

Studying Elites: Creative Methods in Elite Studies

Thu, 10/7 5:51PM • 51:20

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

wealth, people, city, rich, called, money, mayfair, London, plutocratic, buildings, class, walking, photographs, operations, questions, research, wealthy, canary wharf, life, conversations

SPEAKERS

Katie Higgins, Amy Feneck, Ruth Beale, Caroline Knowles

Katie Higgins

The Studying Elites series is motivated by a desire to build a space to reflect on and develop methodologies in elite studies. Over the last decade or so a dramatic widening of socio-economic inequality, and associated concentrations of wealth have seen the study of elites gain renewed energy. Just this week we had new revelations from ProPublica about how billionaires in the US pay little or no federal income taxes, and at the same time against this wider background of increasing dissatisfaction with wealth inequality, and normalised aspiration to wealth can also be argued to be part of the mainstream. All in all, this is an opportune moment to gather today and explore the potential of art to generate public engagement on wealth inequality, the use of creative methods in studying and interrogating elites, and what might be productive conversations between the academic and creative sectors in researching wealth and inequality. We have a really exciting panel joining us today who draw on a range of innovative and creative methodological approaches and artistic practices. First, artists Ruth Beale and Amy Feneck will have 20 minutes between them for their contribution, and they'll be followed by Professor Caroline Knowles from the University of Goldsmith, who will have 10 minutes. After their contributions we've got lots of time to move to questions from the audience. All right, I'm gonna introduce our first speakers. Ruth and Amy run the Alternative School of Economics, which links artistic practice with self-education as a way to study economics. This school was started in part as a response to the banking crisis of 2007-2008. Conceptually, it's a statement that people who are not economists can set up an alternative school to reclaim economics as a social everyday tool. Just to briefly introduce two examples of their work which I know they're going to talk about in more depth. First, their short film Fieldwork: Finding out about the Rich documents of a field trip from a state secondary school in East London to affluent parts of the centre of London to look at wealth, class and socio-economic inequality. And second, more recently, they released a six-part podcast on feminist economics, which looks at questions of labour exploitation, unpaid work, unionisation, and reproductive labour, among other topics. It's a fantastic series, and we recommend you take a good look. Okay, I'm gonna pass over to you now, Ruth and Amy.

Amy Feneck

We collaborate as the Alternative School of Economics. And we've been working together since 2012. The Alternative School Economics sets out to learn together collaboratively and in a non-hierarchical way. It's a social practice working with people questioning ideas, through conversations and relationships. Sometimes we make artworks like books, films and installations as part of the process. And then, to repeat actually what Katie just said that, conceptually, the Alternative School of Economics is a statement that people who are not economists can set up an alternative school to reclaim economics as a social everyday tool. And we're thinking about the study of economics in an expanded sense. So it's not just the study of finance or money, but looking at social relations, and all that this entails like class, geography, conflict, gender and how these things manifest in economic terms, or relate to the economy.

Ruth Beale

Yeah, and so as artists, as we are artists, we use the methodologies of art making to explore these ideas. And by that we mean that, you know, any artists will, to make an artwork, will research their subjects, whether it's history or materials. They'll explore, they'll experiment with it, and they'll shape it into something to share with others. But the way that we work is not to work on our own in studios, but to, you know, to make as a finished article that ends up in a gallery, but to work with other people in a process-led way, an active way. And we spend a lot of time researching and working through ideas with people. And often the main element to our work is this, this process. And so we use this as a means to have conversations and to research and develop ideas. And then as Amy said, we sometimes make these outcomes like books and films and posters and podcasts to speak to a wider audience. And also, we didn't say the beginning but we're going to, we're going to talk for the first half of this and then we're going to show you a film, so we're going to show you about 12 minutes of the film that we made.

