
Berit Fischer

**Towards a Micropolitical
and Holistic Post-Representational
Practice
A Case Study**

*... to expand beyond representation,
to conquer an intimacy
with the body as a vibratile surface
that detects the waves even before they arise,
to learn how to surf,
establish zones of familiarity
within the movement itself—that is “sailing is necessary,”
because if we don’t,
our destiny will probably be shipwreck...*

Suely Rolnik
Anthropophagic Subjectivity
1998

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PREFACE

This practice-based research offers a new perspective to the field of contemporary post-representational practice with the specific angle of examining how the curatorial can activate spaces and conditions for a micropolitical and holistic making of social empathy. It offers a new approach and terminology, that of “intra-curation” and “affective transformative curation”. Such curatorial practice is examined and activated through a practice framework that is called the *Radical Empathy Lab*. The research engages in questions and practices of self-empowering and emancipating publics from colonial capitalist and hegemonic manipulations in the formation of subjectivity. It is an approach on the making of experiential versus informational creative knowledge production.

In its explorations, the research project reconsiders and experiments with what an ‘ex-hibition’ can be, how else ideas can be ‘ex-hibited’ or rather ‘in-habited’ and how they can be activated and made experienced beyond traditional curatorial forms of display, representation and beyond the mere consumption of—in particular—the visual. Furthermore, this exploration seeks to challenge the tri-partition of the audience, artist, curator; and to rethink and question the curator’s role and the paradigm in which she ought to operate. It explores how the curatorial can achieve a more self-determined aesthetic and discursive form of practice, one that actively engages and dissolves the on-looking audience; a practice that strives to nurture agency and enable partaking protagonists instead.

The research mobilised theories and philosophies and unfolded in three curatorial practice modules. They emphasised the processual, affective, and discursive encounter, and replaced the display of objects or what curator, and theoretician Nora Sternfeld might call ‘objective values’. Furthermore, this body of work extends Sternfeld’s idea of the curatorial as a ‘contact zone’ and a space for ‘asymmetric relations’. It further centres around micropolitical and holistic ways of creating a critical and a relational knowledge production, that embraces what Brazilian curator and theorist Suely Rolnik calls the ‘knowing body’.

The notion of the micropolitical is likewise understood in Rolnik’s rationale, as an affective and social process in the production of subjectivity, decolonisation and de-subjectivation of the (social) body and its relationality to the Other. Decolonisation is phenomenologically explored here, to dissociate the process of subjectivation from capitalist and hegemonic misappropriations.

In addition, the research takes guidance in, and exists as an extended interpretation and activation of Brazilian activist and educational theorist Paulo Freire’s learning approach of ‘critical consciousness’ (conscientization) of the 1960s and 70s to address and experience readings of- and being in the world, and to move towards new levels of critical awareness.

In 2016 the *Radical Empathy Lab (REL)* was founded as the practical research framework for the questions at stake. It has since been activated within national and international academic and artistic fields as an experimental nomadic social and research laboratory for experiential knowledge formation. It challenges the metrics driven notion of a laboratory in that it activates a holistic and relational –versus an informational knowledge production, and that in-corporates the sensing body through trans-disciplinary holistic advances that are intertwined with the cognitive. Contemplations on the first three iterations, their theoretical, philosophical backbones as well as applied holistic practices, will be shared in respective chapters.

The *Radical Empathy Lab* emphasises the sensual and experiential for creating conscientization, to sharpen the senses for an ‘active micro-politics’ (Rolnik).

The lab turns to foundational non-gendered feminist and radical pedagogies and practices, that strive to connect theory to lived experience. These are vital inspirations in the pursuit of a practice-based research that questions dominant representations, and that seeks to challenge capitalist logics, heteronormativity, racism, populism, and colonialism.

The lab playfully rehearses new forms of being together—intellectually and otherwise—and momentarily allows to reflect, to re-feel and undo a reactionary an-aesthesia (Greek: an-aesthēsis: without sensation), that is often nurtured by neoliberal capitalism and by dominant, separationist logics and systemic structures. It reciprocally intertwines and cross-fertilizes theory with practice.

Moreover, by moving from singularity to collective activity *REL* investigates the relation between micro and macro dimensions of agency, as potential practices of freedom and self-empowerment that decolonise and de-subjectivate the (social) body and its relationality to the “Other”.

The lab seeks to build a collective, temporary ‘relational body’ (Spinoza) and moves through time and place as a question, a slogan, an intervention, as actions, as affective encounter and as place that allows to explore how to activate a micropolitical and a holistic making and understanding of empathy as “affective translation” (Carolyn Pedwell). This idiosyncratic research concludes with the coinage of a new curatorial terminology: “intra-curation” and “affective transformative curation” to describe this specific post-representational practice.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Since 1997, I have been engaging with “the curatorial.” As a freelance curator, I understand the curatorial as a sphere for theoretical reflection and speculation, for the experiential and experimental; a sphere that is embedded within the social, and that encompasses the potential of an incubator or catalyst to activate possible and alternative imaginaries for social change and for knowledge production.

Following this definition, the focus of my curatorial work and research has primarily been four things. The first is the specification of art as a producer of knowledge and means to permeate the status quo. By saying that as a curator my interest lies in “the specification of art as a producer of knowledge,” I also talk about knowledge that might not have words or images, but affective, experiential knowledge and the intertextual. The other focuses have been on socially produced spaces, the creation of fields of action and the development of spaces for critical engagement. These emphases stem from an interest in critically rethinking the notion of the exhibition, the tri-partition of artist-curator-spectator, the forms of display and different ways of engaging audiences.

How can a curatorial practice achieve a more self-determined aesthetic and discursive form of practice that hopefully overlaps, intersects and actively engages its audiences?

Over the course of two decades, these questions have developed my approach to “the exhibition” continuously away from representation and the display of ideas, away from the consumption of the visual in particular, towards formats in which the active role of the public has become increasingly key to the project audiences—relational, interactive and participatory.

Rather than starting with a specific artwork, my curatorial work usually has its starting point in matters of contemporaneity and relates to urgencies in society and planetary concerns.

Today’s time is defined by immaterial labour, hyper-abstraction and neoliberal, cognitive and semio-capitalism marked by profitability, measurability and authoritarian and utilitarian forces in which the individual is trained to believe that obstacles ought to be resolved at the individual level rather than within a network or a systemic support system. The digital revolution and digitisation, not only of our consumerist desires of entertainment but even our social interaction (including monologic self-presentations on social media, the cultural shift from qualitative to quantitative recognition, e.g., via “likes,” representation and exteriority as key

principles of “self-curation” on social media has not only turned inter-human relations into traded and marketed products, it similarly has opened up complex challenges for the wellbeing of humankind and for our social co-existence (that at its core nature is utterly dependent on live social interconnection).¹

It is a starting point to rethink cultural production and curatorial practice.

I position my practice-based research and curatorial practice in “post-representational curation,” inspired by and owing the usage of the term to theoretician, curator and educator Nora Sternfeld—a decision on which I will elaborate further in the next chapter.² In Sternfeld’s thinking on post-representational curation, exhibitions are understood “as spaces of agency with curators who are able to do and to change something” and is founded on the concept of a “contact zone,” and a space for “asymmetric relations” that is based on contingency and processuality (Sternfeld and Ziaja, 2012). In particular, her emphasis on the notion of process and the antiquation of “objective values and valuable objects” (Ibid.) with a focus on the notion of the discursive encounter was inspirational to me in thinking about the transitions in my own curation practice in recent years (for example, the projects *Hlysnan: The Notion and Politics of Listening* and *Revolution Without Movement*, which will be discussed in this chapter) and in thinking about the curatorial practice that I am developing through this practice-based research. However, my specific approach to the idea of post-representational curation radically extends Sternfeld’s concept. Whereas her approach is situated mostly within the educational field and institutional structures, the approach of this research has extended her rationale and thinking about educational contexts. My research focuses

1 ——— Of course, one must not forget that, depending on the context and existing infrastructures in many parts of the world, it can be precisely virtual communication and social media that can even become life support and tools for survival or resistance. New information technologies can equally have an immense power to overcome the pre-digital ideological world. Artist, cultural scientist, and curator Olu Oguibe reminds us that the “geophysical delineations of First and Third Worlds [...] cut [...] across those to unite a broad array of humanity who are virtually displaced today by the same technologies and network systems that unite others and lend credence to the notion of a globalized world [...] and its benefits can transform our epoch only when its reaches are broadened to include those who are presently forsaken” (Oguibe, 2004, xv).

2 ——— Nora Sternfeld is an art educator and curator. She is professor of art education at the HFBK Hamburg. From 2018 to 2020 she was documenta professor at the Kunsthochschule Kassel and founding director of TRACES (Transdisciplinary Research Center for Exhibition Studies).

on the deepening of a relational form of knowledge production that, by incorporating alternative and holistic methodologies, moves away from the informational towards relational learning—a kind of learning that embraces the “knowing body” (Suely Rolnik), and a somatic and embodied approach of experience and theory (which will be elaborated in greater depth in the following chapters and the conclusion).

This research argues for a deepening of a relational and somatic approach by adding a re-interpretation of the notion of “conscientization.” “Conscientization” (Portuguese: *conscientização*) is a term coined in the 1970s by the Brazilian educator, activist and educational theorist Paulo Freire as part of his radical pedagogy during Brazil’s dictatorship that was an educative tool to address and experience readings of the world, moving towards new levels of critical awareness.

Although the contemporaneity and urgency for conscientization are today very different from the specificities of a dictatorship like that of Brazil in the 1970s, and, of course, vary according to the specific geopolitical contexts and times, the pressing need for the creation of a critical consciousness remains timely and fundamental in questions of how to relate to each other and how to deepen such relations. (This will be elaborated further in chapter 2.3.1).

By creatively grafting these key elements and specific practical methodologies into this particular nexus of research, it not only allowed me to design and test out a post-representational curatorial practice, which aims to holistically activate micropolitically effective empathic affects among my engaged protagonists, but to also challenge the notion of curation in an original direction away from traditional expectations in terms of curatorial functions and the wider domain.

