CONVERSATIONAL RESEARCH: PRAXIS & EMERGENCE

Taarati Taiaroa

Between February and December 2016, four members of the Emerging Curators Programme—Fayen d’Evie, Bridget Riggir-Cuddy, Bridget Reweti and I—undertook an idiosyncratic and collaborative inquiry into ‘conversational research’ as a means to reframe the curatorial process to have human relations—people—at its centre. This research is ongoing, but some of the outcomes that have emerged from our relationships include: a series of workshops at The Physics Room in early November 2016 titled Reflections and Directions; a publication by Emily Rākete (Ngāpuhi, Te Rarawa, Ngāti Hine); a podcast between Salote Tawale and Bridget Reweti, an interview between Matt
Pine and Taarati Taiaroa and a retreat that brought together artists Katie West, Cecilia Vicuña and Tamsen Hopkinson, and resulted in an exhibition at Kadist (San Francisco).

‘Conversational research’ is a process we collectively agreed to pursue over the year. It was a term we devised to encapsulate our varied interests, values and collective politics. Below I have outlined a series of principles that the group considered over the span of the year as a means to sketch what ‘conversational research’ is or at least could be. These principles are not definitive and are drawn from a reflection on and analysis of our conversational research praxis to date.

**Principles for Conversational Research:**

- To practice conversational research is to challenge oneself through an engagement with others.
- Conversational research is a process that places emphasis on engaging in an on-going and potentially immeasurable relational commitment. It requires a commitment to the facilitation and maintenance of kinship—human relations.¹
- Conversational research does not have a deadline, although it can have breaks.
- Geared towards a deceleration of outcomes, conversational research is a conscious decision to engage dialogically as a means to facilitate the emergence of knowledge, as opposed to focusing on the production of a predetermined outcome.
- Conversational research can be haptic and/or silent.
- Conversational research aims to slow down processes in order not to prejudge the outcomes of conversations, or even pre-empt them, but to be open to the emergence of gesture and/or collaboration.
- Conversational research is collaborative, informal and flexible.²
- Conversational research is a process that embraces contingency and uncertainty, aiming not to be limited by preconceived expectations or measures of success.
- In the context of conversational research it is the duty of the curator to support the artist’s ideas, be informed about their complexities and attempt
to construct a safe framework for the artist to produce their work or express themselves.

- In the context of conversational research it is not the role of the curator to ask the artist to change their work towards a desired outcome.

- Conversational research requires benevolence and kindness; however, it is not altruistic. Self-care is important.

- All active participants in the conversation have the ability to voice their opinion and exercise the ‘Law of Two Feet’:\(^3\) to move to a space in which they feel they can contribute or learn, or to walk away from the conversation when it feels inappropriate or unsafe.

- With permission from the collaborators the conversation can be opened up for advice and appropriate council, which has the potential to provide collective permission or possible embargo.

- Conversational research can result in slippery authorship.

- Conversational research resists the assumption that there is a designated ‘public’ or that conversational research needs to be broadcast to be valid as an outcome.

- Conversational research accepts the need for public accountability and the need to support and encourage critical dialogue.

- Throughout the conversational research process it is important that collaborators are exhibitors (that they are represented on their own terms) as opposed to exhibits of a curatorial process.

- The question of how, what and to whom a conversation is made public is something to be determined in conversation with collaborators and must emerge through the process itself.
Taarati Taiaroa (Ngāti Tūwharetoa, Ngāti Apa) is an Auckland-based artist, curator and writer who has a research-based practice that often utilises archives to investigate small narratives, site, print and environmental histories. A graduate of the University of Auckland, Taiaroa holds Masters degrees in both Fine Arts and Museums and Cultural Heritage. From 2012 to February 2016, she was a co-director of RM: an artist-run space, project office and archive situated in central Auckland. She is currently a lecturer at the Faculty of Creative Arts, Manukau Institute of Technology.


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