Amy Feneck

So, next slide, Ruth. Today we're going to talk about the project that we made, called Rich as a Minority Group, and it took place in 2015 in a local secondary school with students studying GCSE sociology. We approached the school and sociology teachers, and worked with them and their Year-11 classes in Little Ilford School in Manor Park, which is in Newham, East London. And we took direct inspiration, from an article in a teacher's journal from the 1980s, which was called Contemporary Issues in Geography and Education, which is about addressing more political approaches to teaching complex subjects like geography to students coming from diverse minority backgrounds. And just to read a quote from this article. In order to understand poverty and deprivation amongst groups at local, national and international levels, it is necessary to examine wealth and privilege. In order to understand powerlessness in some groups, it is important to focus on the ways in which power is maintained by others.

Ruth Beale

For us this proposition really resonated with current economic inequalities in the UK. And you know, it's an answer to the question, "Why study the rich?". So activating this with students in a state secondary

school in East London was about trying to evaluate questions of wealth and power in society. And also just to say that the school we worked with is really ethnically and racially diverse. And nearly everyone in the class was from a so-called ethnic minority. So this idea of exploring the rich as a minority group was really coming from that position of like, their experiences of being labelled minorities.

Amy Feneck

And so we were really interested in the crossovers between art as research practice, and then the discipline of sociology. And this kind of informed some of the visual and other recording tools that young people use to do the research. So as well as brainstorming, a kind of initial brainstorms to unpick thoughts and feelings about the rich, they also did online research about wealth and economic equality, inequality, across the world. And this research was not really about gathering data from which to draw conclusions that could then be shared. But it was kind of about working with the kids, to get them to think about these ideas around the rich and to draw their own conclusions. So we were kind of trying to be careful not to just sort of impose our thoughts and our ideas around this question of the rich.

Ruth Beale

So one of the one of the things that we did with them was to do surveys. So they did audio and photographic surveys of their local areas. And then we took them on field trips to Mayfair and Canary Wharf. And that was one of the processes that we did in order to make visual comparisons. We also invited the head of sociology at LSE and also the Great British Class Survey, Professor Mike Savage, to come to the school and lead a discussion with them about wealth and power and class, which is really exciting. It was really great. It was interesting for us in terms of thinking about how a project could enter into different worlds. So it was existing in the school, but it was also fitting into their curriculum and their, their system. It was also art. And it was also, you know... It touches upon this sort of elite academic world. I think it's elite. And that's something that's quite important to us, to think about these different kinds of knowledges and different kinds of spaces that that knowledge can exist.

Amy Feneck

And so finally, the two field trips. So we did one for each class. One was to Mayfair, which is... that's a picture from that. And that was to meet and interview an ex-Goldman Sachs banker, who's now a philanthropist, and the other one was to Canary Wharf, which was to meet an ex-hedge fund manager, who's now an economist who works in finance regulation. And so these interviews were kind of like primary sources of experience of elite wealth. And the students' experience in the field trips formed the basis of this sort of documentary that we're going to show you in a bit. And the making of the documentary was also a form that allowed thinking, reflection, learning to happen. I think that was quite important. And I think you'll see that more when you watch it as well. So, and this was also partly informed by the filmmaker that we worked with called Ruben Henry, whose voice you can hear in the film. And the film, we would say sort of raises questions rather than gives answers and it's kind of, yeah, about the young people's experience and thought process through the project.

Ruth Beale

So as we were making this project, we were also thinking about how the work can be shared with others. So those kind of public moments that it could have. And this manifested in a number of ways. We made an exhibition in a former library building that we were having residency in. This makes it look like no one came, but there were loads of people. These beautiful gallery shots, gallery-style shots with nobody in them. But yeah, so there's, you know, there was the two films and there was a little reading area. And, and some posters that I'm gonna get to. Oh, there's the film. So these posters are teaching posters. And they... The content of them came from the workshops and discussions that we had with the students. And we worked with an illustrator and a designer - Rosie Traynor is the illustrator, Joe Hales is the designer - to create these posters that shared. So one's you've got these questions, "Who do you think the rich are? What does the minority mean?" So some of these are things that we did with this idea that you would, that the exploration that we did, someone else could take that. And we sent them out to teachers in all the secondary schools in the area to use in their classrooms.

Amy Feneck

I think we've got some close ups of them.

Ruth Beale

Yes, I have.