1.1.1 Hlysnan: The Notion and Politics of Listening

In 2014, I curated (and produced in collaboration with Director Kevin Muhlen at Casino Luxembourg Forum d’art Contemporain) the project *Hlysnan: The Notion and Politics of Listening*, which consisted of an exhibition, a series of performances and a publication for which I invited artists who did not necessarily take part in the exhibition but whose work encompasses writing.³

The project’s focus was on the active act of listening (the emphasis lying on the notion of attention and intent), and not on the mere passive act of hearing (automatic perception of sound). The aim was not to examine cochlear sonic art, nor the technicalities, materiality, representation or visual rendering of the acoustic space, but rather the acoustic medium

3 ——— See: <http://www.casino-luxembourg.lu/en/Exhibitions/Hlysnan-The-Notion-and-Politics-of-Listening>.

was taken as granted and emancipated. The focus lay hence on the active act and socio-political implications of listening and on artistic practices that utilise the acoustic medium as a tool to reconcile with contemporary social and political realities. From a formal curatorial point of view, the project was also an attempt to challenge visual representation and contemporary exhibition-making that is marked by the attention on the gaze, the visual and the act of viewing. In *Hlysnan: The Notion and Politics of Listening*, the auditory perception is deemed central, in comparison to displaying works destined for the eyes; the emphasis lay on the immaterial, the non-consumerist and the non-spectacle. The visual became a mere footnote to aural perception in order to achieve heightened concentration in the targeted sense.

My continuous interest in the notion (and politics) of listening has since been about social relations, about interrelationality, the resonance, interconnectedness and relationship between the micro- and macropolitical. As artist and writer Brandon Labelle notes, listening is a “position of not knowing” and a perturbing of boundaries, drawing you forward from what you know. But while listening, a mutual space is produced that brings together and bridges the internal and external worlds. It is the making of a common space. “To *give* one’s ear is to invest in the making of a future public; it is to give the body over, for a distribution of agency” (Labelle, 2014, 21).

I am interested in the reciprocal relation of the human being as a social body in the relational environment of the socially produced space. As German sociologist and anthropological philosopher Helmut Plessner (1892-1985), whose main research relied on the notion of the human being “in” the boundary between its body and its environment, argues:

A living being [...] is placed in the border between its body and a corresponding environment. Only first when a living organism takes up a relation to its border, does it become open (in its own characteristic way) to what lies outside and to what lies inside. Only then does it allow its environment to appear in it and it to appear in its environment. (Helmut Plessner Society, 2016)

Since the *Hlysnan: The Notion and Politics of Listening* project, my curatorial research has been focused on questions of resonance and interconnectedness, not from an aesthetic or theoretical point of view, but rather from within the social body and in the face-to-face encounter between humans. Scientifically, it has been proven that mirror neurons—which play a major role in the activation of empathy—work best in face-to-face situations. Taking this fact into consideration, my questions since have been about how the curatorial can create spaces and conditions to

activate our empathic and affective capacities within and for a common and shared space, how the curatorial can foster a resonant social body that can perceive, but also sense, create and engage in a critical awareness of this reciprocal interconnectedness to the Other, and how the curatorial can create a space to activate our micro-political agency and a becoming vulnerable to being affected and to affect.

1.1.2 Revolution With(out) Movement

Resulting from such questions and the idea of listening⁴ explored in *Hlysnan: The Notion and Politics of Listening*, the body as a resonant, social and collective body and the notion of embodiment and somatics became important. In 2014 (in collaboration with Galeria HIT and transit.sk in Bratislava in Slovakia), I developed a format of ten days of discursive projects, performative lectures and yoga practice titled *Revolution With(out) Movement*.

Revolution With(out) Movement was an experimental and process-based platform that aimed to create a momentary public sphere in which thinking, conversation and exploratory exercise of the body and mind became a collective experience. It brought together artistic proposals that aspire towards dialogue and direct action that would strive to result in a positive change in society, i.e., practices that manifest and refer to subtle forms of “social non-movements,” a sociological phenomenon defined by Iranian sociologist Asef Bayat,⁵ which in the project was examined and extended. The focus was again on the idea of the interrelationality between micro and macro agency and on potential resistance against hegemonic and paternalistic structures (consensus, capitalist and industry-driven markets, mass media manipulation, etc.) via, e.g., forms of self-organization or individual strategies of self-empowerment.⁶

In *Revolution With(out) Movement*, I endeavoured to create a site in which cognitive as much as experiential knowledge could be experienced and exchanged. It was the first time that the intertwining of the cognitive with a somatic experience was part of my curatorial concept. It included a literal form of embodiment and of somatic experience—in this case yoga.⁷

4 ——— This meant questioning the format and the concept of representation that is attached to the idea of the “exhibition.”

5 ——— Bayat’s “social non-movements” refer (in particular as an approach to analyse the Arab uprisings) to un-articulated and dispersed ways of resistance of ordinary people, who generate subtle spaces within the socio-political constraints in their everyday lives to assert the rights they might be denied by oppression and to enhance their chances and personal lives. (Bayat, 2013)

6 ——— For further information on Bayat’s and the project’s concept and details, please visit: <http://sk.tranzit.org/en/project/0/2014-11-18/revolution-without-movement>.

7 ——— For this project, I invited a local yoga teacher. But I myself have been a

My understanding of yoga is not solely based on its Ayurvedic healing qualities, but equally (and like many other practices of mindfulness) as a practice for self-empowerment (not to feed into neoliberal capitalist demands of self-care for optimum functionality, but on the contrary, as self-empowerment to critically reflect and resist such demands). It is to be emphasised that I am not interested in esoteric or solipsistic self-help approaches. In this context, I instead see it as an effective tool for creating an embodied critical consciousness on the level of the micropolitical (by raising awareness within the self and its relationality to the Other), and thus engaging in questions of the relationality between micro and macro agency.

Returning to the curatorial focus on creating embodied critical consciousness, it was inspiring to think about Judith Butler's reference to Hannah Arendt's understanding of the political space in relation to the public sphere. In her view, the public sphere is not merely an entity of a physical space, but rather a form of relations that are engineered and formed by people and their social relations that produce its meaning:

For politics to take place, the body must appear. I appear to others, and they appear to me, which means that some space between us allows each other to appear. [...] We are not simply visual phenomena for each other – our voices must be registered, and so we must be heard; rather, who we are, bodily, is already a way of being “for” the other, appearing in ways that we cannot see nor hear [...] (Butler, 2015, 76).

According to Butler, the political space is always based on this space of appearance—in the widest sense—between oneself as body and the other as body, and it is this moment and space of in-betweenness that politics bring about. I am interested in this space of in-betweenness, which allows for the moment of critical consciousness and embodied experiencing of the self in relation to the Other, and in which an inter-textual and a mutual space is created.

yoga practitioner since 1997 (same time that I started my curatorial work) and an Ashtanga yoga teacher in the traditional Mysore style of Sri Pattabhi Jois K. for several years. This form of yoga practice is a bespoke and individualised practice within a group, whereby a sequence of a specified series is carried out in one's own rhythm of breath and adapted to the individual condition. It is a dynamic meditation with a strong focus on the union of breath and movement, energy flows and focus. With practice, it heightens an awareness and sharpens a sensitivity not only for the self, but also one's relationality to one's environment and the Other. Hence, it becomes a powerful tool for deepening the relational in a socio-political approach. This will be elaborated further in Chapter 1.3.

1.1.3 Research Question

Following these practical and theoretical explorations, numerous questions regarding the curatorial kept repeating and arising:

How can the curatorial space activate our empathic and affective capacities within and for a common and shared space? How can the curatorial foster the resonant social body to perceive, sense, create and engage in a critical awareness of a reciprocal interconnectedness to the Other? How can the curatorial create conditions for critical consciousness and activate our micro-political agency? How can the curatorial generate spaces for social empathy as a question of agency, and in particular in the field of cultural production?

Out of these questions, I decided that I wanted to engage in a practice-based Ph.D. to examine this particular field in depth and to create a new set of knowledge and questions around it. For the possibility of this examination, the research question finally matured to:

How Can the Curatorial Create Spaces and Conditions for Activating a Micropolitical and Holistic Making of Social Empathy: An Approach to Post-Representational Curation. Here, holistic is understood not only as relating and actuating both body and mind, but as the accentuation of the interrelational and inter-connectedness of systems as wholes in general, and not as divided component parts. Of course, the verification of any transformative claims that this research proposes is extremely limited, as these transformative processes are solely experience-based within the protagonists and were reflected within video feedback interviews that were conducted after the experiments.

1.1.4 Radical Empathy Lab

For my particular methodology within the scope of this research and as mentioned before, I became especially inspired by Paulo Freire's radical pedagogy, in particular the concept of "conscientization." It is an emancipatory, collective and dialogue-based approach and practice for self-empowerment and freedom (this is illuminated, e.g., in his books *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and *Education for Critical Consciousness*). I re-interpret and extend this concept within a practice-based research methodology, which will be elaborated further in the respective chapters and in Chapter 2.3.1. For the practical part of my research, and in order to give it a conceptual framework that could embrace the specificities of individual research projects, I initiated a laboratory structure—the *Radical Empathy Lab (REL)*—consisting of several practice-based protagonist-engaging modules that intertwine and inform my theoretical research and vice versa. The laboratory structure functions as a creative arena in which I can move from analysis to practice and experience, from singularity to collective activity,

and through which I can invite particular communities, social groups, or specific experts into dialogue to test out certain ideas or methods.⁸

I understand it as an ongoing research laboratory that moves through time and place as a question, a slogan, an interpolation; as situations and actions, as encounter and as place that allows the laboratory to explore my research question, i.e., how the curatorial can activate a micropolitical and holistic making of social empathy as an approach to post-representational curation. Participants and peers are invited to experience togetherness (and empathy) and to partake in exercises for developing critical consciousness processes that aim to test the validity of assumptions con-

8 ——— The term laboratory is proposed here in the longstanding lineage of, e.g., Marcel Duchamp's thought of challenging the general tradition of art being mainly associated to retinal perception and Bauhaus' holistic and interdisciplinary rationale that favours a methodological pluralism, intellectual-conceptual processes and discursive creative practices. Etymologically, the term derives from medieval Latin *laboratorium*, and *laborare*, to labour, as "a place for labour and for work", a workshop for practice and testing, for experimentation, for working something out" (Cocker, Gansterer, Greil, 2017, 32). This research laboratory focuses less on the notion of the "workshop," not the physicality of a space in which something gets worked on, but rather pursues to create spheres, situations and sets of conditions for non-binary and nonlinear associations and experimentation—an aesthetic frame and a processual temporality for the experience of ideas (rather than their display or presentation, see also Chapter 2.1.1 on the question of "exhibere" versus "in-hibere"), for affective encounter, experimentation, examination, reflection and opening up alternative ways of experiential, relational and embodied thinking and knowledge production. In "labouring" through assembled transdisciplinary practices and epistemologies, it seeks to create situations for process and encouragement of a new vitality, aesthesis and critical thought and is positioned far from the rationale of market-driven interests.

