. A student organised safer space might then function as a space of comfort for BIPOC students, for example to discuss experiences. However, we could consider the safer space as "more than ever a passing visitor, never a true guest" within the institution. The safer space is also excluded from the institution, since it is never in line with the dominant norm (Foucault, 6, 1984). To look at the fifth principle, specifically from within a safer space, there might also be a suggestion of exclusion. Essentially, anyone could enter, but there might be conditions. This would be a notion of exclusion through counter-normativity; not anyone can enter unconditionally. These conditions can vary; perhaps a similar understanding of power relations and normativities at hand need to be established in order for someone to actually enter and engage, or one would need a corresponding identity marker to not also be a passing visitor rather than a true guest. The safer space, in terms of the sixth principle, functions like a heterotopia by revealing how the 'real' space of the institution functions in an illusionary way in terms of norms and similar types of rules, which, in the end, enforce institutional racism. On the other hand, the safer space is another space, or an-othered space, created by the Othered students. The creation of a safer space in an institution such as an art school in the Netherlands can be consider a reclamation of space and therefore, a compensational space. The value of the fluidity and potential of development of a safer space is echoed in a notion of heterotopia; a space that reflects and is influenced by its surroundings, yet is a compensation and in opposition of its surroundings. It is a space that is (curiously) exclusive to some, but inclusive at the same time and fundamentally deviant to its normative context.

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<sup>12</sup> I refer here again to the 2017 research paper "The Entrance Gap" by Teana Boston-Mammah. In this research paper the admission procedures are examined through notions of diversity and inclusivity.

<sup>13</sup> I refer here to the work of Fenneke Wekker and her research on 'state-supported social interventions, urban sociology, 'feelings of home and belonging', and institutional mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion' (Wekker, 2020).



## Practical research

In the case studies presented in this research, I deconstruct two interviews and reconstruct them by examining what is being said, what is not being said and what is implicated. Both interviews were conducted in Dutch. All translations are mine and are contextual to linguistic expression and geolocation. Both interviews took place in Utrecht, in 2019. The interview with interviewee 2 was part of a different research project during my internship and will be the second case study. With permission, I will use selected parts of the interview with interviewee 2 for a second case study in this research document.

Before going into the case studies, I want to acknowledge the amount of labour that went into organising these safer spaces and the effort to reflect on how these meetings took place. It is not only theoretical and intellectual labour, but also emotional labour that I wish to acknowledge. Therefore, I take no aim in presenting the interviewees' words (and thus their work) as being work of my own. I will differentiate between interviewee 1 (case study 1) and interviewee 2 (case study 2).

### **Case Study 1: A steady safer space, with teacher support**

Interviewee 1 was a fine art student when I met her in June 2019. I had gotten in contact with her through interviewee 2 and we met in Utrecht for our interview. Spread over one entire academic year, interviewee 1 has organised a safer space at HKU. This was a self-organised gathering of students with weekly meetings. The starting point of this safer space was a collaboration between interviewee 1 and an undergraduate fine art student writing their BA thesis on culture and identity. A mutual teacher introduced them, since they were both working with topics related to culture and identity. After speaking, they decided to organise a meeting about culture and identity, at HKU. The group consisted of friends and classmates; participants that would be interested to partake in a conversation about culture and identity. Interviewee 1 does not believe this initial meeting went very well. When the conversation turned to Black Pete<sup>14</sup>, people seemed to generally agree it was a problematic phenomenon. However, in discussing (a) possible solution(s) to Black Pete as well as the less generally

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<sup>14</sup> Black Pete is a controversial character connected to Sinterklaas, a Dutch annual festivity, This character is often centred at the public debate on practical displays of racism within the Netherlands. The character's key elements consist of blackface, overdrawn red lips, curly hair and golden earrings. For further reading I refer to *White Innocence* by Gloria Wekker.

discussed colonial history of the Netherlands, there was a lot of disagreement. The disagreement on “solutions” to certain problematics such as Black Pete is illustrative for the societal debate around racism and colonialism in The Netherlands. Generally, meetings consisted of similar discussions, some with more disagreements than others. When the co-organiser graduated, interviewee 1 decided the gatherings should not stop there and reached out to her teachers. She got into contact with a teacher whose expertise includes antiracism projects. Together they set up a trajectory that ran throughout the academic year 2018-2019. I will touch upon the dynamics of the student-teacher hierarchy within this safer space later on. In the interview, we spoke about the topics discussed in the group, how the institution regarded the safer space, how and why the safer space was organised and what ambitions the group has for the future. Interviewee 1 explained that group mostly consisted out of black students and students of colour. During the safer space trajectory, several topics were discussed, such as; anti-racism, Black Pete, cultural appropriation, inclusivity, exoticism and homophobia for example. In our interview, interviewee 1 mentioned that there are several topics that had not been discussed, due to (them personally) not feeling properly equipped to talk about these topics<sup>15</sup>. This is being addressed in the new trajectory for the new academic year by inviting experts like Patricia Kaersenhout for a symposium.

### *Capacity of the safer space*

Interviewee 1 illustrated that the organisation of the safer space started off by sending an invitation-email to everyone in the school. Posters were also made and both efforts incited responses. Some people contacted interviewee 1 personally, stating their interest or insecurities about participating; being insecure about not knowing what to say and/or saying the wrong thing. On her turn, the interviewee responded by explaining the notion of a safer space and empathised, while sharing her own inexperience with certain topics. While speaking on this during our interview, interviewee 1 emphasised the conflict regarding making statements while “not knowing a lot” and the possibility of hurting people with one’s “naivety”; unwittingly posing a binary opposition between “having knowledge” and “naivety”. Interviewee 1 continued to point out that this hinders making the safer space less accessible for people with “good intentions, but who do not dare” (Transcription Interview 1, 2019, 8). At the same time, interviewee 1 was approached outside of the meetings by people

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<sup>15</sup> One could argue this is a responsibility and thus neglect of the institution, rather than a personal responsibility.

she had rather not join, which, as she states, gave her a “double position” (Transcription Interview 1, 2019, 9). Being aware of this double position, she kept safety in mind. She explains:

I would want to have people with right-wing views<sup>16</sup> also join, to put it that way, to have discussions about that. But I was afraid this would threaten the safer space, because this person could have malicious intent. So it was weird to play judge on that, on who could enter and who couldn't, but you also want to protect the group. (Transcription Interview 1, 2019, 9).

In this situation, it becomes clear interviewee 1 prioritised safety; the safety of the minorities in the group, who are also minorities in the institution. When speaking on her personal take on how the safer space developed, interviewee 1 clearly stated the safer space created an opportunity to speak on things which were previously assumed things one would not speak on. Sara Ahmed argues in *On Being Included* that “Black and critical writers have shown us over generations how the experience of racism is the experience of being the problem” (Ahmed, 2012, 152). Ahmed also notes that talking about racism within an academic setting often makes the person who talks about racism, or the one “who makes noise”, the embodiment of the problem (Ahmed, 2012, 153). This response assumes a singular, individual experience of racism. Generally speaking, talking about racism as a generational as well as an individual issue is often met with a discouraging response. In a Dutch context, this individualised experience of racism is addressed in Gloria Wekker's *White Innocence*, particularly the response in conversations about racism which are often met with the rhetoric of “gelijke monniken, gelijke kappen” which she translated to “equality for all”; illustrating an unrealistic ideology (Wekker, 2016, 10). This ideology represents the principle of everyone having the same opportunities and if you do not share the positionality of another person, you did not take those chances or did not work hard enough. Thus, if one addresses racism, one is not only met with a response that invalidates the experience or reason to talk about this, one is also met with doubts about why one experiences racism and is then placed in a position of “troublemaker.” Interviewee 1 actively tried to avoid this to

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<sup>16</sup> The participants thus far can be considered left-wing. In this quote, the interviewee is referring to jarring, overtly racist remarks, which would become hurtful for some of the participants; something the safer space was created for to have a “break” from.

happen within the safer space, as a result of both personal and institutional responses to matters of racism.

Interviewee 1 considered internalised and oppressive norms when she talked about how participants also expressed feelings of recognisability in sharing experiences. She continued to address notions of learning and emotional affect of sharing experiences and perspectives, by posing questions on how to speak up against racism<sup>17</sup> and that being one of the things to learn in the safer space. There were hard conversations; people did not always initially agree on the problematics of topics such as cultural appropriation or white people saying the n-word. But, as interviewee 1 states, people also were open to change their perspective, which to her illustrates a notion of change and positive influence, “and that, I think, is the most beautiful out of my experiences [of the safer space].” (Transcription Interview 1, 2019, 7).

### *Context of the safer space*

The physical location of the group’s gathering was a space in the school; a non-classroom where the participants could sit on couches, in a (semi) circle. This was important, mentioned interviewee 1, to reduce the sense of hierarchy with regard to the teacher she was organising with. It was interviewee 1’s intent to have the teacher take a mediator-role. The teacher themselves took a more expectant role; they would only speak up if they felt the need. Interviewee 1 explains that the teacher wanted to avoid putting words in the students’ mouths. As it was “her project” as interviewee 1 put it, the teacher took a more supporting role, which resulted in a less hierarchical dynamic with interviewee 1.

As the trajectory progressed, interviewee 1 told me the group felt more and more like it was “us-against-the-world”, since “the world did not seem to agree with us, so if you would open your mouth, a lot of negativity would come up, like, just keep quiet” (Transcription Interview 1, 2019, 3). This dynamic comes back in Gloria Wekker’s *White Innocence*:

[...] the anxious Dutch *claim of innocence* and how disavowal and denial of racism may merge into what we have called *smug ignorance*: (aggressively) rejecting the possibility to know” (2014b, 24). Using the r-word in a Dutch context is like entering

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<sup>17</sup> This questioning reminds us of Sara Ahmed’s article on “a Phenomenology of Whiteness” and Eline Groen’s thesis (MA Gender Studies, July 2019) on the lack of language about whiteness in Dutch; “White Noise, a critical translation of a language gap”.

a minefield; the full force of anger and violence, including death threats, is unleashed, [...] (Wekker, 2016, 18, emphasis in original).