Amy Feneck

What is cultural capital? Does money make you happy? Yeah, it's all working. So we also organised two public conversations. And one was a symposium called Why Study the Rich? which drew on a number of different academics and journalists, campaigners who spoke about their studies and research. So including Aditya Chakraborty and Jeremy Gilbert. And the other event was called Ways of Working: Alternative and Radical Education in Schools, which was a workshop with artists and teachers primarily. And it was kind of looking at, going back to that journal and the sort of radical educational journals from the 70s and 80s, educational journals, and thinking about how these histories have influenced state education, curriculum and discussing the sort of problems and usefulness of alternative methods of working in schools today.

Ruth Beale

So, yeah. I mean, we've nearly finished and we're going to show a bit of the film. But I think overall, it was, it was actually a really challenging project, wasn't it? Like, negotiating with the school, working so things fitted into what they do, organising these interviews with wealthy people, finding people who we're prepared to be interviewed. I mean, yeah, and then, and then thinking of ways to take it beyond that experience in that classroom. You know. But it was also really exciting because on the one hand, we were, we were injecting creative methods into the young people's sociology GCSE. And then the other way, we were kind of using that as a framework in order to kind of subvert the study of inequality towards the study of the rich. And just to reiterate what Amy was saying about the other people that we

worked with, like the filmmaker, like, it was so important to work with other creative people as well, the photographer, filmmaker, Illustrator, designer, in that process of making these kind of high-quality things to share, and making those... and ways of making these public conversations. Right, so we're going to show you two clips of the film, one which is sort of towards the beginning and one which is towards the end. So you get a sense of this kind of arc of what happens.

Male teacher

Can I have your attention please. Quickly. There's a register to see who's here. Thank you, Alina. Imran. Claudia. Usman.

Female teacher

Rachael, come and sit here.

Male teacher

Saskia. Taber.

Female teacher

Aisha. Just stand at the back.

Male teacher

Ahmed. Alina. Amena. Faria. Monibo. Alicia.

Female teacher

Right, if you could take your jackets off. We're just going to be here for about 40 minutes. Take your jackets off. 40.

Amy Feneck

So do we all remember who we're meeting? And what is he?

Child

He's an economist.

Amy Feneck

He's an economist. He used to work in a hedge fund. So now he works with the FCA, which is the Financial Conduct Authority.

Ruth Beale

So, we've started by talking about who he is and about what he does. And I have prepared questions. Do you remember a few sessions ago we did some questions for a rich person and I sort of picked out some that I think might be good. So, he grew up in Manchester, he works in finance, Goldman Sachs. He has an art collection from emerging nations. He does a lot of charity work. And he's chair of the patrons at the Royal Academy. Who looked at Goldman Sachs?

Amy Feneck

The Financial Conduct Authority is a financial regulator, so it basically gives rules to banks and investment banks and firms in the finance industry. That's kind of the main thing. And he used to work as a hedge fund analyst. So he's got experience working with billionaires and super-wealth.

Ruth Beale

He helped people know what to do with their billions of pounds, so we'll talk a bit about that.

Amy Feneck

So anyway, when we get there, we're going to have to go through security. And we're not allowed to take any pictures or do any filming at all when we're in the building. So if any of you have phones on you, you can't take any pictures. Then when we get into the room, we're gonna, we've been allowed to record the audio of your interview with him.

Ruth Beale

So we can't record his conversation if he doesn't want us to and feels like he can't be as candid if we record him.

Female teacher

When you say your questions, how do we project our questions? Loud and clear and slowly.

Child

Can you tell us about your education? Was it private or public? Were you worried about getting bad grades?

Child

Why do choose to spend your money on art?

Child

What would you do if you were at the bottom of the social ladder?

Child

When you worked for a hedge fund were you responsible for large amounts of money? What does that feel like? Was it stressful or exciting?

Child

Why does the finance industry need to be regulated and does it work?

Child

In recent times, do you think the banks and finance industry have been characterised fairly or unfairly but in the media?

Amy Feneck

Great.

Child

How do wealthy people invest their money? Can you describe the process of how investing money makes more money? And how do the super rich protect the economy?