There has been a longstanding lineage of artistic research laboratories, which curator and writer Henk Slager dates back to the interdisciplinary project *Laboratorium* in 1999, curated by Hans-Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden, in which "both the scientific laboratory and the artist's studio were explored on the basis of the various concepts playing a role within the different disciplines" (Slager, 2015, 28). More recent and relevant examples of this research would be artistic research laboratories such as *senselab* by Erin Manning and Brian Massumi (see also Chapter 2.3.4, *Thoughts on Affect*) or the "Method Lab" by Emma Cocker, Nikolaus Gansterer, and Mariella Greil as the structure for their project *Choreo-Graphic Figures: Deviations of the Line* (see Cocker, Gansterer, Greil, 2017) to name but a few. For further thinking about the notion of the laboratory, for instance, Derek McCormack's philosophical and historical account on the notion of "thinking-spaces" is instructive (McCormack, 2008).

cerning social norms, cultural codes and ideologies that might foster dependency and oppression.

REL experiments with and welcomes embodied/somatic approaches for creating “conscientization” in which the cognitive reciprocally intertwines with the non-semiotic, the sensual and the experiential. The laboratory structure equally encompasses exercises of mindfulness, of radically creating self-awareness (here, radically also implied in its Latin etymological sense of *radix*, the root, beginning with the root of the self, but also associating going to the root cause). *REL* works on the level of the body and mind to activate a holistic approach to critical consciousness and for the interconnectedness to the Other (the notion of the Other is further elaborated in Chapter 2.3.1). I am interested in embodied methodologies for creating critical awareness, dialogue, encounters and what I define as “affective listening” (further elaborated in Chapter 3.2).

REL investigates and experiments towards unfolding the relation between the micro and macro dimensions of agency, as potential practices of freedom and self-empowerment that aim to decolonise and de-subjectivate the (social) body and its relationality to the Other.

What unites all projects in the Laboratory is their underlying formal curatorial approach, which I define as my particular approach to post-representation (further explained in Chapter 2.2). More specifically, fundamental to the Lab’s conceptual curatorial format are the following:

- Challenging the on-looking audiences towards active protagonists;
- Fostering the experience rather than presenting ideas;
- An embodied and somatic quality as a key component in the experiential approach of knowledge production; and
- Deepening the relational and interconnectedness as vital aspects to be explored and experienced.

For this research, the laboratory has encompassed three experiential projects, *The Vibratile Body* (2016), *Affective Listening* (2017) and *The Articulating Body, Experiments on De-configuring Reactionary Anaesthesia* (2019).⁹

1.1.5 Practice-Based Methodology

“Are we just going to be apparatchicks in the machine, or are we going to try to push for change? Given the way the world is now, we need to think about things that are not flowing with the mainstream. So, the idea of thinking about what something does, rather than what it is, becomes essential.” (Lind, 2015, 323)

⁹ ——— See public announcements and further elaborations in the respective Chapters 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 dedicated to their theoretical concepts and realisations.

Along these conceptual thoughts voiced by curator Maria Lind, the decision for a practice-based research allows my explorations to be unleashed in practice via various experimental formats of the *REL* that remain in continuous dialogue and cross-fertilize with the theoretical backbone. The theory becomes an inspirational and idea-provoking tool for the practice, while the practice likewise triggers new ideas for continuative reading and deepening of theory, and the writing becomes a practice in itself. Both, the practice and the writing work in complementarity and construct each other, becoming “interrelated objects of thinking” (Macleod and Holdridge, 2005, 197). Researchers Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge argue, in their reflections on creative practice-based Ph.D. s, that methodology “can be defined as a demonstration of theory that has previously been articulated, or theory that is articulated by the work itself” (Ibid.). Both aspects are established in this research. Macleod and Holdridge contend further that the practice or the work of art “can only be characterized as revelatory in the sense that this thinking is not verbalized; however, it can be perceived and understood. For our purposes it will be understood at the moment of the Ph.D. viva, as a *visual* enactment of thinking.”¹⁰

In contradiction to, and as indicated before, their emphasis on the “visual enactment of thinking,” my research does not strive towards a final visual “exhibition,” but instead focuses on the process and the experience during the practical projects of the research and on withdrawing from and challenging retinal and product-based representational art and curation. Although dictionary definitions of “research” (as artist and theorist Victor Burgin contemplates in his thinking on artistic research) imply “scientific or scholarly investigation, especially study or experiment aimed at discovery, interpretation or application of facts, theories or laws” (Burgin, 2006, 101), it is crucial to my method to keep the question open and not to seek or give answers. Curator, cultural theorist and author Elke Krasny elaborates in her thoughts on methods of curating in this respect, “It is part of the question’s method to resist closure and to uphold this ongoing process of producing new answers” (Krasny, 2015, 57). Curator and theorist Irit Rogoff (initiator and founder of the transdisciplinary field of Visual Culture Department at Goldsmiths College, London, a field aiming towards working beyond inherited disciplines) emphasises the enactment rather than the illustration of knowledge, a methodological approach and an epistemological crisis that does “not determine which knowledges went into the work of curating but would insist on a new set of relations between those knowledges. A new set of relations that would not drive home the

10 ——— Ibid. In this “post-representational” research, the practical experiments are solely based on the processes, experiences and participation of the protagonists.

point of an argument, as in much academic work and would not produce a documented and visualised cohesion around a phenomenon, as in much of curatorial practice” (Rogoff, 2013, 45).¹¹

I see my research method (both theoretical and practical) in a similar vein of thought. At its core is not the representation or display of an idea or “a documented and visualised cohesion around a phenomenon,” as Rogoff critically reflects (Rogoff, 2013, 45), but rather a process as described by Krasny. A process around activating, experiencing and embodying a question rather than aiming to answer it: a search to compose, assemble and reassemble new sets of relations, juxtapositions, entanglements and assemblages as a means of creating a synthesis and new views that can create new sets of knowledges and experiences.

Being tangent to ideas of embodied cognition theory (believing that cognition is made by properties of the whole body of an organism) or phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s argument that the body constitutes the permanent condition of experience and the basis for perception, I play with corporeal and processual ontologies as an epistemological method through which knowledge is activated, instead of referring to a product or representation. Concretely, I invite transdisciplinary practices that work holistically, integrating somatic embodied approaches into the research to support this idea of experience—of “what something *does*, rather than what it is” (Lind, 2015, 323). This allows my research to embrace the complexities and fluidity, relationality and inter-connectedness, but also in-between moments in which new imaginaries hopefully can unfold.

11 ——— (Rogoff, 2013, 45).

This highlights, of course, that even a practice-based format of research (and equally curatorial practice) is still trapped within the necessities and hence the limitations of documentation, illustration and iteration of the knowledges (the contextual setting of philosophy and theories and practices) as well as the recordings of the experiential and relational dimensions and of the experience itself that became part of the research. Working within these normative necessities and yet limitations, the result of the practice-based research all the same becomes complicit, reiterated and reproduced with what it tries to challenge.

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT AND THEORIES

2.1 Positioning of My Curatorial Practice

“Exhibitions can be understood as shared social spaces where different agents come together and act. This concept of the contact zone is based on contingency and processuality: It is a space of negotiation in which the meaning of words and things is not fixed but always open to discussion. Representation is replaced by process: Rather than dealing with objective values and valuable objects curating entails agency, unexpected encounters, and discursive examinations. However, in collaborative discussions asymmetric relations between participants have to be taken into account.” (Sternfeld and Ziaja, 2012)

This chapter situates my curatorial practice within the larger field of curating and within the most apparent lines of thought.¹² It elaborates the specific positioning of my work in “post-representational curation,” employing and extending the rationale and term defined by theoretician, curator

12 ——— Of course, it is to be acknowledged that the presence of somatic, relational, embodied, and holistic practices is also found within other disciplines like choreographic and dance practice, performance and theatre. (See, e.g., Katan-Schmid, E. (2016) *Embodied Philosophy in Dance: Gaga and Ohad Naharin’s Movement Research*, or by former dancer and actress Daria Halprin (2003) *The Expressive Body in Life, Art, and Therapy. Working with Movement, Metaphor, and Meaning*). Equally, there is a wide discourse to be recognised on alternative, embodied knowledge and bodily knowledge that derives from the phenomenology of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (see the discussion in Chapter 1.1.5 *Practice-Based Methodology*, and 2.3.1 *Conscientization and Thinking Through the Body*). Moreover, a wider context of non-representational theory exists, for example, developed through the work of scholar and geographer Nigel Thrift. His elaborations on non-representational theory focus on the experimental rather than representational approach to social sciences and humanities and in particular regarding human geography (see Thrift, N. (2007) *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*, New York: Routledge). However, since this practice-based research lies within the specificity of curatorial practice, and in particular within the notion of post-representational curation, these wider discourses unfortunately cannot be elaborated on further.

and educator Nora Sternfeld.¹³ Key to her rationale on post-representational curation is the processual that replaces the focus on a display of “objects” or “objective values” with an emphasis on the notion of the discursive encounter. Her approach is situated mostly within the educational field and institutional structures, whereas my approach extends her rationale by focusing on the deepening of the relational and by embracing the somatic and embodied approach of experience and knowledge production.

The notion of representation –not only in the arts–has certainly been challenged since the historic and avant-garde times of the 1960s.¹⁴ However, it could be argued that over the decades its strategies have become institutionalised and canonised, making them no longer tenable today.¹⁵ The question then becomes what can come after representation in curatorial practice, after institutional critique and after neoliberal “instrumentalised” participatory practice? To put it simply, the “ex-hibition” and curation must be rethought.

Terry Smith is an art historian with a long-standing relationship with Independent Curators International with whom he published two considered texts on what constitutes contemporary curation as a practice (*Thinking Contemporary Curation* in 2012 and *Talking Contemporary Curation* in 2015). In Smith’s estimation, curating develops what he calls a specific “exhibitionary meaning” that “is established and experienced in the space

13 ——— Since 2018, Nora Sternfeld has been the documenta professor at the Kunsthochschule Kassel, Germany. Previously, she was a professor for Curating and Mediating Art at Aalto University Helsinki. She is the co-director of the ecm–master’s programme for exhibition theory and practice, University of Applied Arts Vienna, and co-founder and part of trafo.K, office for education and critical knowledge production based in Vienna.