As mentioned earlier, using the “r-word” in Dutch context can often be met with resistance, ridicule and/or silencing, relating to how Ahmed references Fanon as slavery having “become ‘that unpleasant memory’. It is almost as if it would be impolite to bring it up” (Ahmed, 2012, 164). It is beneficial for the participants of the safer space to discover a sense of unity in the face of these circumstances, since this boosts morale and can provide (temporary) tranquility. This feeling of isolation within the institution (“us-against-the-world”) also gave the group reason to plead for more diverse teachers. Ahmed states in her blog on “Diversity as a Complaint”:

Questions can be heard as complaints when there is so much you are not supposed to question. This is how students who question what they are being taught are heard as being destructive, as if questioning is itself a form of impertinence. (Ahmed, 2017, 4)

Teachers would deflect a conversation about racism, conversations about more diverse teachers or even joining the safer space, seemingly “not in the mood” (Transcription Interview 1, 2019, 4), which illustrates a disinterest and lack of sense of responsibility. The lack of engagement in conversations about racism negates issues like racism within the institution as if this is the problem of the safer space participants and therefore their responsibility “to solve”. This rhetoric around racism as a “pragmatic problem to be solved” echoes the specific rhetoric around racism in the Netherlands. Wekker elaborates:

It is noteworthy about Dutch pragmatism, here as in other domains, that the fundamental issue, racism, is obfuscated and instead practical measures are proposed, which may take away some of the sharpest edges of a problem, but certainly do not go to the heart of it. (Wekker, 2016, 144)

The lack of interest by teachers can be read as an institutional response, corresponding with the aforementioned typical Dutch pragmatism and white innocence.

When asked if the interviewee thought it was the students’ responsibility of implementing conversations about LGBTQIA+ issues, racism and/or gender, she stated: “Actually no, but

someone has to, so if the teachers don't initiate this, we should take responsibility, I think. And we [the group] want to, so that's okay" (Transcription Interview 1, 2019, 7). Interviewee 1 expressed hoping that "what we do here stirs up the management of the school. And they'll say 'Oh if this is how they're doing that, then there must be urgency for that', but I also think we'll need to push them harder" (Transcription Interview 1, 2019, 7). There is evident ambition for activism, invoking change of and reflection on the institution. Furthermore, interviewee 1 here clearly illustrates a structural ignoring of systemic, societal issues like racism by the teachers and the institution at large, which primarily surfaces in classes. This appeared to be why the group of participants felt it was necessary to have meetings with the group more regularly, as well as to appeal to a wider audience within the institution. The ambition was to reach more people and to have meetings consistently, especially because the institution itself does not offer a safe(r) space. Interviewee 1 explains:

We get theory lessons, like art context, and we read about stuff like gentrification; socially-engaged things. But there was never a moment to talk about yourself, let alone your experiences or what you want to discuss in your work. So it was very clear that black students were not being supported enough (Transcription Interview 1, 2019, 5).

This quote shows that the group emphasises the impossibility of creating space for personal experiences in the classroom, or discussing personal experiences in regard to student work. A large element in art education is discussing "free assignments" or "free projects", especially in the Fine Arts department<sup>18</sup>. The quote is thus a testimonial to the education provided and what students are missing within that education. Interviewee 1: "I think that if one is in art school, one needs to develop a critical attitude and that should be stimulated more" (Transcription Interview 1, 2019, 6). If white teachers do not hold space in their lectures or in their classroom to have Black students and students of colour talk about their experiences, yet the students are expected to make work around these experiences, how can we expect the students to thrive when there are "universal" notions of talents on how and what their work should be how are students supposed to be graded?

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<sup>18</sup> These "free assignments" are mostly applied in the second year onwards. As a student, you get to decide what your project is about and how you will translate that in a visual product. You still check in and discuss with your teacher for feedback. This is "free" is the sense that the teacher is not giving you a guided assignment which needs to be completed in one coherent way by all students.

One of the criteria in art school is critical reflection; an important competence students are graded for. How the students are tested differs per institution. However, it would make sense for a school to encourage its students to take critical reflection up in whatever way necessary for their personal and professional development. Without critical self reflection, a student risks creating work that is (unintentionally) esoteric, uninformed or/and even harmful to others. If art students are truly pioneers<sup>19</sup>, there should be education in place to support them. In developing critical reflection as a skill, a student learns to reflect on themselves and on others, which is a skill they can use on a personal and professional level. However, critically reflecting on topics such as racism and related personal experiences seems to be actively disregarded, which illustrates a particular porosity within art education. The word porous evokes an image of a system riddled with holes or apertures, yet managing to maintain its function. By not discussing racism and related topics, apertures are perpetuated, institutional racism and white supremacy is upheld and maintains its function, resulting in an unsafe educational environment for BIPOC students. Similar (racial) porosity can be found in the diversity and inclusivity within staff. The apertures in the system cannot be fixed by temporary content or occupation, not only due to temporality, also due to the structural voids. To close one of the apertures does not fix the structural problems and does not expose nor dismantle the texture of the structure in place. As interviewee 1 puts it: “The problem [is] that if a black teacher enters the school, they could possibly feel like a loner or *the* black teacher. The beauty of inclusivity is that it could create somewhat of a comprehensiveness. So, a wholeness, so that this black teacher doesn’t feel like an exception” (Transcription Interview 1, 2019, 8). Interviewee 1 here implicitly pleads for anti-tokenism and significant or radical change in the teacher staff. Interviewee 1 defies the notion of “fixing” diversity by hiring a singular new teacher; this works on a small level of visibility, but one teacher on a staff of 65<sup>20</sup> is still insufficient (HKU, 2020, 59). What is needed is a “comprehensiveness” or significant change for a more diverse team of teachers, in order to counter the normative whiteness of the institution. In the end, this would include connecting a critical (re-)creation of the curriculum as well as the composition of the staff, which are inseparable since they inform and construct each other.

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<sup>19</sup> Creative Pioneers is a commercialised term used by Willem de Kooning Academy to describe potential students, undergraduate and alumni.

<sup>20</sup> This number is based on the amount of staff based at the HKU location of interviewee 1 in 2019, as published in the annual report of the HKU in 2020.

When asked about intersectionality, interviewee 1 stated the group had discussed the concept a couple of times. This was per example in relation to a trans\*<sup>21</sup> person that joined for a few sessions. Interviewee 1 continued to express the need for expertise on the complexity of connected problems, such as the intersection of racism and sexism, that do not necessarily apply to a personal position and the difficulty of discussing this. This would entail conversations around per example privilege and oppression. In the interview with interviewee 1 it became clear that the two interviewees have had brief contact. When exactly remains unclear, but this was sometime after the safer space organised by interviewee 2 had stopped meeting (the details will be discussed in the second case study). However brief their contact, interviewee 1 thought it remarkable to discover that strikingly similar meetings were happening at other locations of the HKU. Interviewee 1 mentioned rhizomatic thinking, as theorised by Gilles Deleuze, applied to this situation. Even though there might come an end to the meetings of the group, another group might emerge and continue the work if the underlying problems remain (Transcription Interview 1, 11); this could be interpreted as rhizomatic. Interviewee 1 continued to illustrate the possibilities of connections between different HKU locations and students and how this could ensure the future existence of safer spaces within the institution. One influential and institutional task-force that could help support this, would be the *Advies HKU werkgroep Diversiteit*<sup>22</sup>. Interviewee 1 attempted to contact this task-force, however she was not able to find any contact details. Since their agenda, influence and members remain undisclosed, this renders the task-force problematic. There is a clear lack of transparency, communication and thus action: the majority of the student body is unaware of its existence, documents are not accessible and the people in the task-force are invisible, which calls into question the validity of the task-force. It would almost seem that this diversity task-force is only functional to the extent of being able to say there is a diversity task-force, rather than actually being functional.

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<sup>21</sup> I have added an asterisk here to emphasise a broad interpretation of the notion of trans, firstly since I have no knowledge on this persons identity and/or expression, secondly to emphasise an interpretation of the notion of trans beyond the gender binary.

<sup>22</sup> The Advies HKU Werkgroep Diversiteit wrote a report, based on several questions posed by the board, with a focus on how to increase the influx of more cultural diverse students, teachers and how to decrease “blindspots” (Advies HKU Werkgroep Diversiteit, 2, 2018).



## **Case Study 2: A discontinued Safer Space due to lack of teacher support**

During their second year at HKU, interviewee 2 organised a safer space within HKU Media, a different location of HKU, which houses the (digital)media departments of the school. There was a lot of interest from fellow students for a safer space to discuss frustrations around the institution, positions of oppression, curricula, etcetera. Interviewee 2 created the opportunity to come together with various students studying at the same location and they managed to meet once a month. Interviewee 2 illustrated there was a definite sense of urgency for a safer space. Organising this space was important to interviewee 2 due to several negative experiences with the institution, which I will not further go into detail about. After three meetings of self-organising, interviewee 2 took the initiative to approach their course leader to get official recognition, which would fulfil the aspiration for support and visibility. The students had prepared (and thought it would be easiest) to send a school-wide email<sup>23</sup>, which became a priority for interviewee 2. This would allow more students to join and more importantly, the rest of the students would come to know about the existence of the safer space. The recognition of a school wide email would also implicitly acknowledge that the institution would be aware of the fact that such a space is needed and that such a space was being endorsed by (managerial members of) the institution.