Guest speaker

How do the super rich affect the economy? You know, I see no problem if you're wealthy. I see no problem if you have made your fortune and are super wealthy. I think actually, that's good because you live in a place that allows you to dream and to build your wealth. I think that you are very lucky. And I have travelled a lot. And I have lived in several countries. And I can say that, in a way you guys are fortunate because this country provides those tools. Yes. Sometimes it's difficult to access them. Yes. Sometimes it is is good. It's not bad. Okay.

Female teacher

If you could all put your jackets on.

Amy Feneck

OK, so I'm just going to skip forward. Basically, what's just happened before this bit is they, you're kind of doing a sort of debrief after they've just interviewed the philanthropist ex-Goldman Sachs person, and then it goes into other bits as well. Okay.

Ruth Beale

What did he say about this question about being at the bottom of the social ladder? And did you think it was satisfactory?

Child

Because he said if you work your way out of, like being at the bottom... So he obviously doesn't like the idea of like not having money. He likes having money. Yeah he does. He likes having money.

Guest speaker

Has he ever been... So his parents have two pharmacies and his mum's a teacher and he got sent to private school. Would you say, has he ever been completely at the bottom? Or where would you say?

Guest speaker

And how do you perceive his status? Because he wouldn't say what class. That's why I was asking you before. He moved around that subject. How do you see his status? Or what do you think? That's what he did. What do you think?

Child

He doesn't have status. He never thinks of himself having status.

Child

I think that he was never bottom class, lower class. We was in the middle but now he's like really rich but I don't think class is important in that case because he's worked for what he's earned, with a bit of support when he was a child. So still, I don't think, like I don't think he's in a social... I don't know where to put him still.

Child

Even when we asked him, where would you place yourself on the class system?

Child

He was hesitant.

Child

Yeah, he was. He said, I wouldn't identify myself in a class.

Child

He told us it would have been as if he'd just like, he'd been given everything on a plate. But at the same time, he was telling us, you've got to work hard.

Child

He's a different type of guy to what I imagined he would be. Because he's very open, kind and didn't like an accent. Like he didn't show a certain attitude towards us, because other people think they're higher than us. But he could relate to us. Like, stuff like that.

Film maker

Do you think it would be different if you met him here, for instance?

Child

Like where, in the shop? I don't think I would have noticed him because everyone here is the same. You should take a video of this. It's sick.

Child

He felt like it was a kind of duty to give back, because if you're in the position where you can help the rest of society then you should. Because he just kind of sort of like has a moral duty like it's something you should do. So it shouldn't be really questioned.

Child

It was interesting. He was probably the richest man I've met, and probably will meet. So it was nice to see that he's not your average, rich idiot.

Child

But then I mean we've never met a stereotypical rich person.

Child

He was saying that he was lucky. Like, it was his hard work and luck. He got to a private school. So it's not really that much luck. But yet, he got rejected and still... Like he got rejected so many times. Like he still did try hard.

Child

Yeah but like the shops, like in Mayfair, the arcade, they were mainly jewellers and they had really expensive.

Child

But the thing is like. Everyone like. It's like a big Westfield.

Child

And we looked at stuff like the architecture and how it's different and transport. And the contrast between here and like East Ham and Manor Park. Every single building is really nice and like well designed, and really clean as well, but that's like a different story from Manor Park.

Child

I feel that people are more friendly in Manor Park. I don't feel that, I don't feel comfortable in this area. I feel more comfortable in Manor Park.

Child

Yeah, I feel it's different. Everything is different here. Even though it's not it's not that far away. But it's a huge contrast. Everything in this area is completely different to Manor Park.

Film maker

And how do you think someone from this area would feel in Manor Park?

Child

They would probably think that none of the people care about the environment or the they would think that this place doesn't have enough money to build the environment.

Film maker

How does this area makes you feel?

Child

Poor.

Child

Uncomfortable.

Child

Yeah it is uncomfortable being here... just don't feel right.

Film maker

It's alright, we don't have to go we just can't film in the shop. How do you feel uncomfortable and in what way?

Child

The majority of people here are... We're ethnic minorities, all of us, so we don't fit in with the crowd. You do get a couple of daily looks here and there.