14 ——— The shift of cultural practices in the 1960s towards a more egalitarian form of art and blurring the lines between the artwork, exhibition and the audience, when institutions were also transformed from representational spaces to spaces of ongoing production and more direct interaction with the publics, has since become more prevalent, particularly in the 1990s, and is a prevailing model of curatorial activity today. Curator and writer Helena Reckitt reminds us that the post-1960s also saw the rise of independent curators and, with it, the extension of the definition of the curator’s responsibility from conservation and scholarship towards affective labour that involves communication, liaising, and social networking. (Reckitt, 2016, 8) It was a counter-position to the conservatism and social conformity of the post-war era that questioned social, political, economic, sexual and cultural hegemonic authorities. It was equally a period of critical negotiation of the consumerist-capitalist developed industrial world; contents that have again become just as present and urgent in the 21st century.

15 ——— See Sternfeld and Ziaja, 2012.

of an exhibition, actual or virtual (virtual includes memory). The parsings, therefore, are translations from curatorial into other expository and interpretative languages” (Smith, 2012, chapter “What is Contemporary Curatorial Thought?,” ebook, 39,6 / 446, §10,4). In Smith’s estimation, curating develops what he calls a specific “exhibitionary meaning” can be established, even if the notion of ex-hibere is here to be critically reviewed (elaborated further along in this text) when the curatorial is unfolded in “the space of an exhibition,” I depart from his argument that the “parsings” are translations from the curatorial into other “expository” and “interpretative” languages, as this implies the understanding that the curatorial is coupled to representation. Curator, art historian and former Director of Tensta Kunsthall, Maria Lind says that although the notion of “presenting” is involved in the curatorial, she argues that the curatorial is more than mere “re-presenting.” To quote her words: “it performs something in the here and now instead of merely mapping it from there and then” (Lind, 2009). She thereby emphasises the processual and performative at play in the curatorial. Equally, this curatorial research reflects on performativity, more specifically in the sense of “becoming,” the making of a meaning through a practice and an experience, a kind of experiential materialisation of ideas not only through cognitive and speech acts but also through re-feeling and the experience of corpo-real intensities. A performativity of the actual present moment—the here and now—and embodied experience of an idea rather than a mapping and representation of it “there and then.”¹⁶

As a first effort, let’s rewrite exhibitions as “contact zones” (Sternfeld). From this standpoint, they can then become both shared social spaces as well as “spaces of agency with curators who are able to do and to change something (Sternfeld and Ziaja, 2012).” To fill these spaces with a critical post-representational practice of curating, as Sternfeld suggests, would be to pervade them with “a practice that challenges what can be seen, said, and done by taking a position of solidarity with what is outside of the institution, with actual social debates, fights and movements” (Ibid.). In the context of the specific embodied relational focus of my research, this “solidarity” also implies—if not requires—resonating with contemporary urgencies and embracing disciplines such as holistic practices that aid in the unfolding of experiential critical consciousness and activation of micropolitical empathy.

My specific approach in this practice-based research extends the aspect of “presenting art” not only by enacting an idea, an imaginary and an aspect

16 ——— Hence, in this instance, the notion of performativity extends J.L. Austin’s or Judith Butler’s approach on speech acts and the hegemonic linguistic structures that construct the self. The notion of becoming and becoming body will be further elaborated throughout the text, e.g., in the chapter *Conscientization and Thinking Through the Body*.

of contemporaneity, but by making it a holistically embodied live experience. It is in this sense that I connect to Sternfeld's understanding that curation as a cultural practice has "its own procedure for generating, mediating for, and reflecting on experience and knowledge" (Ibid.). Or rather, how can the curatorial offer space and create the conditions for a process, for an encounter (in particular arguing for the deepening of a relational, somatic approach), for the making of micropolitical social empathy and for the unresolved—a space that allows for not providing answers and for the conflictual to exist between "asymmetric relations."

In his book *The Curatorial, A Philosophy of Curating*, Jean-Paul Martinon—Reader at Goldsmiths University, London and writer—encompasses and shows the complexity of what the curatorial can imply. He shows not only that the term cannot be singularised nor totalised, but he also indicates the curatorial as having agency, as having the ability to catalyse and act towards new imaginaries (Martinon, 2013, 4). This sits along the line of my specific curatorial approach that attempts to catalyse social empathy (and hence new imaginaries) through forms of conscientization.

Furthermore, Martinon's emphasis on the curatorial as a way of organising thought in an encounter with the other and/or with objects and as the pursuit of "new ways of working, relating and knowing" finds its way into this exploration.

While Martinon regards curatorial practice as a search for finding other ways of "instantiating the crises of our world," and engaging with current afflictions and contextualising it within the realities of current neoliberal capitalism, market driven spectacle and entertainment (Ibid., viii), art historian Terry Smith refers to neoliberal capitalism by arguing that the core of curatorial practice ought to focus on "de-inhibiting the artwork" from what he calls "impositions," "that commercial, official, and institutional contemporaneity imposes upon it—the demands of globalized consumption, social conformity, and identarian fundamentalism." He makes an important point by pleading to "replace them with ideas that speak from our actual contemporaneity" (Smith, 2012, chapter "Curating Contemporaneity – Present, Past, and Future," ebook, 406,5 / 446, §21.156).

In Smith's exploration of what would or should be particular to contemporary curation (in much the same way that he examines what connection between contemporary curation and contemporary art exists), he speculates that it is contemporaneity and contemporary presence that contemporary curating implies (Smith, 2012, chapter "What is Contemporary Curatorial Thought?," ebook, 36,5 / 446, §10.3). He suggests challenging the curatorial by curating experiences that require the "subjects" to "exercise" the kinds of creativity that are needed by their contemporaneity (Smith, 2012, chapter "Art Critical, Curatorial, and Historical Thinking Compared," ebook, 59,7 / 446, §10.23). Supporting this stance in that it is

contemporaneity that is the core for curating; contemporaneity is here also understood as a rapport, engagement and negotiation with the present moment and contemporary urgencies, what curator and writer Nina Möntmann might call a “plunge into the world,” a “geopolitical immanence, transcultural approach.” Referring to the arts, she sees contemporaneity “not [as] an illustration of what is happening in the world, but an alternative imaginary produced from an intrinsic position with the means of the arts, of curating, and of theory, which can act as a corrective to the factual world-system.” (Möntmann, 2017)

This research proposes “de-inhibit[ing] the artwork” by creating micro-communal ephemeral situations for those who wish to become protagonists—situations that are based on processual, temporal, sensual, corporeal as well as cognitive experiences as one necessity of our contemporaneity. Equally, the research considers activating different creative formats for experiencing micropolitical social empathy as one of such urgencies of contemporaneity that the curatorial propositions of this research aim to instantiate.¹⁷

2.1.1 The Question of Representation and “Ex-Hibere” Versus “In-Hibere”

“Enough of exhibition. We know its vain display, its encyclopaedic aspirations, its tendency to turn, showing off. Consider inhibition instead.” (Morgan, 1992, 58)

Just as the conventional understanding of artistic expression as being “visual” still too often predominates the discourse, so does the conception of the curator’s core function still seem to lie in the circulation of artwork and expanding its visibility. Both are recurring emphases of Terry Smith in his book *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, but it is needless to mention that artistic and curatorial production have long extended this

17 ————— There is a wider discourse on the notion of contemporaneity. For example, the research project at Aarhus University, Denmark, called *The Contemporary Condition: The Representation and Experience of Contemporaneity in and through Contemporary Arts Practice* aims to investigate contemporaneity as a defining condition of our historical present, with coexisting temporalities and entangled presences, and to explore how artistic production can exhibit the condition of contemporaneity. The research project also brought forward a series of publications, e.g., Cox, G. and Lund, J. (2016) *The Contemporary Condition: Introductory Thoughts on Contemporaneity and Contemporary Art*, Berlin: Sternberg Press. See: <https://contemporaneity.au.dk>.

partial approach. Conversely to his propositions, I would argue that “showing, installation and visually phrasing” (Smith, 2012, chapter “Grammar of the Exhibition,” ebook, 69,5 / 446, \$10.35) surely does not need to be the sole approach for space as the medium for description, presentation, commentary, documentation, and interpretation. The content for space as the medium can equally go beyond such forms of (re)presentation; it can be a (re-)enacted action, experience and the actual telling and exchange itself and much more. Along this line of thinking, I take on Smith’s suggestion to “revisit the word ‘exhibition,’ imagine ‘inhibition’ as its implicated opposite, and so re-read curating as the process of removing the inhibitions from works of art, of freeing them into the space of the exhibition—that is, ‘ex-inhibiting’ them” (Smith, 2015, 35).

More specifically, I rehearse a criticality towards the end product-oriented demands of an exhibition and experiment with what it is that can be ex-hibited, or rather by asking how the exhibition space being ‘in-hibited’ might be more interesting and challenging.

Etymologically “ex-hibit” derives from the Latin *ex-* “out” + *habere* “hold.” To “hold out” also means to exclude, which in this context could be read in various ways. One such example is that it could critically refer to the selection process of what is excluded or included in the “exhibition.” It could also refer to the publics that visit the “exhibition,” i.e., who is included and who is not, and/or if something is presented to them or if they are actively involved in the exhibition beyond being a mere spectator or consumer.

Analogously, when “in-hibere” is not understood in the negative contemporary connotation of the word “inhibit” as constrained or repressed but approaching it from the Latin *in-* + *habere*, meaning “holding in, encompassing,” linguistically, the term opens up a new and positive advance in thinking of the ex-hibition space as a space of “in-hibition.” In the redeployed sense of the word, the ex-hibition is a space of holding, encompassing something, occupying and inhabiting. Instead of the connotation of exteriority and display in “ex-hibiting,” the focus in this way of thinking can align with the notion of manifestation and “in-hibiting,” embracing through inhering within ideas, questions and concepts, even in the sense of inhabiting them. The conventional understanding of “inhabit” (based on Latin *inhabitare*) connotes not only “dwelling in something” but also might imply, in this context, an active role for the “spectator” who, instead of consuming, is inhabiting the ideas at stake, even somatically. Then, how can an exhibition be “in-hibited,” not only in the physical space, but equally in terms of ideas and concepts? Furthermore, how can it become embodied, inhabited and experienced, rather than exposed, represented, presented or displayed?