### *Institutional response*

The course leader disregarded the potential of a student-organised safer space and instead asked for the participants to come to him and “confirm” their problem (Transcription Interview 2, 2019, 13). The course leader wanting the participants to come to him and “confirming a problem” can be interpreted in various ways. I will illustrate two interpretations and potential consequences. First, this approach hinders the safer space from being organised. Standard protocol is enforced, which entails that students with a problem come to the course leader. The course leader regards himself as the policy “problem-solver” and policy requires him to “know the problem” to solve it. Another interpretation and potential consequence would be that he wants to know about the “problems” being discussed in the group to oversee or supervise what is happening in the safer space, regardless of the safer space being organised let alone if he has been invited to join. However, this goes against the notion of why the safer space was organised in the first place; regardless of

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<sup>23</sup> Students do not have access to email addresses of all students school wide, therefore they would need someone in a managerial position and their permission to send this email.

whether they have a space to discuss this, students feel unsafe due to multiple factors (i.e. racism, sexism, cisgenderism). The course leader could be/embody one or more of those factors (or problems), as an individual or as part of the institution, and thus be unsafe for students to approach. It should go without saying that a hierarchical influence inquiring about participants and topics being discussed compromises the perimeters of the safety of the space and thus the presence of these participants in it. Whether the course leader would consequently attempt to solve or address the problems, is purely speculative. Nevertheless, the course leader demanding to know the individual participants and ‘problems’ in this way defeats the purpose of the space being safe. After several conversations with the course leader, which had topics such as the safer space itself and the negligence of the institution in supporting (BIPOC) students in general, the safer space was discontinued. Illustrating why they were after support through visibility from the institution, interviewee 2 tells me 20% of Utrecht inhabitants are BIPOC and 7% of the HKU’s students has a “non-western background”<sup>24</sup> (Advies HKU Werkgroep Diversiteit, HKU, 2018). Therefore, BIPOC students would already feel a notion of alienation, Othering or worse. Reading the report of the Advies HKU Werkgroep Diversiteit, the focus seems to be on diversity; it is in their title, there is an illustrative (dictionary-like) quote defining diversity on the first page of the report and the report seems to mainly argue for a diversity policy. However, a discrepancy in definitions and accountability emerges. Ahmed goes into this phenomenon when she says:

Diversity becomes something to be managed and valued as a human resource. Scholars have suggested that the managerial focus on diversity works to individuate differences and conceal the continuation of systematic inequalities within universities. [...] the word “diversity” invokes difference but does not necessarily evoke commitment to action or redistributive justice. [...] the institutional preference for the term “diversity” is a sign of the lack of commitment to change and might even allow organisations such as universities to conceal the operation of systematic inequalities. (Ahmed, 2014, 53)

Focusing on and arguing for such a diversity policy thus might not evoke the change the HKU Werkgroep aspires to. Moreover, when the discrepancies of conversations around

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<sup>24</sup> The term ‘non-western background’ contrary to i.e. the acronym BIPOC, poses white and western as the norm. I am paraphrasing the diversity committee and will only use this expression here.

diversity becomes apparent, the conversation often conveniently shifts to “inclusion” as though the words are synonymous. This is another topic interviewee 2 discussed with the course leader, related to the hiring of BIPOC guest teachers. Interviewee 2 rightfully criticised their department on the fact that a single lecture or even a small amount of lectures would not solve the issues (such as inclusion) at hand. Interviewee 2 continued to explain that the focus on the institution would be to “obtain” inclusivity and diversity from outside of the institution, rather than fix things from the inside out. The tensions around inclusion and diversity Interviewee 1 describes here, brings Sara Ahmed’s *On Being Included* to mind:

When diversity becomes a form of hospitality, perhaps the organization is the host who receives as guests those who embody diversity. Whiteness is produced as host, as that which is already in place or at home. To be welcomed is to be positioned as the one who is not at home (Ahmed, 2012, 43).

In addition to that, giving guest lectures on the subject of diversity or inclusivity would educate the students, but not the teachers. However, when it comes to accountability with regards to inclusivity, the teachers would hold more accountability of inclusivity than the students. Furthermore, this responsibility of inclusivity and its consequent education also does not lie with guest teachers. It seems, however, that the HKU would rather outsource the students education on inclusivity to a guest lecturer instead of ensuring this knowledge has a permanent residence within the institution. Instead of asking who is trying to get into the classroom and whose presence in the classroom is under constant threat of erasure or minimisation (Stewart, 2017), the focus seems to be with a capitalist continuation of injustice; it is cheaper to hire a guest lecturer than to implement (new) subjects in the curriculum and renew staff.

## **Conclusion of the analysis**

The past chapter was an analysis of the two case studies. In this chapter, I will conclude this analysis. There are certainly differences between the two case studies, such as location, participants, teachers, managerial influence and content. All of these issues are influential to the organisation and endurance of a safer space.

The previous pages contain a close reading juxtaposed to intersectional analysis of the interviews about the case studies that took place at HKU. In this analysis, it became apparent how the HKU is a generally white, male dominated, heteropatriarchal space. The hegemony of these elements that functions outside as well as inside the institution ensures the lack of room for change. However, there is subversiveness in a student initiative to create a space within this hegemonic entity. The queerness of creating something which subverts the norms that are oppressive to BIPOC student bodies is both powerful and empowering. It speaks of great nerve, determination and persistence to initiate such a project and to continue resisting these norms for the survival of the safer space. In this, we can recognise the notion of *praxis* that Freire spoke of. Whether or not a safer space is continued for a longer period of time hardly tells us about its value. Even though it is not necessarily the goal here to conflate the safer spaces of the case studies, and even though one could argue the case studies took place in close proximity to one another, it is quite remarkable how they had their own trajectories.

### ***Safety***

Among organisers as well as participants, the enthusiasm and devotion to create a safer space is evident. For a safer space to exist, for however long it might go on, it needs organisers and participants and would not exist nor continue without them. Both cases also show that safety is a priority. As mentioned earlier on, safety in a safer space is always in flux and under negotiation since not every-body can be safe in a safer space, always. This is why the term 'safer space' is used throughout this thesis. The notion of safety was held in such high regard in case study 1, that there was a sense of having a “double position” for the organiser. In this situation, interviewee 1 prioritised the safety of minority students in the institution, minority students that are also part of minority groups outside of the institution. In case study 2, the notion of safety played a similar, yet different role. There was a similar intent to keep minority students in the safer space safe. Next, in an attempts to gain exposure and institutional recognition to ensure the possibility of more people to join, a threatening

situation ensued which resulted in a breach of safety and the consequent discontinuation of the group.

### *Resonance*

It has become clear that in both safer spaces, personal experiences were shared between participants. This created a feeling of connectivity and collectivity. For a safer space to be continued, there is a need for resonance and this was evident in both case studies. In case study 1, this primarily came down to shared experiences on institutional racism. This links on a theoretical level with Sara Ahmed's 'Phenomenology of Whiteness' and *On being Included*, as well as *White Innocence* by Gloria Wekker. Painfully, both interviewees and their subsequent safer spaces dealt with the notion of being considered "the problem". The notion of "being the problem" or "becoming the problem" when speaking (up) about racism emerged in case study 1 on the basis of speaking about racism whilst this is experienced as "something you do not speak about". Specifically within an institutional white academic setting, the person who talks about racism becomes the embodiment of the problem, a notion that extended to the existence of the safer space as a group. In the Dutch context, mentioning the word racism, triggers reactions that goes as far as aggressiveness and violence. There is a claim of innocence through the rejection of accountability and responsibility through the subsequent denial of racism. Where institutional whiteness gets reproduced as a positive residence, non-white bodies will be othered, rendered uncomfortable or worse. This notion of othering, or deviance, echos the principle of a heterotopia of deviance, as well as the principle of in- and exclusion.

### *Hierarchical student/teacher relation*

The hierarchical student/teacher relation in the case studies diverges. In case study 1, we can see a teacher in a supporting role. One that is supportive through facilitating exposure, but also by making their knowledge available when needed, estimated by the teacher themselves. We can clearly see a positive influence of this particular teacher in this case study. In case study 2, however, the influence of a teacher position in relation to the organising student of the safer space played out differently. This particular teacher, or rather, course leader, inquired about the participants and topics being discussed in the safer space. This inquiry happened upon the organiser seeking institutional recognition in an effort to maximise for exposure. The information the course leader asked for, if this were to be shared, would

compromise the safety perimeters of the safer space and thus its participants. Considering the fact that BIPOC students felt unsafe and unsupported in their previous (personal) efforts towards change or asks for help at their school, the standard, individualist response from the course leader had already proven not to work. This showed that their group effort was not taken seriously, and as a consequence of this, the safer space of case study 1 was discontinued.

### *Critical and Queer pedagogy*

As previously mentioned, the transformation of an oppressed reality is possible through what Freire calls 'praxis'. Praxis is the reflection and action necessary in order for transformation to occur and is part of what is called Critical Pedagogy. Queer Pedagogy allows us to be critical towards normativities at play, specifically within an institution. We cannot see the institution as a monolithic entity, and thus we have to look at how norms are maintained by elements in the institution; staff, teachers, students and also curricula. Both safer spaces can be seen as an effort to critically reflect on the institution and a consequent action to create a safer space. Fundamental conversational topics in both groups involved institutional norms, such as whiteness, cisgenderism and racism and how these safer spaces are an intervention to these norms. In that sense, both safer spaces were not unlike the critical, alternative and potentially transformative character of a heterotopia.