Film maker

So you're aware of being part of an ethnic minority. Do you think that has a relationship with class?

Child

Yeah, because when like, because all of us at one point, our parents or grandparents aren't from here. So when you come to a new society, the majority of them came in the '50s. And they were given like manual labour jobs and things. And so it wasn't you can't really be a part of the upper class unless you work for it in our case, because you've not got a heritage here. You ain't got like a good foothold in this country.

Katie Higgins

Next we have Caroline Knowles. So, Caroline is Professor of Sociology at Goldsmith University, and has published extensively on globalisation, cities, privilege and social inequality. Caroline specialises in visual, spatial and biographical methods and regularly collaborates with photographers and artists. She has researched the social consequences of extreme wealth and plutocratic capital on London and the people who lived there over several years, including for a major level human research fellowship, titled *Serious Money: A Mobile Investigation of Plutocratic London*. This project has resulted in several articles and will be part of a forthcoming book to be published with Penguin, which I'm really looking forward to. I'm gonna hand over to you now, Caroline.

Caroline Knowles

Thank you. Let me just say what a fabulous project that is that we've just seen. And I just note those kids unease in those streets. And those are the kinds of streets that I'm going to talk about. Thank you very much for the invitation to do this. The two things I want to talk about today are photography and walking. I must say I use photography, mostly on my phone as a kind of note taking. If you're walking about, it's much easier to take notes with, with a phone. And I use these photographs later when I write street scenes. Because often I notice things later that I didn't at the time. And so the photographs, my own photographs become an archive from which I can write and of course, I don't exhibit those photographs. You really wouldn't want to see them. They're rather boring. But they are kind of an archive of what's there. And I don't show them also, because I don't like that documentary, close reference, this is what we're doing and here's a photo of it, because I think photography has better uses than that kind of simple description. As Katie said, I often work with photographer. *Serious Money*

posed serious problems when it came to finding a photographer. Partly because the landscapes on which the super rich operate, plutocrats, operate, are actually rather banal. And it's very difficult to, you know, bring life to them, make them interesting. And I think this is not coincidental. The lives of the rich themselves are rather banal and uninteresting and lacking in vitality in lots of ways. But I didn't want a series of photographs that simply said that. So I'm working with a photographer called Derek Mann who's quite involved in the democracy movement in Hong Kong, although East London based. And he has some interesting ideas. And I hope... We're just at the beginning of our collaboration, but my hope is that he can pick up moods or atmospheres, that he can pick up things and do things that I can't do with words. And so our collaboration would be about extending kinds of descriptions, but in non-verbal ways. Yeah, so we've talked, Derek and I, about doing close ups with tight framing. We talked about imposing one image on another, shifting colour schemes. And one of his ideas was to photograph through the transparent bit of a 10 pound note and to see how London looked that way. And another was to find locations in social housing estates, from which to photograph London's Moorgate financial centre from a distance. And we have some of those. And so he's experimenting with windows, doorbells in Mayfair, and a bit frustrated at not being able to get inside these offices which I think is part of the territory. But my hope is that somewhere between the image on the written word, we can create a space in which the viewer or reader is free to imagine the lives and landscapes of London's super rich. Katie has just a couple of photographs to show you from our early experiments. These aren't finished. This is from the housing estate. And this is one of the Mayfair windows. And then the next is are the doorbells, which don't declare the purposes of offices or what happens in them. I mean, the kind of cone of secrecy is pretty, pretty thorough. Thanks. So walking is how I grasped the daily doings of the city on the ground. As I navigate London's wealth producing machine around Bank junction. I think I let his stories seep through the soles of my feet. Plutocratic dwelling is about accumulation and excess. And excess, of course, is the City's very substance. The very conception of a plutocrat, someone who has amassed great wealth embeds fundamentally uneven relationships with the City. And so of course, it is with London. And I thought what I'd do today is to give you a taste of one of my walks, and then I can say something about what I think it brings to the table analytically. So this is a walk inside the money engine, which is around bank junction, creating what Kathleen Stewart calls new spaces for thinking about what might be going on, writing theory through stories and descriptive detours that have bodies, rhythms and, as she describes it, ways of being in the noise and the light and the space. I walked the financial district on my way to meet someone I'm going to interview, who I'll call banker. I see that Corinthian columns of 18th and 19th century neoclassical buildings form the architectural substance of London's claim to global financial significance. Street names reveal financiers' former operations in labyrinthes of passages and alleys, Change Alley, the Royal Exchange at Cornhill. Now the refuge of smokers and hasty stand up lunches eaten by women dressed in ways that suggests the not so well paid service roles holding the financial machine together, bits of financial infrastructure if you like. There are other bits of infrastructure. I pass a string of cafes squeezed into ancient buildings, and stylish and Michelin restaurants. Dispersed among the eateries or other kinds of services, lawyers and accountants steer finance on the right side of regulation and minimise the tax liabilities of wealthy clients and corporations with creative accounting in capital house. On past Daiwa Capital Markets, a Japanese investment and brokerage firm, the Chinese Imperial Bank of Commerce, channels circulating finance between London and a meshwork of elsewhere. On close inspection, and close inspection being one of the benefits of walking, the money machine seems less the monolithic infrastructure of accumulation, and more like a cluster of micro- operations, orientations, practices and