Theorist and curator Doreen Mende emphasises another aspect of “inhibiting” in the context of the exhibition. She argues that it is not in opposition to the exhibition but rather is a condition or an “enabling element” in introducing a relationship “between heterogeneous forms of practice and theoretical thinking”; she further concludes that “inhibiting” thus helps to unfold cultural differences and to overcome a Western cultural approach that she characterises as “always shedding light on what is discovered, analysed and displayed.”¹⁸

I propose considering “exhibition” in relation to “exposition” as well. The term’s general linguistic everyday usage is applied more often in the context of trade fair-type staging that demonstrates the latest products, such that the term itself implies an even stronger aspect of exteriority, making or presenting in public. Its Latin root *expositus* means “to put or set out,” as in displaying. Artist and writer Martin Beck attempts to grasp the difference between exhibition and display by referring to European and North American post-war definitions of “exhibition.” In those days, the notion of “exhibition” was strongly connoted with that of public presentation, with the purpose of communicating information to and even manipulating its public through display. Beck manages to differentiate the two by regarding exhibition as a “static format” and “display” as a method, an operation and the “form-production” that comes from within the exhibition (Beck, 2009, 32).

Different to Beck’s evaluation of display as the agent of activating form, I see contemporaneity and the curatorial idea at stake as the agent that activates “form,” as well as the curator as protagonist (elaborated in section 2.1.4) and the protagonists themselves as agents. This allows me to rethink Beck’s perspective of the static format of the exhibition into a transformative stake-holding frame for agency.

Within this framework, it is interesting to think about the connotation of the French word for exhibition (*exposition*). Based on Jérôme Sans, the curator and co-founder of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, the term implies taking a position—a theoretical position and a curatorial stand—which is mutually agreed upon by the participants (Sans, 2001). Political philosopher and sociologist Oliver Marchart takes the idea further by understanding curation as “organizing the public sphere” by taking said position. This sphere then allows for antagonism or “asymmetric relations”

18 ——— (Mende, 2013, 106).

Another thought on “displaying” or “showing” is that it implies an intended directional and binary structure of communication, a “from – to” approach, which suggests an emitter and recipient (e.g., artist/spectator) rather than a circular notion of affectivity, experience, process and exchange. This also touches upon questions of authorship, which cannot be discussed within the scope of this research.

(Sternfeld) and becomes collective. Marchart understands the curatorial function as essentially collective. “Organizing is a collective activity. One cannot establish a political counterstandpoint, a counterhegemony, on one’s own” (Marchart, 2011, 45). This idea of the “collective activity” underlines my advance in the *REL* for the making of a collective experience and collective action as a counterapproach also to the question of the non-circular affective quality of display and representation.

Going back to the notion of an exhibition as a purely aesthetic device, I take my position at the counter-standpoint. While philosopher Jean-Louis Déotte holds to the notion of an exhibition as a surface of (re)production (Martinon, 2013, 10), I understand the exhibitionary moment as the site of process and production itself that explores the possibilities of the alternative and emancipatory production of inter-relationality, social experience and knowledge, and additionally as an embodied event and experience that questions, resists or adds to predominant canons of representational curation.

Instead of regarding the exhibition as an aesthetic device, I rather relate the notion of the aesthetic back to its Greek meaning of relating to the perception of the senses (*aisthētikos*, from *aisthēta* “perceptible things,” from *aisthēsthai* “perceive”) and consider the “exhibition” as a ground as well as an agora for knowledge and experience. In this regard, Claire Bishop refers to political philosopher Jacques Rancière’s approach of “aesthesis,” understanding aesthesis as “an autonomous regime of experience that is not reducible to logic, reason or morality” (Bishop, 2012, 18) and as “a mode of sensible perception” (Ibid., 27). Relating aesthesis to art, she states that art is perceived “both as *too removed* from the real world *and yet* as the only space from which it is possible to experiment” and hence that “art must paradoxically remain autonomous *in order to* initiate or achieve a model for social change” (Ibid., 27). She argues further that art as a sphere is both “removed from politics *and yet* always already political because it contains the promise of a better world.” Instead of considering the *work of art* to be autonomous, she highlights (again with Rancière) that it is “our *experience* in relation to art” that is autonomous (Ibid., 27). Bishop elaborates this logic further:

All claims to be “anti-aesthetic” or reject art *still function within the aesthetic regime*. [...] The aesthetic for Rancière therefore signals an ability to think contradiction: the productive contradiction of art’s relationship to social change, which is characterised by the paradox of belief in art’s autonomy *and* in it being inextricably bound to the promise of a better world to come (Ibid., 29).

Even if my curatorial practice appears to be “anti-aesthetic,” it still functions within the “aesthetic regime.” I am intrigued by this idea of “the productive contradiction of art’s relationship to social change.” By integrating non-artistic disciplines (e.g., yogic techniques or Deep Listening) into the aesthetic regime and into the realm of art, I aim to extend and challenge the visual aesthetic and the conventional way of curation, while trying to keep a productive and continual tension between art and the “social.”

Re-thinking the notion of curation, I offer it as poiesis. I recite this term as a making, a scope for action that intentionally attempts to reconcile and interconnect thought with the body, and the individual body with its collective social body. I imagine it further: it is like an attempt toward “sym-poiesis,”¹⁹ as proposed in the work of Donna Haraway, highlighting the relationality and interconnectedness of a making or a “worlding with.” In all my open-ended aspiration, my aim is to expand this argument and work with the idea in the very literal “corpo-real” sense of “in-hibiting” the “ex-hibition” in order to literally question and reverse the attention of “shedding light” onto a displayed something, and rather question what else can the exhibition be and how else can ideas and inquiries be made detectable and relevant. Instead of asking what can be displayed, aesthetically expressed, ex-hibited, I ask how can the making and an idea be articulated, embodied and translated into an experience, and how can the imaginary be “inhibited.” Thus, the practical part of this research, the approach of the *Radical Empathy Lab (REL)*, activates this enquiry by creating forms of conscientization and experiences, which through the inward gaze strive towards a positioning of oneself within the world rather than through representation or pure display. The exhibition thus becomes not a beholder of objects and carrier of ideas, not a physical space but rather an “unfinishable space” (Harney and Desideri, 2013, 136) that is based on the sharing of social time versus the individual one-on-one experience with an object. The ex-hibition becomes a shared, interpersonal, inter-subjective experience, and the curatorial gets imagined as a collective action and experience.

2.1.2 The Question of Audience and (Post?) Participation

Pursuing the curatorial stance towards its ‘addressees’, ‘spectators’, ‘listeners’, ‘visitors’, ‘audience’ (the designations are manifold) is essential. Martinon argues that the concern for the Other always fails in curating. In his opinion, there is a hierarchy of concern: first, the concern for what is displayed, then the exhibition as such, the artist and the curator, and only

19 ——— (Haraway, 2016). Haraway, of course, refers with the idea of sym-poiesis specifically in an ecological sense to our relationality and interconnectedness to the non-human, the earth and all its inhabitants.

then does the concern for the Other and the audience come into play (Martinon, 2013, 27). However, I disagree with Martinon. There have been many curated community-engaging and participatory projects that have contradicted this point.²⁰ Furthermore, my own curatorial practice has developed precisely towards reversing this hierarchy of concerns.

In the practical experiments of this research, it is in fact “the audience” and “the Other” that are not only of concern, but are the core of the projects, which would not even unfold without them.²¹ The artistic and curatorial group Raqs Media Collective²² understand the “sensitivity towards the needs of communities that constitute the publics of the exhibition” as one of the concerns of curatorial responsibilities (Raqs Media Collective, 2010, 103). Within the concerns of curatorial responsibilities lies the crucial question of “the agency of the visitor,” formulated by researcher and

20 ——— For example, the project *Nine Urban Biotopes – Negotiating the Future of Urban Living* curated by the urban arts association Urban Dialogues in Berlin, Germany, was a socially engaged art project of artistic research and cultural exchange among citizen and art initiatives in cities in South Africa and Europe in 2014. The aim of *9UB* was to establish both a “trans-local” and “trans-continental” dialogue by interweaving and connecting new context-specific, socially engaged art projects into the existing social activities of these biotopes. It did so by engaging actively and in flat hierarchy with both citizens and initiators of existing innovative urban development projects and by discussing and sharing different “intentions, methods and techniques” of imaginative urban practices for building “sustainable cities.” See <http://www.urban-biotopes.net>.

Another example can be found the projects by The Israeli Center for Digital Art in Holon, Israel (founded by curator Galit Eilat, now directed by curator Eyal Danon) which is “a space for public art, it constantly questions the place of art institutions in the society in which they act, and tirelessly examines the linkage between art and society, and the political and social issues emerging from the encounter between them.” Their approach—e.g., in the *Jessy Cohen Project*—is to work with and actively engage with the residents of the precarious neighbourhood as equal stakeholders and partners with artist and municipalities in the project. See http://www.digitalartlab.org.il/skn/c6/זכרמה_וניתדוא/e297/וילא_רשיה_ילארשיה_תילטיגיד_תונמאל_ילארשיה.

21 ——— The aim in my curatorial projects is not to invert a “power structure,” but to rather establish a collective experience.

22 ——— Raqs Media Collective can be described as catalysts of cultural processes with a strong focus on philosophical speculation, research, and theory. As a collective of three artists (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, and Shuddhabrata Sengupta), they are also media practitioners, researchers, editors, and curators, for example, of the 11th Shanghai Biennale, which had a strong emphasis on the sensual. They co-founded South Asia’s prominent initiative Sarai-CSDS, a platform for research and reflection on the transformation of urban space and contemporary realities. See <http://sarai.net/>.

editor of the *Afterall* Exhibition Histories book series Lucy Steeds, “how art realizes its affective and discursive potential – how art takes shape in experience and what debates it kindles” (Steeds, 2014, 14). In my view, this aspect is most often underrepresented and not ‘taken care’ of enough (and frequently the emphasis lies more on the representations of “the selves,” artists and curators alike). In my approach, I aim for the publics to be of equal importance in the tri-partition of artist/curator/audience, such that the publics/audience as protagonists are the fundamental subject of curatorial care, and less emphasis is placed on the necessity of the conventional artwork.

In *the Radical Empathy Lab*, the ‘audience’ is not understood as spectators, participants, consumers or “pro-sumers,”²³ but rather as active ‘protagonists’, as the main and leading figure in the curatorial project. Through their active making of micropolitical empathy, they become and inhere ‘the exhibition’. As a result, that which is on ‘display’ is reversed by the performativity of making the ideas ‘visible’ or ‘legible’ by activating them in dialogue, corporeal experience and experiment.²⁴ It seeks an active shifting of the audience away from its positioning as a mere consumer and spectator, whose perception is disembodied and “from the neck up” a “code-breaker deciphering what has been encoded.”²⁵ Concurrent with this shift is the activation of the ‘audience’. Thus, this research seeks to shift ‘the audience’ not only towards becoming the player and participant,

23 ——— (Blackman, 2016, 37). Media theory often reimagines its audiences as potential co-producers of meaning, immediacy, affectivity, and content; often also prone to criticism as merely providing free labour.