### *Institutional deflection*

Both safer spaces have dealt with a form of deflection from the institution, or institutional deflection. Even though safer space 1 has been supported by one singular teacher, other teachers were negligent to join when they were (personally) invited by participants. There never seemed to be a good moment for them to join, even though the safer space was continued for a year. This is a deflective response from the institution in which we can see the teachers as its representatives. In case study 2, a similar form of institutional deflection is found in the response of the course leader, who also represents the institution. The attempt to dissolve the safer space approaches the safer space as having the sole purpose of registering a pile of complaints which then needs to be solved. This negates and erases the experiences of BIPOC students and their continuous attempts to address this in a way that is structural and institution-wide and takes notice of both individual as well as shared or collective experiences. What can also be considered institutional deflection is the anonymity of the

Advies HKU Werkgroep Diversiteit. With its anonymity and the inaccessibility of produced documents, it would seem the task-force is functional to the extent it merely exists. The task-force and course leader are both representative of the institution. It is painful to have to come to the conclusion that in general, the HKU as an institution nor its staff has shown proper interest or care in listening to their BIPOC students' experiences, wants and needs.

## Concluding statements

It has not been the intention of this work to produce a guide on how to expand western art education, nor is it possible to oversee the entire educational landscape from a single perspective. In terms of methodology, a qualitative accumulation of data or interviews is of particular value, since qualitative data will allow a deeper analysis of norms and values at hand and makes space for detailed personal experiences.

This has been a project to illustrate the efforts of students to improve their education through the creation of what can be considered a heterotopia, and to illustrate the problematic dynamics that emerge through the creation of safer spaces in and around the HKU. These dynamics do not necessarily have to emerge structurally to acknowledge that structurally, there are problematic dynamics. These problematics are not necessarily dependent on the amount of safer spaces, or the fact that they are being organised or not. The safer spaces that are negotiating these dynamics are at the front lines of showing a structural institutional problem as well as why (BIPOC) students could benefit from a safer space.

I have argued that safer spaces have queer as well as critical pedagogical value, when applied to normative art education. This manifests in how the HKU is shaped, and how it behaves toward subversive acts such as the organisation of safer spaces by the interviewees. This pedagogical value is in line with heterotopian principles and becomes evident through the sharing of “deviant” experiences of the participants, the conditions on which one can join or not and the principle of creating a space of comfort and safety, of compensation. Key to the organisation of these heterotopian safer spaces is an intrinsic discomfort with how the institution is designed and shaped (or who it is designed for and shaped towards).

Considering influences of societal norms and keeping in mind the ever-contextual, ever-situated arrangement of its principles, these case studies cannot in any way be viewed as a blueprint for how safer spaces can be designed. However, it should be explicitly mentioned that students and their knowledges cannot go unheard, unseen and disregarded when it comes to (research on) how learning is approached. The efforts, energy and experience of students to get together and express themselves needs to be acknowledged and celebrated. It is



important to remember that these efforts are taken up by students alongside their regular study programme, private lives and possible side-jobs

Taking into account that art education cannot be considered a monolith, further research should be taken up with regard to the development of curricula in relation to the demographic of the staff and students over the years and how that development is facilitated by the institution. This research can be broadened towards how research and policy on institutional racism and queermisia can be implemented in higher (art) education. This research extends to various and different art schools in the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, hardly any research exists regarding institutional whiteness, let alone on the effects of institutional whiteness on (art) education. This leaves whiteness undiscussed in educational discourse and perpetuated as the (unspoken) norm. Similarly, research on LGBTQIA+ developments in educational environments should be approached intersectionally. In terms of research on the development of all levels of education, there should additional research as well as participation in this research of those whose voices are systemically not heard or wilfully ignored. Research on safer spaces within higher education, specifically in the Netherlands, the uses and advantages of safer spaces, spectrums of safer spaces and so on is rare and holds major potential for further research.

To conclude, it is my honest perspective that the creation of safer spaces should be encouraged, as well as and not limited to sharing (personal) experiences of institutional racism, cisgenderism, heteropatriarchy and homo- and transmisia. The most important take away should be to learn from safer spaces and their participants, to do better.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I've adopted the notion of safer spaces from the organisers of Gender Bending Queer Party, among others, whom have discussed this notion in the podcast 'Ongehoord'. I'll further elaborate on this in the theoretical framework of this document.

<sup>2</sup> HKU stands for Hogeschool voor de Kunsten Utrecht, this is translated to School of the Arts Utrecht. I will use the acronym HKU from here on out through this document.

<sup>3</sup> I have to thank Nychenda Antonia Adela Fecunda for inspiring me with the notion of heterotopias by Michel Foucault, through her thesis "Reinventing Realness: An Oral Ethnohistorical Study of Gender Practices in the Dutch Ballroom Scene", Erasmus University College, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> This acronym stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Two-Spirit. The acronym as well as the plus sign are used here to ensure inclusivity toward other non-normative gender identities, sexualities and expressions. The usage of this acronym is in no way an attempt to speak for others or to conflate gender identity with sexual orientation or sexuality. I use this acronym also for historical events where other authors might not. This is to consciously refuse normative, racist, homonormative telling of (queer) history.

<sup>5</sup> Homomisia means hate towards a person based on their sexual orientation. I use misia rather than phobia, since misia entails prejudice and power, rather than an extreme or irrational fear.

<sup>6</sup> This acronym stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour.

<sup>7</sup> Othered comes from the verb Othering, a notion of a binary opposition between the "Self" en the "Other". The *other* or *othered* is used denote the stranger, minority or the deviant to the norm.

<sup>8</sup> This was a collaborative effort of an anonymous activist group called Resist Their Reignbow and political party Rotterdam Bij1.

<sup>9</sup> This phenomenon is also known as pinkwashing. For more information on this phenomenon, I refer to S. Schulmans' 2011 article "Israel and 'pinkwashing'" in the NY Times, which coined the term.

<sup>10</sup> The notion of "coming out" creates a binary, contrary to the alternative of being "locked in", which invalidates a sexuality if not made "public".

<sup>11</sup> Cammarota, J. Critical Pedagogy: Learning from Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, April 10th, 2012 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JRiL7YSzMjg>>

<sup>12</sup> I refer here again to the 2017 research paper "The Entrance Gap" by Teana Boston-Mammah. In this research paper the admission procedures are examined through notions of diversity and inclusivity.

<sup>13</sup> I refer here to the work of Fenneke Wekker and her research on 'state-supported social interventions, urban sociology, 'feelings of home and belonging', and institutional mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion' (Wekker, 2020).

<sup>14</sup> Black Pete is a controversial character connected to Sinterklaas, a Dutch annual festivity, This character is often centred at the public debate on practical displays of racism within the Netherlands. The character's key elements consist of blackface, overdrawn red lips, curly hair and golden earrings. For further reading I refer to White Innocence by Gloria Wekker.

<sup>15</sup> One could argue this is a responsibility and thus neglect of the institution, rather than a personal responsibility.

<sup>16</sup> The participants thus far can be considered left-wing. In this quote, the interviewee is referring to jarring, overtly racist remarks, which would become hurtful for some of the participants; something the safer space was created for to have a "break" from.

<sup>17</sup> This questioning reminds us of Sara Ahmed's article on "a Phenomenology of Whiteness" and Eline Groen's thesis (MA Gender Studies, July 2019) on the lack of language about whiteness in Dutch; "White Noise, a critical translation of a language gap".

<sup>18</sup> These “free assignments” are mostly applied in the second year onwards. As a student, you get to decide what your project is about and how you will translate that in a visual product. You still check in and discuss with your teacher for feedback. This is “free” is the sense that the teacher is not giving you a guided assignment which needs to be completed in one coherent way by all students.

<sup>19</sup> Creative Pioneers is a commercialised term used by Willem de Kooning Academy to describe potential students, undergraduate and alumni.

<sup>20</sup> This number is based on the amount of staff based at the HKU location of interviewee 1 in 2019, as published in the annual report of the HKU in 2020.

<sup>21</sup> I have added an asterix here to emphasise a broad interpretation of the notion of trans, firstly since I have no knowledge on this persons identity and/or expression, secondly to emphasise an interpretation of the notion of trans beyond the gender binary.

<sup>22</sup> The Advies HKU Werkgroep Diversiteit wrote a report, based on several questions posed by the board, with a focus on how to increase the influx of more cultural diverse students, teachers and how to decrease “blindspots” (Advies HKU Werkgroep Diversiteit, 2, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> Students do not have access to email addresses of all students school wide, therefore they would need someone in a managerial position and their permission to send this email.

<sup>24</sup> The term ‘non-western background’ contrary to i.e. the acronym BIPOC, poses white and western as the norm. I am paraphrasing the diversity committee and will only use this expression here.

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# Appendices

## Transcription Interview 1

20<sup>th</sup> June 2019

M: We zitten blijkbaar bij Domplein, dat wist ik niet. Maar ja, dus jij hebt een symposium georganiseerd, vanuit een situatie.

Interviewee 1: Ja, ja dat gaat in september plaats vinden en we hebben een gastspreker, Patricia Kaersenhout uitgenodigd. Zij is ook veel bezig met die topic van racisme, maar ook feminisme, dus daar zit ook die intersectionaliteit in. Ja hoe we dat willen doen is dat ze eerst gaat praten over haar werk eigenlijk en over haar misschien haar eigen ervaringen en dan daarna willen we soort van korte workshops geven. Hoe we die workshops gaan doen is nog een beetje een puzzel, maar het moet er een beetje uitzien alsof je zelf iets met een groepje moet gaan doen, echt praktisch iets moet doen over een onderwerp, zodat je dat leert te begrijpen op die manier. Een docent van mij had een voorstel, die had het over de privilege-walk, dat is zo'n... ken je dat?

M: dat is zo'n oefening die je ook in de documentaire van Sunny Bergman kwam, geloof ik

Interviewee 1: Ohja, Sunny Bergman.

M: Dat je een stap naar voren doet, of dat er een vraag wordt gesteld en dat je een stap naar voren doet

Interviewee 1: Ja precies en daarna moet je allemaal gaan rennen, en dan zo van ohja, dus de mensen die meer stappen naar voor hebben komen natuurlijk eerder bij de finish line.

