Modalities of Exchange

A Summary Report on the Serpentine Gallery Project Skills Exchange: Urban Transformation and the Politics of Care.

Skills Exchange consisted of five case studies:

STUDY 1: A Palace for Us
Location: *Woodberry Down Estate, Hackney*
Artist: *Tom Hunter*
Research Assistant: *Laura Cuch*
Co–Researchers: *Participants and Staff at AGE UK, Hackney Tea Group*

STUDY 2: Barter With The Future Self
Location: *Westmead Care Home, Westminster*
Architects/Designers: *Markus Miessen and Åbäke with Kees de Klein, Photographer Sophie Bellmer and Writer Yanki Lee*
Researchers: *Alison Rooke and Katey Tabner*
Co-Researchers: *Staff and residents at Westmead Care Home, Westminster, led by Phyllis Etukudo*

STUDY 3: The Trip
Location: *St. John's Hospice, St. John's Wood*
Artist: *Marcus Coates*
Research Assistant: *Ananda Ferlauto*
Co–Researchers: *Alex H, outpatients and workers at St. John's Hospice, including Andrew Gallini and Sheena Boyd*

STUDY 4: Trading Spaces: An Investigation into the Future of London Street Markets
Location: *InSpire, Southwark*
Artist: *Barby Asante*
Research Assistant: *Cristina Garrido Sánchez*
Co-Researchers: *InSpire Reminiscences Group, East Street Traders Association, and participants in the Sarsaparilla Summits*

STUDY 5: The Future's Getting Old Like the Rest of Us
Location: *Camden Homes for Older People*
Artist: *Beatrice Gibson with writer George Clarke*
Research Assistant: *Mara Ferreri*
Co-researchers: *Residents of Camden Homes for Older People with care home staff and Programme Coordinator Sally Mercer*

About the partners

Goldsmiths, University of London
The Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR) at Goldsmiths, University of London was the research and evaluation partner for Skills Exchange. The research was led by Dr. Alison Rooke, with the assistance of The Skills Exchange research assistants Cristina Garrido Sanchez, Ananda Furlauto, Laura Cuch, Mara Ferrari and Katey Tabner who worked as part of the team of artists, agencies and participants as the projects unfolded.

Serpentine Gallery
Skills Exchange is a Serpentine Gallery Project. Serpentine Gallery Projects challenge where art is experienced and by whom. They build on over ten years of work producing art in the social realm, linking local and international artists with dedicated collaborators in organizations of mental health, education, elderly care, housing and homelessness and migrant support.

The Skills Exchange Partners
Skills Exchange was funded by Bloomberg, the Rayne Foundation, the City Bridge Trust, The National Lottery through Big Lottery Fund and Camden Homes for Older People. It was delivered in partnership with Age Concern Hackney; Westminster Housing Care Services; Camden Homes for Older people; the InSpire programme at the Crypt, Southwark; St John's Hospice, Camden; and Westmead Care Home, Westminster.

Skills Exchange was a collaborative art and social research project that took place between January 2007 and April 2012. Through five embedded multi-year residencies, Skills Exchange projects tested the idea that isolation and discrimination are best addressed if artists, older people, care-workers and others exchange their skills on equal ground, altering roles, representations and well-rehearsed relations through processes of creative exchange.

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The Skills Exchange Findings: From Service Delivery to Embedded Exchange

Building on the Baring Foundation's finding that involvement in participatory arts can raise awareness of age discrimination and break down pervasive self perceptions and external stigmas, the Skills Exchange Project made efforts to increase democratic participation – moving from a **paradigm of service** to one of **embedded exchange.**

The Report

✔ Reviews the way in which art is discussed in social care and social care is discussed in art.

✔ Surveys five case studies and the ways in which participants re-shaped the original project aims.

✔ Identifies Modalities of Exchange developed across the studies and summarises them for consideration by funders, policy makers, care-workers, administrators of organisations of art and care.

Modalities of Exchange

We identified eight categories of exchange developed across the Skills Exchange Project which could be of use to others undertaking this kind of work:

Exchanges of Power & Agency:

✔ Skills Exchange invited older people to shape the aims of each project. In the majority of cases, groups communicated an overwhelming desire to make change in their neighbourhoods / the world, and took this to be the basis for empowered exchange.

✔ Project participants intervened directly in issues such as the privatisation of street markets, the negative stigma attached to social housing residents and the social silence around issues of death and the dying.

✔ Through this work both institutional attitudes and broader social perceptions changed from thinking about older people as recipients of care to those who care for their community.

Exchanges of Time

✔ Skills Exchange revealed that the highest benefit for participants was found in those projects that engaged in consistent relationships and regular visits over a period of 1–2 years.

✔ Longer durations allowed those involved to develop ethical relationships, that were truly interrogative of power, isolation and discrimination.

✔ Participants suggested that key to the future of an ethical relationship between art and care is the adequate resourcing of time for all those involved.

Exchanges of Visibility and Invisibility:

✔ Through exposure at Serpentine Gallery and in local and national press, projects reached over 60,000 viewers and challenged dominant stereotypes and forms of discrimination against older people.

✔ Viewers consistently stated that projects allowed them to see a part of life they had not seen before, and that they read the works as a call to action.

✔ Questions of access and elitism associated with art galleries were addressed as a central concern.

Exchanges of Space:

✔ Skills Exchange projects provocatively interrupted the routines of the various settings – care homes, community centres, day centres – to which older people often feel assigned and isolated by creating physical exchanges, trips, walks, and public space performances.

✔ Participants communicated that changing spaces enabled them to see each other beyond their role as 'older person', 'carer' or 'artist'.

✔ Care workers suggested that changes to the environment and spatial routines increased the memory capacity of those with dementia.

✔ Speech therapists suggested that introductions of new elements to the care environment expanded speech patterns.

✔ The projects reiterated the crucial role of group work and the need to restore and build on spaces in which older people can meet, particularly at a time when so many of these spaces are at risk.

Exchanges in Strategy:

✔ Skills Exchange participants suggested an overwhelming interest in exchanging strategies concerning how they might more effectively intervene in the representations of and changes to their environments.

✔ This was posed against definitions of 'fixing' their problems or illnesses.

✔ This sense of strategy provoked participants to engage inter-generationally and beyond their immediate constituencies to find others engaged and interested in these issues.

Exchanges of the Past and Future:

✔ Many participants felt that reminiscence projects can frame older people as subjects immersed in nostalgia and unable to adjust to the global multi-cultural postmodern city.

✔ Participants suggested that where this work can neutralise activism, by positioning older people as those who lived through historical change rather than agents of that change, 'Memory Work' enables participants to make use of their past in decision-making about the future.

✔ This orientation of the past towards the future is also the basis for strong-intergenerational connections.

Exchanges of Empathy:

✔ Where many of those working in care suggested that in their training they had been told 'not to get attached', Skills Exchange Projects demonstrated the importance of empathy on both sides of relationships of care.

✔ Attention to the interests and involvement of care workers enabled deeper and less ritualised relationships between them and residents.

✔ Gallery workers, artists and visitors equally valued the learning and exposure they were offered in the process, describing this as changing their perceptions from a sympathy or 'helping' mindset to an empathetic way of relating to aging.

✔ Valuing the form of speaking of all participants – including those with dementia and speech difficulties – was central to the development of empathetic relationships.

Exchanges of Trust:

Participants suggested that critical elements for the building of trust included:

✔ Taking time to listen to each other before imagining the work.

✔ Consistency in visitation: the embedded model.

✔ Open discussions of ethics in the production of the work were central to success.

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