movements on different scales. In the spirit of writing what Stewart again calls a geography of what happens, I try to find what she calls the atmospheric achievements of the streets, formal interests and demeanour, movement purposeful and routine, and sometimes intimate secrets and endearments whispered in doorways, sharp dark suits and pastel shirts. Sartorial styles for women ape men's with the exception of high-heeled shoes. Subtly securitized and luxurious an African security guard stands at the entrance of the Royal Exchange, seemingly different, insignificant operations apprehended through walking hold things in place. The Royal Exchange houses expensive restaurants, watch and jewellery shops for lunchtime browsing. I stopped at Fortnum and tune in to the lunch conversations of a mother and her lawyer daughter. Quietly voiced concerns leak into this place. Workplace politics, abilities rewards the performance, the injustices of their distribution, classical dressage, the riding academy, competitive horsemanship, and international events in Switzerland and Paris, appreciation of beautiful horses, until the women recover their identical Burberry macs and head off. Two men next to me are discussing leadership, aspiration challenge and people who could be useful to you. "How his family life? Not so good. I'm trying to spend more time with my family." Different kinds of operations and attachments hold things together, the benefits of lingering and of course the benefits of eaves dropping. Walking for Moorgate on the southeast edge of the financial district, I pass spaces, rented desk for the city's itinerant workforce, further huddles of smokers, homeless people shrouded in sleeping bags, their situation and a thriving financial district connected in a politics of austerity, and a street sweeper pushing a cart. These things too hold this place together. And putting all of this together is one of the benefits of slow moving. The ancient financial district ends abruptly towards Liverpool Street and a modern city rises at Broadgate, the area all dug up for Crossrail. A pedestrianised square owned by British land and shielded by construction hoardings that announced the new commercial lease possibilities at the square is almost finished. The unfinished city breaks out of the ground, a landscape in constant heave through a thousand different channels. New buildings fashioned in double metal, The Union Bank of Switzerland and Deutsche Bank among them, mark the scene between the ancient and the new City. At this junction, a 21st century financial district in glass and steel sweeps down Bishopsgate to London Bridge and eastward down the Thames to Canary Wharf, London's financial annex, its confident towers reaching into the sky.

Banker operates on this junction between the ancient and the new City. Security personnel who stand all day by the bank's glass revolving door which leads into a clinical marble hallway, the scale of which suggests things of importance happen in this building, protect banker from the doings of the street. A woman on reception lets me through the glass barrier, another escorts me to the inner workings of the bank, past famous modern art to an anonymous meeting room among meeting rooms intended for conversations about expanding money. In his 40s and in a smart suit, Banker says there are rules that prevent him speaking to journalists and researchers, that most financial sector workers think it's best to, as he put it, fly beneath the radar, that there is, as he says again, no upside to being conspicuous. Concealment and separation make this place. Banker is the high-net-worth, and a service worker. He expands the wealth of already wealthy people, a cog in the human algorithmic workings of the plutocratic city. He is part of a global stock market trading and wealth management enterprise operating in over 50 countries, managing the wealth of over half of the world's billionaires. He tells me that this involves bespoke services in assessing the needs of the wealthy and advising on the expansion of their wealth through a spectrum of financial instruments. Okay, so that's just a taste of my walk.