M: Juist

Interviewee 1: en dat is om dan een beetje een idee te krijgen. Het zijn best wel simpele dingen, maar soms is het de simpliciteit die iets doet aan knopen denk ik. Dus op die manier willen we een beetje het onderwerp aankaarten. Maar het dus ook een beetje luchtig houden, want het is wel zwaar. Dat heb ik wel gemerkt in alle meetings die we hebben gehad in de safe space.

(01:49)

Interviewee 1: Ja, als je topics gaat hebben, mensen worden heel emotioneel, boos, onbegrepen en sommige mensen hun referentiekader wordt helemaal op geschud en ze begrijpen er niets meer van, en dan worden ze boos. Waardoor word je daar nou weer boos, er zijn ergere dingen in de wereld en... Ja dat was ook een dingetje.

M: Dat was een ding in de safe space?

Interviewee 1: Ja

M: Want hoe zijn die safe space, hoe zijn die ontstaan?

Interviewee 1: Die zijn ongeveer vorige jaar, deed een meisje ook haar thesis over cultuur en identiteit en toen kwam ik met haar in gesprek. Een docent had ons bij elkaar gedaan, want ik was iets met die topic bezig in mijn eigen project. En toen raakte we aan de praat en was het zo van wow ja, inderdaad, dit is inderdaad een probleem en misschien moeten we gaan organiseren en even een dagje bijeenkomen. Toen zei ze ja ik ken wel meer mensen die daar wel over willen praten. Dus toen hebben we dat een beetje losjes zo, met vrienden, klasgenoten, wat mensen bij elkaar gesprokkeld. En dat gesprek ging niet goed. We gingen over zwarte piet praten. Iedereen was min of meer eens dat het niet kan, maar iedereen had een ander idee over hoe het opgelost moest worden, toen ging het helemaal over koloniaal verleden, waar



mensen niet over eens waren. Een vond dat slavernij lang geleden was dus het maakt niet meer uit en de ander... Weet je wel, dan krijg je zo'n gesprek. Dus toen was het een beetje daar gestopt en toen. Nou ja, dat meisje was al afgestudeerd waarmee ik dat deed, en toen bleef ik alleen over. En toen dacht ik van ja, dit moet niet hier stoppen, dus toen dacht ik misschien moet ik zeg iets gaan doen. Dus toen heb ik een mail gestuurd naar mijn docente(n), van hey ik wil dit doen, maar ik weet niet precies hoe en toen heeft ze mij een e-mailadres gegeven van [naam docent], en zij is docent bij ons op school en die werkt al 15 jaar aan antiracisme projecten enzo. Dus toen ben ik samen met haar dit gaan organiseren, hebben we emails en posters gemaakt en mensen uitgenodigd. En zo is dat een beetje ontstaan.

M: En was dat binnen de HKU? Want die eerste was dus...

Interviewee 1: Dat was ook binnen de HKU. Zij zat ook op dezelfde opleiding, maar een ander jaar. En werkte binnen haar kunstprojecten over die topics.

M: En die allereerste meeting, die dus niet helemaal goed ging, dat was ook binnen de HKU?

Interviewee 1: Ja.

M: En zodoende zijn jullie een soort traject in gegaan?

Interviewee 1: ja

M: Wat voor mensen kwamen naar die safe space?

Interviewee 1: Verschillende mensen. Er kwamen veel, waren wel wat mensen van kleur, vooral Antillianen, omdat ja die zitten ook vooral op onze school. Die komen... Die worden geadviseerd om van Curaçao hierheen te komen omdat daar geen academies zijn. Dus de meeste Zwarte mensen zijn zeg maar van de Antillen. Er was een transgender meisje een keer gekomen, en ja wat jongens en meisjes.

M: Van allemaal verschillende achtergronden?

Interviewee 1: Ja allemaal verschillende, docentenopleiding, wel vooral van beeldende kunst wel, we zitten allemaal op onze eigen locatie, in onze eigen bubbeltje

M: Welke locatie is dat?

Interviewee 1: het Pastoefabriek is het

M: Oh daar ben ik nog niet geweest

(05:33)

Interviewee 1: Ja het is echt alleen beeldende kunst en docenten opleiding, volgens mij

M: Waren er ook docenten bij?

Interviewee 1: Er was dus 1 docent, [naam docent]

M: [naam docent]

Interviewee 1: Ja, de andere docenten hadden nooit tijd, om het zo te zeggen

M: Die zijn dus wel benaderd om eventueel aan te schuiven.

Interviewee 1: Ja, die zeiden dan nee ik moet weg. Altijd wel heel geïnteresseerd zo van goed dat je dat doet, maar ik heb geen tijd. Het is wel een beetje irritaties ofzo, maar ja. [naam docent] die wilde ook heel graag dat docenten meer betrokken zijn bij dit, maar komt nog wel.

M: Wat was haar rol precies in de safe space?

Interviewee 1: Nou eerst zou ik graag dat zij soort van mediator zou zijn, maar uiteindelijk was ze gewoon, was dan equal, dus het was niet een soort docent-student hiërarchie, was gewoon iedereen zat aan tafel en we hadden een discussie (06:31) was wel fijn, want het werkte heel goed

M: Dat er geen hiërarchie was?

Interviewee 1: Ja, ja dat werkte heel goed

[We were interrupted by a man sitting behind interviewee 1, asking us to be more quiet, due to his concentration. We acknowledged his request and continued]

M: ik ben even helemaal uit de zone

M: Hoe kreeg je het voor elkaar om die niet-hiërarchie te hebben? Is dat een bewuste... Is dat bewust benoemd?

Interviewee 1: Nee ik denk dat dat vrij natuurlijk is ontstaan, dat is niet echt besloten. Ik had eigenlijk haar een soort rol toegewezen als mediator, dus dan was wel een soort hiërarchie geweest, maar zij nam zelf gewoon die rol aan als, als een van ons, om het zo te zeggen. Ja ik weet niet. Het was wel dat zij in ieder geval wel duidelijk meer kennis had erover, maar ik merkte dat ze niet graag de woorden in onze mond wou stoppen, dus ik zag soms wel dat zij zich wel soms inhield om te kijken, volgens mij was het voor haar ook een soort sociaal experiment om te zien hoe studenten hiermee omgaan. Maar zij promoot heel graag die grassroots bewegingen en ja we hebben hier 1 jaar elke woensdag aan gewerkt. Dus dat is wel, ik wil het wel voortzetten, maar ik weet niet. Het is wel heel vermoeiend geweest.

(08:13)

M: Vermoeiend op wat voor manier?

Interviewee 1: Het eiste heel veel energie van je. Want je zit dan elke woensdag zo over hele moeilijke dingen te praten. Die mij heel erg persoonlijk raken, eigenlijk. En iedereen praat over zijn eigen ervaringen, wat mooi is, maar ook pijnlijk. En ja, als je dan ook nog niet de support van andere docenten of dit soort nare dingen krijgt... Er was ook een ander incident waarin mijn poster steeds van de muur werd gehaald. Elke keer, het was 3 keer gebeurd dat ik posters all over the school had opgehangen en elke keer waren ze meteen weggehaald.

M: Waren dat de anti zwarte piet posters waar je het net over had?

Interviewee 1: Ja, ja, ja. Dus dat was duidelijk een soort aanval op de situatie. We zijn er niet achter gekomen wie het heeft gedaan, maar dat was dus eigenlijk een soort, ja, vind ik schending van je vrijheid van meningsuiting maar ook eng. Weet je er is iemand die echt, nou, wat zegt dat? Het is een beetje geniepig? Dus ik voel me ook heel erg dat iemand op ons zat te kijken ofzo, van weet ik veel. Want ja, we waren ook met een vrij kleine groep, ik denk dat we met 10 mensen waren ongeveer. Ja.

(09:34)

M: Heb je het idee dat juist door die safe space en juist door het kunnen bespreken van bepaalde dingen, de space daar buiten meer onveilig werd?

Interviewee 1: Ja. Het werd ineens als het wij tegen de wereld was ofzo. En dan was, de wereld was het niet met ons eens, dus als jij je mond opentrekt dat daar opeens heel veel negativiteit op af komt. Van blijf maar stil. Ga het er maar niet over hebben. Vandaar dat we ook dus meer diverse docenten willen hebben, want er zijn ook docenten die dat de hele tijd weg wuiven. Van oh, ik heb hier zelf geen zin in ofzo.

M: Heb je het idee dat er een verdere reactie is op het feit dat deze safe space er is geweest het afgelopen jaar? Vanuit docenten of vanuit management of..?

Interviewee 1: Ehm. Wat bedoel je daarmee?

M: Nou ja, Je zegt van we willen diversere docenten, is dat een statement geweest bijvoorbeeld die jullie als safe space hebben geprobeerd te maken?

Interviewee 1: Ja

M: Op wat voor manier hebben jullie dat gedaan?

Interviewee 1: Ik heb dat toen, dat hebben we besproken dat we dat wouden, dus toen ben ik naar de studieleider gegaan, toen heb ik het aangekaart en [hij] zei ja ik ben bewust dat we een blanke school zijn en toen heeft hij gezegd dat hij het geprobeerd heeft om zwarte docenten aan te nemen of als guest teacher te hebben en dat er vanuit de zwarte kunstenaars een soort tegenreactie is geweest dat zij dus niet de zwarte docent willen zijn. Omdat ze misschien uit eigen ervaring merkte dat dat niet goed werkte voor hen. Van beide kanten is dat zoeken zei hij. Wat ik wel kan begrijpen. Dus ja dat is een beetje de situatie.

M: Oeh, ingewikkeld zeg. Is dat het enige wat je besproken hebt met je studieleider of zijn er andere dingen ook nog geweest die zijn voortgekomen uit de safe space?

Interviewee 1: Voor verandering in de school bedoel je?

M: Bijvoorbeeld.