24 ——— This research is not drawn to a distinct audience, but the individuals themselves that partake and the diverse backgrounds, practices, and knowledges they bring and add to the collective experience are of greater value. In my practice, I am always relating to the potential, and it proves helpful to also keep in mind what the limits of the practice are and to think about what it cannot do. One of the limitations has been for example that the protagonists in the research projects have mostly been cultural practitioners (owed to the pragmatics (finance, resources etc.) of the open calls that were placed within the field of cultural production). This implies a mayor danger of exclusion (even of elitism) and a failure to reach ‘the general public’, even if artistic projects might be considered as a space for experimentation and as laboratories for society. I hope my practice can develop in the future towards collaborating with organisations that can access wider publics and reaching beyond the field of art.

25 ——— Blackman, 2016, 42). Lisa Blackman is Professor in Media and Communications and co-Head of Department Goldsmiths, University of London, UK. She works at the intersection of body studies and media and cultural theory and is particularly interested in subjectivity, affect, the body and embodiment. She has also contributed to the fields of critical psychology and body studies.

but also towards becoming an active stakeholder, a protagonist, and a 'participant' (with the middle English etymological connotation of "sharing in").

The conventional notion of the "spectator," rather than the "protagonist," is a rather static approach and ought to be problematized if one understands the curatorial as agency (explicated further down in the text) and as an attempt to contribute on a micropolitical level to the potential of social change by enhancing a relational sensitivity. Spectatorship, observation, by-standing and the outside view is what today's society is abundantly saturated with; for example, the spectatorship of ever-increasing sensational news reports, general media consumption and, in particular, the over-stimulation brought on by the digital revolution. These monologues and often banal interactions, as well as the self-marketing and communication on social and networked media, comprise the danger of alienating subjects from their own social and expressive efforts, which can even lead to anxiety—a trademark of late capitalism, as the militant research collective *Institute of Precarious Consciousness* also points out.²⁶ It is active engagement, immersion, experience and taking a position that are often lacking in today's intermediated and distanced perception and engagement with the world. It is this dualism between immersion and "exteriority" that my curatorial practice aims to tackle by altering ways of making, fusing engagement with immersion without leaving the protagonist as just the observer, but rather making her become part of the inside, inhabiting and experiencing the ideas at stake. (This brings issues of participatory art into play, which will be addressed shortly.)

Contemplating again the notion of the spectator, the curatorial is placed in relation to "the stage." Curator and writer Bridget Crone, for example, considers the curatorial a methodology that aims to organise and to add sense to a world in flux, which she calls "a sensible stage" (Crone, 2013, 208). This theory again reinforces the dichotomic perception between the "stage" and its "audience." Crone, however, regards the concept of staging as a helpful approach, since "staging offers us a double-action." "Staging" simultaneously recognises immersion in the unfolding action and at the same time it separates us from it, offering us the view from "outside" of the stage: "a position of spectatorship" (Ibid., 210). I argue that it is exactly this exhibitionary structure understood as "a stage" (which implies a set hier-

26 ——— Similar to the practical approach of my research, *The Institute of Precarious Consciousness* believes that by "implementing consciousness-raising tactics, they suggest that participants might transform the 'blocked reactive' affects produced by networked capitalism into those of 'active liberation'" (Reckitt, 2016, 23). Their approach, though, lies in the specificity of precarity-oriented consciousness-raising to overcome and see anxiety as symptomatic of wider social structures.

archy between what is displayed on stage and the audience)²⁷ that needs to be scrutinised and reflected upon in respect to its potential for the emergence of new subjectivities and in particular of “inter-subjectivities.” How can this hierarchical and dichotomist partition be dissolved?

“Participation” at first glance, for example, appears to be socially inclusive and a proposition against representation. However, when critically observed, it can re-iterate and reinforce identitarian ascriptions and parameters for exclusion, instead of fostering post-identitarian understanding of “we” and working towards “self-definition.” For example, when working “with” minority groups of society, who defines and sets the parameter of what a minority is? By defining the group as such, it reiterates identitarian ascriptions and “brings about even greater exclusion (of those outside the scope of the target group), (Sternfeld, 2013, 5)” as Nora Sternfeld argues. By referring to Irit Rogoff, she suggests reconsidering the concept of “we” in a post-identitarian manner and “participation as a collective praxis of speaking and acting publicly that resist identitarian ascriptions” (Rogoff as cited in Sternfeld, 2013, 5-6). Sternfeld, however, argues that participatory projects are often part of museum strategies for social inclusion and tools for creating further “visibility.” And although participation strives for “working with” people, its participants become objects of representation instead, and fulfil the function to “close the gaps in the (educational) responsibilities that the institutions have failed to fulfill [...]” (Ibid., 2).

Similarly, writer Claire Bishop points out the governmental instrumentalisation of “participation” in art²⁸ to not only compensate for the shortfall of their own duties, but also as being part of a neoliberalist political agenda to create self-active citizens (Bishop, 2012, 14). I strongly agree with Sternfeld’s wish to understand participation “not only as ‘joining in’ something, but also as a way of taking part and of having a part, and thus making the conditions of participation part of the game” (Sternfeld, 2013, 3). However, my specific focus centers on the individual and the experiencing of the possibly emancipatory practice and the aspect of “taking and having a part” itself.

27 ——— Reminding us of the early part of 20th-century idea of the fourth wall, an invisible wall that divides the actors in a staged theatre from its audience, assuming a one-way perception in that the audience can see through the wall and the actors act as if they cannot.

28 ——— Bishop refers in particular to New Labour’s social inclusivity priorities for arts funding in the UK in the 1990s and 2000s and what this meant for programming priorities and ways in which seemingly politically engaged participatory art was at times offered as a SOP against actual political activism.

Instead of discussing the systemic structures,²⁹ rules and conditions of participation and transformative institutional strategies, the focus of this research and proceedings is on the practical, potentially emancipatory experience on the micro level. This shifts the emphasis toward conscientization, transformative agency and self-definition through experience and the action of the protagonist, the individual herself in the making of becoming an “intersubjective agent” as I have come to call her.³⁰ This, of course, also adds to the discussion of institutional critique, but extends beyond the relational within the institution, the artworld and the predicted identitarian attributions of the object-, spectator-, artist- and curator-quadrangle that comes with it.³¹ This way, it can become a methodology beyond the institution that deepens relations to urgencies of contemporaneity at stake in society.

29 ——— Another angle of the critique of systemic structure is, e.g., that of curator and writer Helena Reckitt who emphasises the precarity and dependency on funding structures as effects from audience-driven curatorial practice. In the era of affective and immaterial labour of late neoliberal capitalism that demands that problems be solved individually (instead of understanding them as systemic and as a collective process), she calls for “a redefinition of curatorial care and calls for a reallocation of curatorial and institutional priorities and resources” (Reckitt, 2016, 7). Namely, instead of complying with neoliberal capitalist demands, which means instrumentalising and feeding off on “affective resources” like personal relationships and energies for a project to happen, for Reckitt, curatorial care should broach the structural issue of conditions of precarity under which cultural production occurs, act upon it, raise public awareness about it and thus resist and counter the neoliberal capitalist demands. She situates her demand against the backdrop of the financial precarity of funding infrastructures that are caused by the trend of decreasing governmental cultural funding and its trends towards support of entrepreneurship of fundraising in the private sector.

30 ——— Helena Reckitt calls for curatorial care to be re-conceptualised by prioritising “the field’s overall sustenance over its most visible, prestigious or lucrative aspects” (Ibid., 26). Her call fully resonates with me but implies a different area of research that in its complexity could be a research subject on its own. Hence, it exceeds the scope of this theoretical and practice-based investigation to elaborate further on the political conditions under which cultural production operates.

31 ——— My research interest lies not within the relations inside the artworld and hence not specifically on institutional critique (which, of course, is tangent to my practice, but which I regard more as a side effect in it and which cannot be emphasised further in the scope of this research). My curatorial practice in this research focuses instead on art’s relationship with the contemporaneity outside of the artworld and the embodied experience of art’s capacities of forms of potential resistance within the overall social arena.

I am aware that my recent curatorial practice can easily fall not only into the pitfalls of the critique of the experience economy, but also into the logics of the market gaining value from immaterial labour, or reaffirmation of and feeding right into neoliberal capitalist requirements. The practice can easily be misunderstood and accused of such “individual problem solving” instead of critically reflecting on the systemic structure as the problem at stake. I regard my approach not as an attempt to sidestep such pitfalls nor as a panacea, but more as a lens than an agenda and as a point from which we can start thinking together. In addition, my approach starts one step before the systemic critique, by first creating a critical experiential, “radical” awareness at the radix, the root (the individual level of the protagonist) with yogic techniques, listening practices and meditation or sensorial experiments in which the perceptions are heightened to create a more sharpened awareness of the self. This aims at developing a critical reflection of the positioning of the self within the larger (and possibly even systemically complex) social and collective body.

Regarding the practical making of my research, this move places my curatorial practice somewhat between what is defined as “participatory” and “relational aesthetics.” It is participatory, of course, in the sense that people and their intersubjective relations are the core or the medium of the project and that the scrutiny of the project does rely on, as Claire Bishop defines it, “participation as a politicized working process.” She states:

Today’s participatory art is often at pains to emphasise process over a definitive image, concept or object. It tends to value what is invisible: a group dynamic, a social situation, a change of energy, a raised consciousness. As a result, it is an art dependent on first-hand experience [...]. (Bishop, 2012, 6).

Although parts of the experiences of the *REL* are in some stages more “interactive” (one-on-one interactions with the self and other protagonists in the project), at the heart of the projects lies the attempt to create a “social situation, a change of energy [and] a raised consciousness” (as per Bishop).

As indicated earlier, the curatorial practice in this research is not about a visual aesthetic refusal; it instead wishes to re-emphasise aesthetics in the sense of “aesthesis,” a sensual experience (and with Bishop, connecting this notion back to politics—in Jacques Rancière’s understanding—“an autonomous regime of experience that is not reducible to logic, reason or morality” (Ibid., 18)). It is in this sense that the practice aims to create an aesthetic social experience.³² To challenge the term “exhibition” further,

32 ——— Regarding “relational aesthetics” – a term coined by curator and theorist Nicholas Bourriaud in the 1990s in his book *Relational Aesthetics*

the curated affective experiences become the ‘exhibition’, and don’t remain in the realm of the accompanying “paracuratorial” side programme.³³ The affective experience, the dialogue and the social process become the dematerialized work. The “exhibition” becomes a safeguarding of ‘sensing’ that fosters what semiotician and literary theorist Walter D. Mignolo might call “disobedient conservatism,” “to disobey ‘scientific’ classifications of human beings and to conserve the fundamental role of sensing (aesthesis) and emotioning in our everyday life, as well as in the high decisions by the actors leading states, corporations and banks and the production of knowledge” (Mignolo, 2017, 42).