Let me finish off by indicating what I think are some of the analytic advantages of walking as a method of urban investigation. I think you'd get a grainier a more practical grasp of city infrastructure for its human algorithmic and material textures, operations and micro-mechanisms. What I want to call an operational approach to infrastructure which arises from a street view exposes some of its less obvious mechanisms as they unfold in the everyday heave of city life. My walk exposes the suits in the machine working its money skimming algorithms, it exposes a slightly ragged female labour force in cheap clothes, and is still more ragged bodies of the homeless. It exposes the human and technological security operations that contain, regulate and exclude and it exposes the atmosphere, of quiet entitlement, the bodies, the buildings, the attachments, the thinking, the implicit normativity that hold these plutocratic streets and their operations expanding and consuming wealth together. Theoretically I think this provides a route to a deeper, elaborated and situational understanding cities through their micro operations. A worrying of the links between buildings, operations, algorithms, activities, decor, clothes, movements, disposition. This opens a way of seeing the city that is personal, distributed, institutional, lived, material, ephemeral, solid and constantly remade, all at the same time, unbundling some of its assemblages in order to see what it is they hold together and how they do it. This unbundling, I would argue, sustains a new politics of the city in close-up, grainy operational details. Infrastructures holding plutocratic life together are much less robust than they seem at first. From walking the street, infrastructure's fragilities surface, its secrecy, its concealments, separations that disconnect it from the mainstream of urban life, its emotional complexities, which include intimate gendered of relationships, and luxurious lives threaded with the anxious privileges that come with maintaining and displaying wealth in socially appropriate dispositions, acquisitions and activities. Walking exposes the fragilities of the plutocratic city, and a politics of fragility suggests the possibility of remaking the city in more open and inclusive terms. Thank you.

Katie Higgins

Thank you Caroline and thank you Ruth and Amy for those really thoughtful and thought-provoking contributions. I'm going to move now straight into questions from the audience for the last about 10 minutes. So a reminder to people please post your audiences in the chat, and then we've had one come through here which is for all of the speakers and this is kind of a more political economy question I suppose, zooming out and asking, "Do you have any reflections on the constraints on the creative sector or academia as critical spaces to reflect on economic inequality and elites when often it's the wealthy who fund and buy the arts and in the case of academia where philanthropic donations may also play a key role in the funding streams?". And I'll open that to all of you.

Amy Feneck

I mean I think yes. Me and Ruth definitely think about the context in which the art world is kind of you know an elite, very privileged space from which to operate and there is also you know but there are also kind of different art worlds as well and there is, however, I suppose. So I suppose how we work with that is within the project that we spoke about was kind of using those worlds. So one of those people that we managed to get to speak to us we got to speak to them through a contact in it wasn't direct but we eventually got there through the art world and you know so he was a patron of the Royal Academy of Arts. And so I suppose in terms of like using that kind of context as a way to kind of help us do the project that we wanted to do. I don't know if you want to say something else.

Ruth Beale

Yeah and we also do we have a sort of like almost like an ethical protocol ourselves that's like who we would be prepared to be funded by and we think about when projects come up and you know where's the money coming from what's the what's the constraints around that?

Caroline Knowles

Yeah I think it's really interesting that you use art in the way you do. I think it's I mean it shows that you know in plutocratic life art is an asset class. It's kept in free ports to avoid tax, It's a way of laundering money and yet you know you're subverting it and looking back in a different way and allowing you know art to show that world in quite an interesting way from the from the eyes of the children. I think it's really interesting.

