

the **Whitworth**

**ARTS
WHITWORTH**

Creating Safe / Brave Spaces
by Matt N

**BRITISH
ARTS
SHOW**

**HAYWARD
GALLERY**
TOURING

**SOUTHBANK
CENTRE**



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ENGLAND**

Alt Text: Logos featured are
British Art Show, Hayward Gallery
Touring, Southbank Centre, Arts
Council England, The University
of Manchester, the Whitworth

Creating Safe / Brave Spaces

About the project

During the Summer of 2022, alongside the opening of the *British Art Show 9* (BAS9) in Manchester, artist MATT N has been working with *the Whitworth* to bring together a group of Queer & Neurodivergent individuals, exploring the concept of Safe Space(s) as a tactic for Care & Togetherness.

Since July, the group has been meeting weekly for sessions, both online & in-person at the Whitworth. The group has taken part in a series of conversations and creative workshops, developed a shared 'Safe Space Agreement' and produced insightful responses to the project's themes.

The final outcome of our work on this project has resulted in the creation of this zine publication, which aims to highlight the journey and findings of our group whilst also acting as a toolkit for other arts organisations. The zine shares the approaches and methodologies our facilitators have used on this project and intends to demonstrate how other organisations can develop 'Safe Spaces' for Queer and Neurodivergent identities in their own establishments and engagement practices.

  @MATT_N_CREATIVE



The Language of 'Safe / Brave Spaces'

Every individual's needs will be different, every group will have a different process to creating their own Safe / Brave Spaces. Our needs are not fixed, they can change day-to-day and over time.

Safe Spaces are:

- A place (digital or physical) where group participants feel safe to exist and are empowered to express their individual and collective needs.

Brave Spaces are:

- A place (digital or physical) where group participants feel comfortable to express their thoughts and ask challenging questions - even when there is a risk of offending or denying another group members experience - in order to foster an environment which encourages group learning and promotes social justice.

There are conversations around whether 'Safe Spaces' or 'Brave Spaces' are more effective. A criticism of 'safe spaces' is that they usually protect those with privileges and don't allow for challenging conversations and group learning.

To learn more about the conversation around Safe vs Brave Spaces, have a look at *From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces: A new way to Frame Dialogue Around Diversity and Social Justice* (Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens, 2013).



Creating a group agreement

When bringing a group of participants together, it is helpful for the individuals and the group to have an agreement in place. This allows both individuals and the facilitators to know how to engage with the group, share ideas and what they can expect to receive from other group members.

The agreement should allow individuals the opportunity to share any barriers they may face to accessing the group, the group should then validate these concerns and take action to resolve them.

Your process of creating an agreement should include:

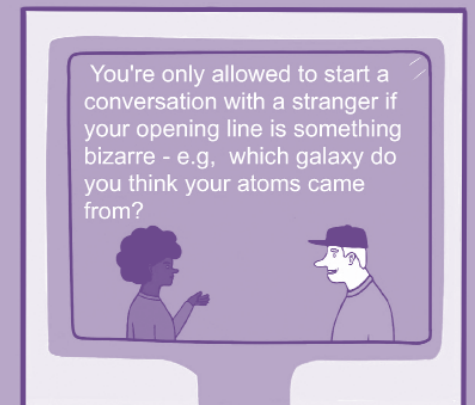
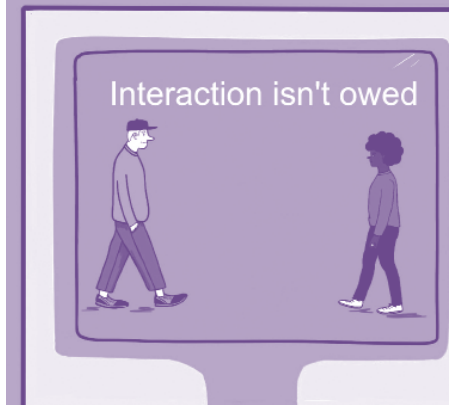
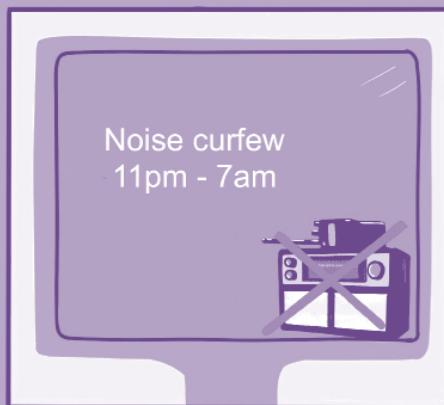
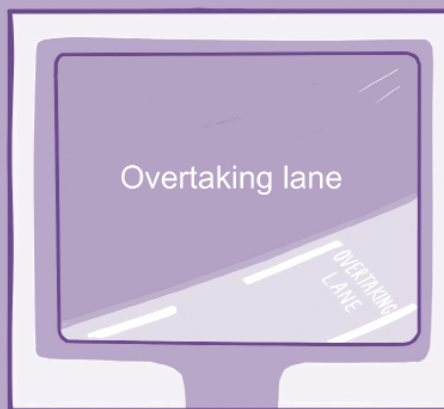
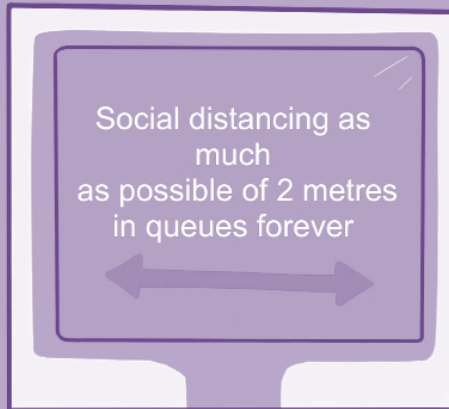
- Establishing guidelines that outline the ways the group will engage, work with and behave towards each other.
 - These should be created and shaped by the group themselves, prioritising their collective and individual needs in the space.
- Opportunities throughout to reflect on and update the agreement, as the group or individual needs change.
- A system to ensure the guidelines are upheld. This could be the role of a facilitator, a designated person within the group, or the group as a whole.