Interviewee 1: Ja, we wouden sowieso dit een regulier ding werd, dat safe space moet eigenlijk naar een groter publiek toe. Dus toen zeg maar, de eerste stap is dus dat symposium, maar we willen dat iets gereguleerd hebben en ook toegankelijker voor meer mensen. Maar de vormgeving daarvan is altijd lastig, want je kan niet mensen forceren om hiernaar toe te komen of dat dat moet en ik zei...Of nou ja, misschien wel, maar ja. In ieder geval ja. Er zijn mensen die proberen. [naam docent] die probeert heel erg haar best om dat aan te wakkeren, maar het is heel erg een eenmansstrijd lijkt wel. En dat is iets wat met een groep gedaan moet worden, dat is altijd zo geweest. Maar dan moet je bondgenoten hebben en die zijn lastig te vinden. Omdat zoals ik al zei, in die safe space ook veel strijd is ofzo dus dat organiseren is vrij lastig, omdat je niet altijd op een lijn zit.

M: Dus die organisatorische taken komen dan vooralsnog eigenlijk vooral bij jou te liggen?

(12:44)

Interviewee 1: Ja

Of heb je wel het idee dat je dat deelt met [naam docent]?

Interviewee 1: Ik deel dat wel met [naam docent], maar het is wel een beetje...

M: Er zit wel een verdeeldheid in?

Interviewee 1: Er zit ook een verdeeldheid in, want zij is ook nog gewoon aan het werk. Ze heeft ook andere dingen te doen en ik hoop dus... Dat is wel, ja...

M: Heb je het idee dat daar nog een verschil in zit, in termen van, omdat zij docent is, komen er bepaalde taken bij jou als student bijvoorbeeld?

Interviewee 1: Niet per se. Ik denk... Ja op zich wel, want het was wel mijn project om zo te zeggen en zij is dan meer een ondersteuning daarin. Maar als ik hulp nodig heb, dan staat ze er wel voor klaar, maar ja. Ik weet niet of dat door een hiërarchie is per se. I don't know.

M: Voelt het alsof je meer met haar op gelijke voet staat dan dat ze je docent is?

Interviewee 1: Als het aankomt bij dit soort dingen wel, ja.

M: Ik ga schaamteloos even mn laptop erbij pakken, want ik had nog meer vragen, waarvan ik zeker weet dat je er al een hele hoop beantwoord hebt. Op een gegeven moment weet ik het ook niet meer. Wat betekent die safe space voor jou?

Interviewee 1: Ja voor mij betekent het eigenlijk eindelijk een moment om over iets te praten wat je altijd voor je moest houden, internalised. En ik denk (14:28) dat dat wel iets moois is geweest omdat het niet iets kwaadaardigs is wat binnen in moet zitten, dat dat dan met andere mensen gedeeld kan worden, die door hetzelfde heen gaan. Dus dan is het eigenlijk een mogelijkheid om te groeien ervan. Ja dat is ook vaak iets wat is teruggekomen wat ik hoorde van andere mensen is dat ze zeiden van ja ik heb altijd het idee dat ik de enige was die dit moest en dan zie ik dit en dan weet ik niet hoe ik daarmee om moet gaan en dan hoor je al die verhalen die best wel met elkaar overeenkomen en dat vond ik dus heel mooi aan die safe space, eigenlijk een soort mushy mushy [laughter]. Dat vond ik de positieve kant eraan, dat het mensen hielp. En ook mezelf, dat ik ook leer over anderen en andere denkwijze. En ook om je eigen manier van, om jezelf beter te kunnen articuleren in z'n situatie want vaak is het allemaal emotioneel. Dus als je daarover gaat praten, hoe praat je daarover? Dat was denk ik de kern van de groep, dat je leert praten over dit soort dingen.

M: Interessant. Het is misschien een beetje herhalende vraag, maar wat betekende het om die safe space te creëren? Zowel voor jou als bijvoorbeeld voor anderen als bijvoorbeeld de HKU? Natuurlijk wat je zelf denkt dat...

(16:13)

Interviewee 1: Ja, ehm. Ik denk een optie te bieden die de school niet bood. Het was wel dat we theorieles krijgen en dan heb je art and context waar we wel, ja, teksten kunnen lezen over weet ik veel gentrification of zo, dat soort dingen, sociaal geëngageerde dingen, maar er was niet echt een moment dat je zelf echt je, over jezelf kan praten of je eigen ervaring of binnen je werk als je daarover wilt praten, het was dus heel duidelijk dat zwarte studenten op school niet goed genoeg ondersteunt werden. Dus we wilde eigenlijk zoiets bieden, wat niet door de school geboden werd. En nu hopen we eigenlijk dat de school dat gaat bieden, door ons. Dat dat een beetje zo, een beetje aangewakkerd wordt.

M: Dus eigenlijk is het doel daarin om die safe space dusdanig regulier te maken dat echt een onderdeel wordt van het curriculum.

Interviewee 1: Ja

M: Ik ben echt in awe van jullie. Nog een keer voor de duidelijkheid waar werd die safe space precies georganiseerd?

Interviewee 1: We hebben een woonkamer, dat heet loopskamer,

M: Cute

Interviewee 1: Hele relaxte setting, gewoon op de bank en ja daar zaten we dan

M: En dat was wel in de locatie van de

Interviewee 1: Ja het was wel in de school, maar het was wel een relaxte ruimte, dat hielp ook heel erg denk ik. Niet dat in je in een klaslokaal zit en ook zo'n hiërarchie hebt natuurlijk, van docent student, maar gewoon in een cirkel.

M: Was dat een bewuste keuze ook?

Interviewee 1: Jazeker

M: Nice. Ja mijn volgende vragen waren dus waarom daar en niet ergens anders, maar ook dat heb je meteen toegelicht, super chill. Dit heb je eigenlijk al verteld, dat was voordat we de recording aanzette. Wanneer werd de safe space precies georganiseerd en waarom toen? Kun je dat nog een keer vertellen

Interviewee 1: Ja dat was dus met dat meisje die haar thesis schreef over identiteit en vanuit dat gesprek, want zij interviewde mij voor haar thesis en vanuit dat gesprek kwamen we bij het onderwerp zwarte piet terecht. En toen merkte we dat er inderdaad vanuit de school heel weinig hierover wordt gepraat, terwijl ik vind dat als je een kunstopleiding doet, dan moet je een kritische houding hebben en dat moet sterker gestimuleerd worden. Dus vanuit die houding wouden we dus die groep organiseren omdat mogelijkheid te bieden.

M: Cool. Ja toen kwam natuurlijk dat eerste gesprek, die eerste safe space toen studeerde dat meisje af en ben jij het zelf gaan organiseren samen met [naam docent]?

(19:35)

M: Aaah zo cool, love de onderneming. Hebben jullie het ook safe space genoemd trouwens? Zo noem ik het steeds nu?

Interviewee 1: Nee nee, ja, ja, sorry. We hebben het aangeboden als safe space inderdaad, dus daarom ook dat we [naam docent] als mediator wouden, dus we hadden ook vanaf het begin bedacht om mantra's te hebben als het uit de hand zou lopen, om het kalm te houden. Maar dat leek een beetje te schools uiteindelijk, om mantra's te doen

M: Wat voor mantra's zouden dat zijn?

Interviewee 1: Ja, ik weet het niet meer, het waren een paar zinnnetjes ofzo. Maar het gesprek, het liep altijd heel natuurlijk dus om dan ineens zo'n mantra te roepen of ineens dat iemand moet zeggen 'hey stop met praten' dat voelde niet goed. Dus alles ging gewoon dan iedereen op z'n gemak kon praten en als het escaleert, dan moet het escaleren, maar kan iedereen elkaar wel aan van okay jongens, kom, rustig. Maar ja, dat vond ik juist wel goed dat mensen boos werden want dat laat dan zien dat het wel echt [een], iets is dat erg is toch.

M: Misschien een brutale vraag, maar wat waren de punten waarop het escaleerde? Waren dat steeds dezelfde punten, waren dat heel veel verschillende punten?

Interviewee 1: Ja het ging vaak over cultural appropriation, sommige mensen vonden dat onzin en zo van ja wat maakt dat uit als iemand zijn haar vlecht op zo'n manier of wat maakt het uit als je the n-wordt zegt als je blank bent enzo. En dat waren moeilijke gesprekken om die personen ook te overtuigen waarom dit en dat. Maar daar zijn wel goeie antwoorden uitgekomen, goeie..., vind ik, dat mensen van blik zijn veranderd. Dus er is wel verandering geweest en het heeft wel invloed gehad. En dat vind ik wel het mooiste aan mijn ervaringen hier.

M: Kun je een voorbeeld geven van wat je zelf geleerd hebt? Of wat inzichten zijn geweest die je zelf had? Als je dat wilt delen uiteraard?

Interviewee 1: Ik heb geleerd dat ik wel een hele vaste eigen visie had. En dat ik dacht dat dit de enige manier was en dat dit de... zeg maar alles wat ik over racisme weet en mijn eigen ervaring dat staat vast. Dus als iemand anders daarbinnen kwam met het tegenovergestelde dan stond ik daar niet voor open. En ja, toen begon iemand over left fascism, en ik vond dat een beetje lastige term want dat vind ik een beetje hetzelfde als reversed racism, maar ik begreep wel waar dat vandaan kwam. Dat je dus heel erg zo met je

eigen doctrine zit en dat dat vast staat en als iets ook maar anders is dan is dat niet okay. Dus toen heb ik wel, dat was wel een spiegel voor mezelf, om te weten... gewoon om er bewust over te zijn, ik weet niet of dat per se veranderd hoeft te worden, want je mening is je mening. Maar wel dat je bewust bent dat je net zo koppig kan zijn als die persoon. Dus dat.

M: Ondanks dat jouw ervaringen daarin natuurlijk volledig valide zijn, wat iemand anders daar dan ook van vindt toch?