Amy Feneck

Also just to say the thing I mean I'm not really able to comment on the academic world but when Mike Savage came to visit the school, so he is he's like the head of sociology at a very incredibly prestigious university and he's written this book all about class where they kind of came up with seven different types of class rather than the old ones and he's you know, and a part of the session he, you know, he got the staff, the teachers, and the kids to sort of answer some of the questions to work out what class they were and he sort of straight away said, "Well, I'm in the elite class" because he because of the amount he earns, the type of job he has etcetera etcetera. And that was really great that you know he you know he kind of was coming in and being very sort of transparent about that on some level with within that context.

Katie Higgins

Caroline did you answer grapple with the question about academia?

Caroline Knowles

Sorry what was the question about academia?

Katie Higgins

How it can operate as a critical space to study power and elites given that there are philanthropic funding streams that come from that source as well and the limitations of that?

Caroline Knowles

It is always difficult isn't it? I mean if you think about you know the number of us who've lived on Leverhulme money, which is entirely dodgy actually and its colonial iterations. I think again it's a bit like the art example that you know you can turn these things around and turn them inside out and use it in different ways. There's nothing that stops us using academia as a critical space you know although it

has contradictions and academics you know are tied into particular systems you know which also compromise the ways in which we operate in these kinds of research projects.

Katie Higgins

Thanks for that and we have a question from Matt Reynolds to all. Some skeptics falsely accuse creative methods of being superficial or just a novelty. How do you theoretically justify using your methods to defend against these accusations?

Amy Feneck

I'm not sure if this is going to answer the question but maybe because just when you were talking then Caroline about kind of academic constraints and I was thinking about what I just heard you say. And it was I mean it was it was kind of making me think of other, another artist who is coming from a very different kind of place to you who's also kind of has this walking practice but both you and her I think that what there is, there's a kind of there's a there's a freedom in what you're doing through walking and using that as a as a kind of tool to gather data research. I think it's a really, that's incredibly valuable um and I suppose that's I suppose that's what I would say is that it's kind of a so-called sort of creative method can actually just by being a bit alternative to a sort of normal kind of academic process can kind of create this sort of very different, so it can just subvert things, and make it a very different kind of freeing way to make knowledge.

Caroline Knowles

I think, you know.

Ruth Beale

Who's the person you're thinking of Amy?

Amy Feneck

Well the writer, artist, she's called Laura Grace Ford and she basically made loads of zines from the sort of early 2000s onwards which is now, they've been published in an anthology that's like that and it's called the Savage Messiah. And she did a lot she does lots of walks all over London but she did concentrate a lot of her kind of walking and writing about around during sort of Olympics and when that was all kind of sort of you know sort of taking place in that part of east London and the kind of regeneration and and things like that so yeah. Laura Grace Ford she's called.

Ruth Beale

Sorry Caroline, I interrupted you.

Caroline Knowles

I was just gonna say I think creative methods have a bad rap. I mean we must all have creative methods and you know some of the methods a lot of us use they're just methods have been around for a long time, you know walking photography these are old methods. But you know I think we don't have to think of them in those illustrative, simplistic descriptive ways. I mean your presentation today shows you know the hidden depths, the possible conceptualizations that are popping up in your film, in the interactions with the children. And I would argue in my walk where you can get a close look at the texture of how of the streets of how things are strung together and you can begin to theorize, if that's what you want to do. I'm not saying this is the only thing. But I think that you know that the creative methods have huge theoretical possibility that isn't always exploited and maybe it doesn't need to be, but it could be.

Katie Higgins

Okay and so we've got... Oh did you want to jump in again Ruth?

Ruth Beal

I think well the argument about whether art is superficial or novelty or not is quite old and I suppose like that old but ongoing and you know, what's it for, why are we doing it, what should it be, what should it be doing? So it's got that's maybe coming at it from like rather than like, is creative research superficial? It's like well is art superficial? What's the purpose of it? Is it, is it better, is it more exciting if it has an agenda, if it's political? You know these are huge interesting wide-ranging arguments

Katie Higgins

Absolutely, and ones we hope to continue in the face-to-face event and more generally in further conversations. But I'm seeing it's six o'clock and we're out of time, so this just leaves me to say a huge thank you to Ruth, Amy and Caroline for your excellent contributions and to the audience for your questions and for your engagement.