Holding that concept, *REL* sets out to allow for an “aesthetic” experience for critical reflection and conscientization. In this process, the individual experience fluctuates back and forth with the collective experience of multiple authorships and into a thinkable micro-community that strives towards social change,³⁴ reminding us of Roland Barthes’ idea that, “What

(Bourriaud, 2002) – my practice relates inasmuch as meaning is elaborated collectively rather than through consumption of a sole individual and in that it is moved by human relations and their social context and positions, and additionally in that the position of the artist, or as I would claim, also the curator, shifts further towards the position of a facilitator, initiator, or catalyst rather than the maker, in order to activate “intersubjective encounters.” (In my practice, in addition to being a facilitator, I also become an active protagonist.) Further positioning with regard to relational aesthetics will be detailed later in this text.

33 ——— See for example Jens Hoffmann who argues: “Too many curators seem to think that exhibition making is a thing of the past and that today it has to be all about what I call the paracuratorial: lectures, screenings, exhibitions without art, working with artists on projects without ever producing anything that could be exhibited” (Hoffmann and Lind, 2011).

34 ——— A very literal example for this was the gong sound-bath at the end of *The Vibratile Body* experiment that culminated in a collective vocal sound making in which the protagonists were connecting with the other by putting their arms on each other, letting the vocally created sound travel somatically from one person to the other. This created a momentary micro-community via an embodied collective experience of our interconnectedness, the unconditional equality between us which resonated and nurtured as an inspiration and resonating sensation in our everyday lives beyond the project (at least temporarily). The notions of “community, micro- and temporary community,” along with associations to notions of collectivity or mutuality, and collaboration open up and have precedence within an existing discourse, whose analysis unfortunately will have to wait for another venue. Nonetheless, art historian Grant Kester, for instance, gives an overview and traces community and socially engaged art back through art history to the conceptual and feminist art of the 1960s and critical theory. See, for instance, Kester (2004), *Conversation Pieces: Community and*

matters are the ideas, experiences and possibilities that result from these interactions.”³⁵

With an advance towards social change, Claire Bishop warns us about what Peter Dews calls the “ethical turn”; if a project gets judged and evaluated by the ethics of its interpersonal interaction, by the striving towards

Communication in Modern Art, or Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art (1995).

Art historian and writer Miwon Kwon iterates “community-based” as synonymous with site-specific public art that emerged in the 1990s. See Kwon (1997), or Claire Bishop’s *The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents* from 2006.

Jean-Luc Nancy’s elaborations in his book *Being Singular Plural* (2002) proves to be a source for further thinking about the question of collectivity, which scholar Irit Rogoff also draws upon in her investigation into audience and participation in contemporary art spaces. She argues for a similarity between what she calls “performative collectivities” and the shared production of meanings that are created by the mere fact of gathering in an exhibition or around an artwork. In referring to the 1970s and sociologist Howard Becker, who put forward the concept of “art as collective action,” scholar and choreographer Sandra Chatterjee provides a further overview of the literature on the concept. See Chatterjee (2015).

The term “community” is not used throughout this research in the idea of community as site-specific public art, nor in relation to an audience of visiting an exhibition (Rogoff), but rather with the understanding of creating a momentary intimate group of protagonists that are unified through their common interest in practising and experiencing together the concepts that the respective experiments offer—a temporary being-together shared through a common interest, while allowing for dissensus and debate. In this context, it is interesting to look at performance theorist and performance maker Bojana Cvejić’s thoughts on collectivity, in which she defines the notion of “we” as “we’ isn’t unison, but taking responsibility for relations ‘with’ in working with one another, with no compromise of tolerance, but sustaining the differential in contact [...]” Cvejić (2005).

35 ——— (Bishop, 2012, 9).

In both research projects *The Vibratile Body* and *Affective Listening*, I video-interviewed the protagonists after the project to find out about their experiences, how their perception and conscientization within and in relation to the other protagonists felt and developed. Since this is not an empirical study, I cannot offer a precise measurement, but it can be said that probably 90% described what I had hoped for, i.e., that they felt more connected and more part of the collective body throughout the curated development of the projects. Here, it is also fruitful to contemplate the aspect of crisis or disruption (reminding us of Marchart’s note on that earlier on). A brief moment of crisis did happen halfway in both experiments, by one protagonist, who (probably triggered by the overstimulation and intensity of the exercises) went into a short moment of disruption and resistance.

consensual dialogue and by sensitivity to difference, it risks becoming a new kind of repressive form (Bishop, 2012, 25). Rather than creating an ethical consensus, I hope for the actions and experiences in *REL* to have a potentially emancipatory and self-empowering effect and affect that operate within the politics of social concerns. My approach does not strive towards consensual dialogue, ethical reasoning or resolving; rather, it hopes to create post-identitarian, intersubjective relations and to allow for an unfolding of controversy and debate within the micropolitical experience, within the self and within the created micro-collective social body. *REL* might not be disruptive or disturbing in method, but via the critical consciousness that it aims to create, it encompasses possible symbolic shifts.

By creating an experience for critical consciousness, *REL* strives towards what Jacques Rancière might call “dissensus,” undoing and moving beyond subjugation and imposed homogenising norms and values.³⁶ Although the experiences produced through *REL* are initially curated towards the individual, they specifically always develop into and pursue the social moment and the experience of being part of a collective body, which makes the experience participatory rather than interactive. Therefore, the methodology remains un-didactic in that it does not wish to give its protagonists “things to do,” but it instead offers a space of potential collective transformation through exercises and experiments, in which categories of individual/social, conscious/unconscious, and active/passive are tested and might temporarily even be dissolved. By integrating non-artistic disciplines of mindfulness into the aesthetic realm of art—while simultaneously and paradoxically de-emphasising the visual aesthetic—, *REL* aims to transgress, expand, and create a productive incongruity to the conventional way of curation, within the tension between “art” and the “social.”

Although situated within but not rejecting the aesthetic realm of the arts, *REL* meanwhile offers very little for visual analysis. Instead, *REL* focuses more on an unmediated, live, first-hand experience by the protagonists. It does not reject “the exhibition space” but rather aims to refer to a relationship by attempting to challenge it. Similarly to scholar and author Günter Berghaus’ description of European Happenings in the 1960s and ‘70s as “a confrontation with our alienated existence in late-capitalist society, a discourse on the conflict between our real self and its alienated state” (Bishop, 2012, 95), I endeavour to curate experiences that raise consciousness, discuss and challenge but also empower this “real self” (Berghaus) and its “alienated state” in today’s normative codes and neoliberal and

36 ——— In his writings in *Dissensus* (2010) Rancière explains dissensus as being based on the claim for equality of its acting agents, and not only as disrupting the social order, but disrupting and exposing the perceptive and epistemic foundations of that order.

cognitive capitalism. I aim for a “sensuous immediacy as a potential locus of disalienation” as Bishop refers to participatory practice (Ibid., 276). This “sensuous immediacy as a potential locus of disalienation” allows for transdisciplinarity, obstructions, questions, disagreements and for not seeking to give answers, in which the power of sensuous immediacy, transdisciplinarity and partaking of the protagonist lies. To do so, it seems important for the curatorial to actively undo its often administrative and representative frame.

The next section looks at the difference between “curating,” “the curatorial” and curatorial agency and how they have been defined by various authorities in the field, in order to attempt to re-frame and re-define these notions within this research.

2.1.3 Curating—Curatorial—Agency

“The curatorial is a jailbreak from pre-existing frames, a gift enabling one to see the world differently, a strategy for inventing new points of departure, a practice of creating allegiances against social ills, a way of caring for humanity, as process of renewing one’s own subjectivity, a tactical move for reinventing life, a sensual practice of creating signification, a political tool outside of politics, a procedure to maintain a community together, [...] the act of keeping a question alive, the energy of retaining a sense of fun, [...] the measures to create affects, [...] an invitation for reflexivity, [...] a way of fighting against corporate culture” (Martinon, 2013, 4).

Maria Lind has long made a distinction between the curatorial and curating. In agreement with her, I suggest a qualitative difference, between the act of “exhibiting,” “the curatorial” and “curating.” Curating to me is the practical, organisational and administrative act of translating or implementing the curatorial thought or concept into flesh or action; or, as Maria Lind says, “Curating’ is ‘business as usual’ in terms of putting together an exhibition, organizing a commission, programming a screening series, etcetera” (Smith, 2012, chapter “The Grammar of the Exhibition,” ebook, 74,2 / 446, §10.44).

In rethinking curating today, I find it useful to draw upon thinker and curator Sarat Maharaj. Maharaj is not only an authority in thinking about cultural translation and difference, but particularly important in this context, for his thinking on art as a producer of knowledge and for new understandings and experiencing of the world. He makes an important distinction between what he calls “curatorial captivity” (in which “the curatorial process is more strictly ‘representational’—bound up with constellating

artworks and practices according to some pre-given theoretical perspective, often a ‘truth’ shipped in from another discipline, i.e., from ‘outside’) and “curatorial capture.” Curatorial capture, he argues, “is about the capacity to bring into visibility new ‘epistemic objects’, other terrains of experience, attention and sensibility. It generates new knowledge from ‘inside’ its exploratory force” (Maharaj, 2013).

The *Radical Empathy Lab* aims to activate this “inside,” the “exploratory” force as an alternative way to generate knowledge and experience. It is “the curatorial capture” which is of interest to my research, as it implies and underlines the open, non-answer-giving process as well as the “experimental force” and a “thinking through curating” which also involves that methodologies are invented anew for each project. Based on Maharaj, curating as a process of thinking means “it engages with academic disciplines while remaining at odds with them. In posing ‘irregular’ questions that fall outside their ambit and line of vision, it opens an indeterminate, speculative chink between them and beyond” (Ibid.).

Maharaj’s advancing of and distinction between the two terms strongly underlines my conceptual approach and helps me rethink “the curatorial” as a potential for activating a speculative capturing force and experience, a new imaginary. It also helps in keeping an awareness about the activation and relationship between theory and practice.