Interviewee 1: Ja, ja, nee, sowieso.

M: Heel goed. My god, je hebt gewoon al mijn vragen in een keer al beantwoord dat had ik helemaal niet verwacht. Ik had ook het idee van ohja dan trekken we een uur uit en dat moet dan wel genoeg zijn en we zitten nu op 25 minuten haha. Zijn er nog dingen waar, die je ambieert? Voor deze safe space? Want jullie willen het regulierder gaan doen, heb je het idee dat daar ook ruimte voor is?

Interviewee 1: Ja, ik hoop echt dat, want ik studeer volgend jaar af dus ik hoop dat het blijft bestaan als ik weg ben. Wat ik wil is dat het blijft bestaan. En dat dat ook vanuit de docenten meer aangewakkerd wordt en dat er dus meer diversiteit op school komt. Ja. We hebben we gastdocenten vaak en toen hebben we bijvoorbeeld de kunstenaars [Artists name] gekregen, zij, haar werk gaat heel erg over LGBT en dat soort onderwerpen, maar zo'n gesprek met haar is heel verfrissend. Dus dan denk ik van, zo iemand moet vast op school zijn. Dus ik hoop heel erg dat wat wij hier doen, dat dat iets aanwakkert bij [de] leiding[en] van de school. En zeggen oh ja, als zij dat nu zo doen, dan misschien is daar wel nood voor. Maar ik denk dat wij ook wel wat harder moeten duwen (24:43) tegen hun toe.

M: Vind je dat die verantwoordelijkheid bij de studenten ligt?

Interviewee 1: Nee, eigenlijk niet, maar iemand moet het doen, dus het komt niet van de docenten dus dan moeten wij verantwoordelijkheid nemen, denk ik. En we willen dat doen, dus dat is okay.

M: Die fire is er, die ambitie?

Interviewee 1: Ja, ja.

M: Ik ga een hele vervelende vraag stellen. Wat is volgens jou het verschil tussen diversiteit en inclusiviteit?

Interviewee 1: Nou. Ik denk dat als je kijkt naar diversiteit vind ik dat dat wel meer kwaliteit levert aan de school, omdat daar meer, in diversiteit bedoel ik meer verschillende mensen toch, simple as that. Inclusiviteit in die zin is dat mensen zich allemaal gelijk voelen binnen die school. Zoals ik al eerder zei met het probleem dat er dan een zwarte docent komt op school, die zal zich misschien ook als een loner voelen of als dé zwarte docent. Het mooie zou zijn als daar dus een soort geheel is, die inclusiviteit. Dus dat het allemaal gelijk is en hij of zij zich niet als een uitzondering voelt.

(26:02)

Dus dat is weer een nieuw probleem dat aangewakkerd kan worden op het moment dat we dus een diversere school hebben. Maar ik vind, ja, er zijn dus heel veel verschillende culturen op onze school. We hebben mensen van heel, we zijn, of ze willen zich graag presenteren als een internationale school. We hebben ook een Engelstalige klas en dat soort dingen. Maar dan zijn alle docenten allemaal Nederlands, blank. Dus dat is, dat is wel een soort niet goeie divers verschil. Dus vandaar die noot, maar goed.

M: Over taal gesproken, was de safe space in het Nederlands of in het Engels?

Interviewee 1: In het Engels.

M: Okay, nice.

Interviewee 1: Want er waren veel Engelstalige ook, die erop af kwamen.

M: Kijk aan, dus dat was ook een bewuste keuze, om het zo te zeggen?

Interviewee 1: Ja, ook omdat [naam docent] zelf Duits is, dus haar Nederlands is okay, maar het is makkelijker in het Engels dus ja.

M: En je had het eerder over vlak toen je ging samen werken met [naam docent] dat er toen een soort call-out ging van 'hey we gaat dit organiseren, sluit aan', op wat voor manier ging dat?

Interviewee 1: We hadden een email gestuurd naar iedereen op school waarin alles werd uitgelegd en toen nog een poster met de uitnodiging met exacte data en daarop hebben mensen gereageerd. Ja, het bijzondere eraan was dat ik ook wel wat mensen die persoonlijk naar mij toekwamen die zeiden van 'ja ik wil, ik vind het goed wat je doet maar ik durf zelf niet in de groep te praten over dit soort onderwerpen omdat ik bang ben dat ik de verkeerde dingen zal zeggen'. Wat ik wel begreep en ik wou heel erg uitleggen dat het een safe space was dus dat er, je kan niets fout zeggen, maar het is wel lastig omdat bijvoorbeeld, ik zelf weet niet veel over, over gender studies bijvoorbeeld. Dus ik zou zelf ook heel moeilijk...

M: Meer dan je denkt waarschijnlijk hoor

Interviewee 1: Maar ja ik zou het moeilijk vinden om daar statements over te maken als ik er niet veel over af weet en je wilt mensen ook niet kwetsen, dus met jouw eigen naïviteit eigenlijk. Dus dat is altijd wel lastig om dat toegankelijker te maken voor mensen zonder, die goede bedoelingen hebben, maar niet durven...

M: Kun je iemand daarin geruïststellen is dan eigenlijk de vraag... Zijn, is die desbetreffende persoon of die personen, zijn zij uiteindelijk wel naar die safe space gekomen?

Interviewee 1: Nee die zijn niet meer gekomen, maar waren altijd wel nieuwsgierig maar, was lastig. Ja.

M: Hebben jullie bepaalde regels afgesproken of bepaalde afspraken met elkaar gemaakt, buiten de mantra's om natuurlijk waarvan werd afgezien, maar? Basic dingen misschien?

Interviewee 1: Ja, of ja dingen die voor zich spraken eigenlijk, gewoon we zijn hier niet om elkaar uit te schelden of dat soort dingen, dus het was wel heel duidelijk dat als je hier komt moet er wel met respect met elkaar omgegaan worden. Dus als jij hier een beetje de lolbroek gaat uithangen ofzo dan sturen we je weg. Dat was wel heel belangrijk want we hebben wel wat typtjes op school die graag iets willen uitlokken, provoceren. Dus ik wou wel duidelijk maken dat dat niet, dat het geen grapje was ofzo. Dus dat was wel regel nummer 1 en verder ja die mantra's. Die niet gelukt waren maar het was een poging. Ja. Ja.

M: Heb je ooit moeten wegsturen?

Interviewee 1: Nee, we hebben niemand weg te sturen. Maar wel, nee.

M: Wat was dat?

Interviewee 1: Nee ik heb wel mensen gehad die zeg maar niet in de meetings, maar buiten om die wouden komen en ik liever niet had dat ze kwamen en dat was, gaf mij een beetje dubbele positie want ik wou wel graag, ja mensen met rechtse visies ook erbij hebben om het zo te zeggen, om daar een discussie over te hebben. Maar ik was dan bang dat die safe space weg ging omdat dat wel een soort, die persoon een beetje soort kwaadaardige bedoelingen zou hebben. Dus dat was wel een beetje gek om rechter te spelen ofzo wie wel of niet binnen mag komen, maar je wilt het ook wel weer beschermen, die groep.

M: Wat voor afwegingen heb je daarin in moeten maken?

Interviewee 1: Ik heb toen maar nee gezegd, want ja, ik merkte dat andere mensen zich er niet prettig bij zouden voelen. En ik was wel geïnteresseerd in die discussie, maar die persoon durfde ook niet zo goed te komen want die wou niet allemaal aangevallen worden door de rest. Dus dat was een beetje ja, [indistinctive].

M: Wikken en wegen...

Interviewee 1: Ja

M: Mega interessant, maar ja goed je hebt dit een jaar lang georganiseerd, dus dat kan ook niet anders dan dat er flink wat over te vertellen is.

Interviewee 1: Ja tuurlijk. En er zijn ook heel veel kleine uitstapjes geweest, buiten. Dus we zijn bijvoorbeeld naar het Sinterklaasfeest gegaan in Catherijne convent en dat is zoiets van sinterklaas tour voor kleine kinderen, en dan wij gingen dat gewoon checken hoe dat vormgaf. Ik ging ernaartoe denkend okay, zwarte piet zal overal zijn, maar ze hadden het vervangen, door matroos, Maas heette die, en het waren matrozen. En die kwamen ook op een schip, maar waren gewoon normale mensen, gewoon geen schmink, en die hadden gewoon een matrozen outfit aan en die begeleiden de kinderen en toen op het einde was sinterklaas er wel en toen zei een kind 'waar is zwarte piet' en toen was het een beetje zo spanning en toen zei die 'oh die zijn aan het werk in de fabriek' klaar. En that was it, dat was het enige momentje, ja ze moesten het op een of andere manier weg sussen denk ik, maar er was tenminste geen zwarte piet, waar ik heel blij over was. Ja en we zijn ook naar de anti-racisme demonstratie geweest in Amsterdam, om te kijken hoe ja want dat was ook onderdeel ervan enzo, dus ja dat soort uitstapjes dat was ook een beetje onderdeel van die safe space, beetje onderzoek, beetje relateren aan de buitenwereld ook waar we altijd over hebben dus ja.

M: Ging iedereen steeds mee?

Interviewee 1: Nee, niet iedereen, was altijd 1 of 2 mensen die gingen dan mee, van de meetings, die dan tijd hadden en dan ja, deden we dat in het weekend.

M: En dat was dan na initiatie van jou? Van hey laten we hierheen gaan.

Interviewee 1: Ja of iemand zei dit is er dan, ga je mee? En dan op die manier kom je daar terecht.

M: Hoe, hoe hielden jullie contact met elkaar?

Interviewee 1: Gewoon via de app enzo

M: Jullie hadden een appgroep met z'n alle?

Interviewee 1: Ja we hadden een facebook groep en een appgroep, dus ja

M: Nice, super nice, technologie had ik helemaal nog niet aan gedacht! Hadden jullie veel contact buiten de meetings?