Some questions you may ask your group at the start:

- How will we work together? What agreements should we make?
- What type of environment do we want to create?
- How will we behave with each other?
- Why are we here? What is our purpose?
- How do we ensure we are being inclusive and not discriminating?
- How do we navigate freedom of speech and discuss our lived experience?
- What do we do when the agreement isn't being respected?
- What do we do when something in the agreement isn't working or presents as a barrier?

There should be opportunity for the group to return to and adapt this agreement regularly. We recommend a regular check in with the question: *'Is there anything in the agreement that you'd like to add, change or adapt?'* This is especially helpful if there has been a change or breakdown in the group.





Reflections

From the outset, you should allow people to feel comfortable to participate how they want to. This might include: not forcing participation, offering alternative ways to communicate, and allowing space for individuals to be present without masking.

These are the steps we took to create our Safe Space for our group. It's important to remember every project, group and individual has different needs, and therefore your journey should always be tailored to your specific context.

Further reading and resources:

- 1 Wellbeing Umbrella
- 2 Action Research Cycle
- 3 Facilitating Encounter Groups. Rogers, C. (1971). Carl Rogers Describes His Way of Facilitating Encounter Groups. *The American Journal of Nursing*, 71(2), 275–279.
- 4 Queer Spaces, An Atlas of LGBTQIA+ Places & Stories. Co-edited by Adam Nathaniel and Josh Mardell, and published by RIBA Publishing

Image: Strudleville, YAYA @yourallrightyouare, 2022



Dewey



Character File

Species - Canada Goose

Job - President of Strudelville

Traits - A Goose of few words but has supreme intellect.

Favourite place / Activity - Swimming in the many waterways of Strudelville.

Why Strudelville? - Dewey wants everyone to feel safe and happy. He believes that through attending council meetings he can Honk or Hiss to pass bills to make Strudelville the greatest place to live.

Baph



Character File

Species - Horned Beast

Job - Owner of the 665 Club

Traits - Desperate to be as mean as possible but is unable to keep up the pretence. Almost always anxious.

Favourite place / Activity - Feeding the wild animals of Strudelville and listening to Dolly Parton whilst shining his Dolly Parton boots in the 665 Club.

Why Strudelville? - Baph has always struggled to fit in, he wants to live in a mellow community that will accept him for who he is.

Nigella Mawson



Character File

Species - Silverback Gorilla

Job - Owns Nigella's Lounge (an Alcohol free Salon).

Traits - Seductive, fiercely protective of friends and family. Sheds everywhere and used to have a cat-nip problem.

Favourite place / Activity - Their Salon, and the Robot Hairdressers

Why Strudelville? Still unsure.

Mylie Minogue



Character File

Species - Human

Job - Kylie Minogue drag muse.

Traits - Drinks Whisky and likes makeup and fashion.

Favourite place / Activity - Muse for the Strudelville Museum.

Why Strudelville? - Hasn't made their mind up yet.

Cara the Capybara



Character File

Species - Capybara

Job - Wellbeing officer/Councillor

Traits - Kind, motherly and warm. She also has a chain-smoking addiction and is covered in nicotine patches under her clothes.

Favourite place / Activity - Bathroom were she can secretly fan smoke away from her children, and any body of water that she can lay in and float in order to decompress.

Why Strudelville? She wanted to be a part of a society that offers inclusivity and safe space. Also because there is no litter in Strudelville.

Montgomery Tootsworth



Character File

Species - Grizzly bear.

Job - working in health and safety at the building block.

Traits - Montgomery is kind, funny, and on occasion anxious.

Favourite place / Activity - He likes to unwind by drinking espresso martinis at the local dive bar. One of his latest hobbies is building tiny houses for tiny insects. His obsession is the scissor sisters

Why Strudelville? It was a fresh start for him as he felt out of place in his last home.

Patty Catty



Character File

Species - Cat

Job - Beautician-on-a-bike.

Traits - I'm no spring kitten but in my job I have to look the part and that involves a punishing beauty routine. Like Jan Crawford in Monty Duneset, I'm up at the crack of dawn for a jog, and my face is plunged into a bowl of ice to close the pores before I start decorating it.

Favourite place / Activity - I enjoy snooping around the homes of the people I visit to do beauty treatments. And not to put too fine a point on it but I do like to go to the bathroom out of doors in parks or gardens (call me Scatty Patty!)

Why Strudelville? It is kind to those of us who cause public disorder. Whenever I get reported for my hobby, there's no prison or fines to pay. Instead, I have to attend litter-training sessions.

Blobby



Character File

Species - Sentient Plasma Blob

Job - Librarian at The Grand Library.

Traits - Plasma-headed - Sweet as honey - and quite funny.

Favourite place / Activity - Reading, drinking iced tea and listening to Margaritaville by Jimmy Buffet whilst drinking margaritas. They are also currently interested in embroidery but it may change.

Why Strudelville? - To live out their life long dream of becoming a Librarian.

**‘Safe Space
is somewhere
where we
feel heard
and valued’.**

MANCHESTER
1824

The University of Manchester
The Whitworth

the **Whitworth**