Interviewee 1: Ja, ja op zich waren wel goed bevriend geraakt enzo, we kennen elkaar allemaal wel een beetje maar dit maakte de band wel sterker denk ik. Dus dat is wel goed.

M: Cool. Je noemde nu twee uitstapjes die te maken hadden met anti-racisme, hoe zat het onderwerp gender misschien juist in de safe space? Of misschien juist religie? Of validisme? Of goh ik noem d'r maar hoor

Interviewee 1: Het zat er niet veel in moet ik eerlijk zijn. Ja we hebben een keer over, toen dat transgender meisje was gekomen, hebben we het daar toen over, heel lang over gehad, zij had toen over haar eigen ervaring. Ja wat is daar verder uitgekomen... Ik weet het niet meer, ik denk dat daar een beetje ophield. Ze kwam daarna niet meer, ik denk ook omdat zij zich niet goed bij de de groep voelde, of identificeerde, omdat het wel heel erg over dat racisme ging. Dus die crosslink was er niet, het zal er vast wel zijn, maar het is



lastig altijd om... Ik had daar laatst nog over gelezen dat het heel [moeilijk], heel veel problemen problemen in de wereld zijn heel erg aan elkaar verbonden, maar het is moeilijk om daar een soort verbinding in te vinden of mensen van te overtuigen dat er een verbinding in zit. Vaak omdat veel values niet overeenstemmen, dus dan heb je bijvoorbeeld de zwarte community die heel erg homofobisch is, heel veel. En daar moet dus ook bewustwording in komen dat de strijd voor homoseksuelen net zo hard is voor antiracisme en dat daar eigenlijk een soort gelijke lijn in zit.

M: Intersectionality

Interviewee 1: Ja precies. So, ja i don't know.

M: Alright, zijn er nog dingen die je misschien meer wil gaan oppakken in de toekomst of?

Interviewee 1: Ja, ik zou daar wel meer assistentie in willen, daarom... Maar ik zou niet weten, ik vind het lastig om te zeggen 'hey jij bent transgender, wil jij nu bij ons komen praten?'. Ofzo, dat klinkt heel erg... Net als...

M: Cringy?

Interviewee 1: Cringy, ja, precies.

M: Heel begrijpelijk

Interviewee 1: Want ik kan, zoals ik zei, ik zou... Misschien moet ik er zelfonderzoek naar doen en dat aankaarten, maar het is fijner als er een persoonlijk gesprek komt, iemand van hun, eigen ervaringen toch? Denk ik... Maar ja, we'll see

M: De ambitie is er in ieder geval

Interviewee 1: Ja

M: Denk je dat dit, wat jullie nou gedaan hebben het afgelopen jaar denk je dat dat een soort format is, wat andere locaties ook kunnen toepassen?

Interviewee 1: Ja, ik weet de [persoon] waarvan...

M: [Interviewee 2]

Interviewee 1: [Interviewee 2], die was daar mee bezig, maar dat is ook gestopt of iets. Ben heel kort met hem in contact geweest, want door hem ben ik dus achter gekomen dat ook op andere locaties in de HKU soortgelijke dingen aan de gang zijn, maar ik weet er niet veel van af. Dus er zou wel... Als er weer connectie komt, misschien kan het dan beter uitbreiden of in stand blijven, maar ik ben heel erg in de 'ik weet niks'. We hebben geprobeerd om erachter te komen, want er is een diversiteit comité, maar hoe we daar contact mee kunnen krijgen is echt, je kan dat nergens vinden.

M: Heb je het rapport toevallig?

Interviewee 1: Nee

M: Kan ik naar je sturen, zo

Interviewee 1: Echt? Oh dat zou nice zijn

M: Dat is geen enkel probleem

Interviewee 1: Oh ja, ja

M: Ik weet verder daar vrij weinig over, moet ik zeggen hoor, ik heb het rapport en dat is het. Ik had nog een vraagje... Ohja, het zou natuurlijk prachtig zijn om die connecties te leggen tussen de verschillende locaties. In hoeverre denk jij dat je, want er is nu een safe space vanwege jou, je bent daarin best wel de spin in het web als ik het zo mag zeggen. Wat gaat er gebeuren als je afstudeert?

Interviewee 1: Ja dat is de vraag. We hebben het er kort over gehad...

M: Met [naam docent]?

Interviewee 1: Met [naam docent], en ja ik begon toen over rhizome denken. Rhizomatisch denken is soort filosofie waarin, waarin zeg maar niet alles aan 1 stam verbonden is, maar dat alles gewoon soort van... ja.

M: Is dat Deleuze toevallig?

Interviewee 1: Ja dat is Deleuze

M: Ben ik aan het lezen nu

Interviewee 1: Nice!

M: Ja dat zeg jij dat gewoon casual ff nu, omg, amazing. Sorry, ga door

Interviewee 1: Ja, ja, dus als je daar, met die gedachtegang dan komt het weer ergens anders opduiken, dus daar klamp ik een beetje aan vast. Maar meer praktisch gezien, hoop ik dus wat andere, jongere jaren in die groep te krijgen die dan een soort van pass the torch aan hun. Dus aankomend jaar probeer ik dan eerste jaars of tweede jaars in die groep te krijgen die dan net zo gemotiveerd zijn als ik en hopen dat zij dat over nemen. En dan op die manier dat het blijft bestaan, dat is een beetje mijn plan voor nu en ik ga ook wel aan [naam docent] vragen of zij dat ook wel een beetje wil blijven doen. Maar ja, zij gaat waarschijnlijk ook naar een master toe, of zij gaat lesgeven aan de masters, niet meer aan de bachelors. Dus dat is ook wel lastig, wat het gebeurt binnen de bachelors. So, ja alles valt een beetje uit elkaar dan, maar, we zullen zien, ja.

M: Nice. Ik ben op met vragen

Interviewee 1: Okay haha

M: Zijn er dingen die jij nog heel graag wilt toelichten of wil je?

Interviewee 1: Nee, ik denk dat ik alles wel heb gezegd

M: Echt zo gaaf, echt everything I wished for and more

Interviewee 1: Great

M: Ik ga 'm stop zetten.

## Transcription of Interview 2

2<sup>nd</sup> of April 2019

Interviewee 2: Ik wil nog iets zeggen

M: Ga je gang

Interviewee 2: Ik ben ook bij een van die gesprekken, dat was met [course leader's name], ik heb meerdere gesprekken gehad, toen gaf ik ook aan van, het leeft heel erg, hier in de HKU, om een soort safe space op te zetten. Want daar was ik ook initiatiefnemers voor, ik heb meerdere studenten bij elkaar gevraagd en gehaald om een soort safe space te creëren en dat was ook echt een ding. En toen zei ik tegen [course leader's name] van ja dat zou eigenlijk gewoon officieel erkent moeten worden door de HKU en dat het dus echt een ding is, waar mensen zich wel veilig kunnen voelen, na al die andere voorbeelden die ik heb doorgemaakt. En toen zei hij van, ja hij deed er ook moeilijk over en hij draaide eromheen, hij zei ja dan moet je wel... hoe zeg je dat... ja, dan moeten die studenten allemaal naar mij toe komen. Dus dan moeten zij dus bevestigen dat het inderdaad een probleem is en dus op die manier gaat het.

[Redacted for privacy reasons]

(19:11)

M: Wouw, hoe zag die... ik heb zoveel vragen nu. Die safe space, is dat een fysieke space geweest?

Interviewee 2: Het is geen fysieke space geweest, maar het was meer een soort groep studenten die ik... die we zeg maar om de maand bij elkaar brachten, wilde brengen, om dus te spreken over hun ervaringen binnen de HKU enzo

M: Wat gaaf

Interviewee 2: Ja

M: Hoe vaak zijn jullie uiteindelijk samen gekomen? Bestaan jullie nog, als groep?

Interviewee 2: We bestaan wel, maar we zijn iets van 3 keer bij elkaar gekomen, niet heel veel. Maar het had wel echt kunnen uitgroeien, als we dus gesupport zouden worden. Want dat was met name mijn eerste doel. Ik zei ook tegen de mensen uit de groep van ik vind het vooral mijn prioriteit nu om het serieus erkent te laten worden door de HKU, om gesteund te worden.

M: Ja

Interviewee 2: Bijvoorbeeld mailtjes rond te laten gaan, om mensen dus in te sluiten en te... Naar die groep toe te krijgen, weet je wel?

M: Ja

Interviewee 2: Maar ehm...

M: Zichtbaarheid

Interviewee 2: Ja, zichtbaarheid, maar dat gebeurde niet. Terwijl we zien ook uit de feiten, ook uit het diversiteitsrapport, dat 5 dat 7% van de HKU niet wit is. En Utrecht, daar is zo'n 20% niet wit. Dus niet witte mensen binnen de HKU voelen sowieso al een bepaalde vorm van vervreemding, van othering of kwalijker. Maar er wordt niets mee gedaan, eigenlijk.

M: Bij wie vind jij dat de verantwoordelijkheid ligt voor het inclusiever maken van de HKU?

[Redacted for privacy reasons]

Interviewee 2: En wat ik nog meer zei is ja dus niet-witte gastdocenten naast alle witte gastdocenten, meerdere colleges, sowieso, over verschillende onderwerpen rondom inclusiviteit, omdat het binnen 1

college gewoon te kort tijd is daarvoor. Ja ik gaf heel veel verschillende punten aan, maar het lijkt alsof daar niet echt gehoor of prioriteit aan gegeven wordt, letterlijk. Omdat er ook tegen mij is gezegd door met name [course leader's name], maar ook [name of a teacher] Vriend, dat het niet een prioriteit is voor de HKU.

(24:20)

De prioriteit ligt gewoon bij het diverser maken, met name op etniciteit, van de HKU. Maar niet inhoudelijk gezien.