Accordingly, I understand the curatorial as the conceptual backbone that includes methodology and theoretical and philosophical speculations, which are worked out in the flesh or put into action, and which give curating agency, offering a potential for change or a micropolitical impact. In trying to rethink the curatorial, Maria Lind represents a position that strongly seeks to extend how it traditionally is understood. She asks the following:

Is there something we could call the curatorial? A way of linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories, and discourses in physical space? An endeavour that encourages you to start from the artwork but not stay there, to think with it but also away from and against it? I believe so, and can imagine this mode of curating to operate like an active catalyst, generating twists, turns, and tensions – owing much to site-specific and context – sensitive practices and even more to various traditions of institutional critique (Lind, 2009).

Lind argues that, for her, the curatorial process always starts with the artwork (even if it doesn’t need to stay there, as she stresses). Equally, in a conversation with writer and curator Jens Hoffmann in *Mousse* magazine, she states that she understands the curatorial as a methodology, which takes art as its starting point:

Innovation needs some kind of urgency in order to avoid becoming formalized. In my case, thinking about and developing new and/or altered formats and approaches in relation to curating is connected with art itself, with its sensibility, attitude etc. My process starts with art rather than theories or arguments, which enter at a later stage (Hoffmann and Lind, 2011).

I strongly sympathize with her search for altered formats and approaches and her expanded understanding of curation that can extend the exhibition format,³⁷ and my work certainly also is indebted to art's "sensibility"; however, in contrast to Lind, my own approach and curatorial process does not necessarily have art or the artwork as its starting point, but rather the urgency or an aspect of contemporaneity, and questions of how individuals may relate to each other. Particularly in my recent research projects, the starting point has been an idea and theories which then become activated and unfolded, with the focus on the processual and on transdisciplinary artistic and holistic body-related practices (which, in turn, has then led me back to new theoretical approaches).

To exclusively take art or the artwork as the starting point is in my opinion slightly reductive, as in my view the curatorial does not necessarily need art as a starting point, but rather the contemporaneity at stake and an opening for new sets of relations and knowledges that might not even be artistic in the conventional sense.

I certainly agree with Lind's argument about the political dimension of the curatorial, which parallels Chantal Mouffe's propagation of "the political" as antagonistic and non-consensual (Mouffe, 2005):

An aspect of life that cannot be separated from divergence and dissent, a set of practices that disturbs existing power relations. At its best, the curatorial is a viral presence that strives to create friction and push new ideas, whether from curators or artists, educators or editors. This proposition demands that we continue to renegotiate the conventions of curating. And it asks that we look closely at recent curatorial projects to find potential avenues for curating during the decade ahead [...] (Lind, 2009).

37 ——— For instance, she states that, "The most significant development in the last 20 years is that other formats besides exhibitions, such as discursive events, commissioning projects outside designated exhibition spaces, and film screenings, have become more common and more influential" (Hoffmann, 2017, 262).

Jean-Paul Martinon also differentiates between the practice of curating (as a constitutive activity of staging and setting up exhibitions and other modes of display) and the curatorial, which he describes “as a non-constitutive event-form,” emphasising the moment, the enactment and utterance of the event of knowledge itself which communicates and allows for agency, or what Lind might iterate as “encouraging another way of thinking or sensing the world [...] and inevitably sparking new ways to change the world” (Lind, 2009).

I sympathise with Martinon in understanding the curatorial (and here I would equally add artistic and holistic practices) as agency, or what he compares to a “warrior of the imaginary.” To him, the imaginary can “never be drawn with any certainty” and cannot be confined by a discipline or a practice. Reminding us of Mouffe’s propagation to keep political antagonism alive, he writes: “As such, the imaginary [and hence the curatorial] remains a pure political tool untainted by the stench of politics” (Ibid., 29).

Along the lines of Martinon and Lind, I argue that, similarly to artistic practice, the curatorial imaginary carries potential for agency and change (even if on micropolitical level), as potentially transformative, as an incubator and spark for creating critical consciousness, activating and inspiring new ways of positioning oneself and being implicated in the world and extending the form of pure description. Through my practice-based research, I have sought to manifest these potentialities (see Chapter 3 on the *Radical Empathy Lab*).

Nora Sternfeld talks about the “curatorial action in which taking a stand” is of importance; curating as agency, “as a theoretical practice and practical theory that is about being able to do and change something” (Sternfeld, 2013, 146). According to her, critical agency defies the dichotomy of “good” and “bad” and asks instead for “the difference within” and what it could mean to still remain able to act (Ibid., 148).

Theorist and curator Suzana Milevska advocates that critical curating today means that the focus lies less on the end-product of the exhibition, but rather on the process, research and the theoretical and critical formats like conferences, workshops, reading workshops, public debates, etc. She concludes that critical curating stands in relation to institutional critique, art for social change and curatorial agency, and refers to social anthropologist Alfred Gell’s understanding of “art as agency,” claiming that art does not only represent the world but that it equally has the capacity to act. Furthermore, her view on the curator’s role does find resonance in this research exploration, in which the curator is “an active societal agent that contributes towards a cross-referential understanding of art between artistic, cultural, ethnic, class, gender and sexual camps and works, moreover, towards the improvement of society in general [...]” (Milevska, 2013, 69).

Although Milevska's practice is specifically situated within postcolonial discourse of visibility and cultural policies related to the nation-state, art, curating and museums, I strongly sympathize with her argument and understand the curator, and thus myself, as an "active societal agent" who aims to contribute to the potential enhancement of society. Of course, critical questions remain, like to what degree can the curatorial create social transformation, what are the limits of the curatorial, and how might acts of curating shift specific conditions of agency.

2.1.4 Curator as Protagonist

Although as a curator I am still beholden to a traditional structure of inviting and giving a platform for other cultural practitioners to act out their practice, I have started to become transdisciplinary in my own practice. Resonating with feminist scholarship and revaluing caring activities, I extend the notion of curatorial practice (in the etymological Latin roots of the word *curare*, from *cura*, taking care or even "curing") by actively integrating and engaging in holistic practices and those in which I am trained beyond my curatorial expertise (which is yoga and meditation) as additional and reflective tools for a holistic making and caretaking not only of protagonists' embodied experiences, but of also the ideas and approaches inhibited in the project. For example, I also enacted aspects of "Body Pedagogy," an educational methodology and tool for social change that builds on relational skills and collaborative games and that through collective bodily experiences talks about the social organisation of living together.³⁸

38 ——— This method was, for example, part of "Soma," an anarchist therapy and social laboratory created by Brazilian psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and author Roberto Freire (not related to Paulo Freire but taking part in his projects) in the late 1960s during Brazil's military dictatorship to playfully challenge regulations and hierarchical and social conventions. See <http://somaexperiments.wordpress.com/soma/>. These playful methods were not only used for self-empowerment and dealing with the oppression, but also to challenge capitalist values, hierarchical rules and social conventions with playfulness and cooperative games on a personal level. In my research project *Affective Listening*, for example, I enacted and extended parts of the exercise "Body Locomotion" which focuses on building trust between the protagonists and towards the awareness of a collective body and collective responsibility for safety and risk-taking. It further involved a physical aspect of entrusting one's physical balance to the other protagonists, as well as reflection and discussion, empathic listening within the group and reporting back to the other groups as a collective body. This was inspired by the 2012 *Radical Education Workbook*, by the Radical Education Forum (a group of people working in a wide range of educational settings in the UK that discuss radical pedagogical theories and techniques that also include members of the sound art and political collective Ultra-red).

Upon close research, I also re-enacted multi-sensorial experiences by Brazilian artist Lygia Clark from the 1960s and activated instructions of sonic meditations by experimental composer and Deep Listening founder Pauline Oliveros.^{39 40}

39 ——— See Chapter 3.1.2. I researched the video interviews by Brazilian curator and theorist Suely Rolnik (who has worked intensively on the work of Lygia Clark) that she conducted with artist and cultural workers that worked with Lygia Clark. These video interviews were part of Rolnik's project *Lygia Clark, from Object to Event* that frames the artistic and intellectual legacy of Lygia Clark's experimental work that she created after her practice in painting and sculpture. Some of these interviews were shown at Raven Row, London, in the exhibition *A History of Irritated Material*, curated by Lars Bang Larsen in 2010. (Available at <http://www.ravenrow.org/texts/16/>. Accessed 6 November 2017). I got particularly interested in the interview with artists Gaëlle Bosser and Claude Lothier (2004) who attended several semesters of Lygia Clark's classes at Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. Gaëlle was one of Clark's closest students, and they elaborate in fair detail how Clark's Multi-Sensorial Experiments were conducted. Based on this research, I re-enacted these exercises in my project *The Vibratile Body* as closely to their description as possible. The senses of smell and touch were enhanced, entwined by awareness exercises of breathing and interconnectedness with the other protagonists. Pauline Oliveros' instructions for sonic meditation are easily accessible through her books. In *The Vibratile Body* project, I enacted sonic meditation in particular from Oliveros' book called *Sonic Meditations*, Smith Publications, 1974.

40 ——— My practice is certainly indebted to the line of thinking of the art of the 1960s and '70s (beyond the Brazilian context and occurring worldwide, like Fluxus, conceptual art, and Happenings, though their scrutiny lay on the broadening the boundaries of art), and that of the 1990s, which is defined by Nicolas Bourriaud as "relational aesthetics" in his eponymous book from 1998. He defines it as follows: "As part of a 'relationist' theory of art, inter-subjectivity does not only represent the social setting for the reception of art, which is its 'environment', its 'field' (Bourdieu), but also becomes the quintessence of artistic practice" (Bourriaud, 2002, 22). Bourriaud makes an important distinction between art that creates empathy and the sharing of experiences (e.g., sculpture, painting, etc.) in which the exhibition functions as that space of sharing and exchange and which "tightens the space of relations," e.g., through a created sociability, for instance, conversations about the exhibition (Ibid., 15).

In my research practice, I aim to not only tighten the space of relations between the protagonists (neither a visitor nor a relational aesthetic object to be perceived), but also to create a space of relations and inter-subjective relations: embodied experience of conscientization within the self and in relation and exchange with the Other. As the producer of the experiences, I create relations between people but also within oneself; the difference from relational aesthetic practice is that

I am mindful that such methods might be vulnerable to the critique of the curator as the creator, thereby instrumentalising artists (or, as in this case, posthumous artists' practices) as the medium and overshadowing the artist or their artworks. However, I would counter with independent curators Joseph Doubtfire and Giulia Ranchetti's (2015) argument that the curatorial process is very similar to the process of an "artist-curator" who likewise uses the exhibition/curated project as a medium for making their practice and for creating "new narratives through and with existing narratives," though Ranchetti and Doubtfire also argue that, "The artist-curator curates, in a sense, like the artist makes work, through idea, dialogue and/or inquisition. The dichotomy between an independent or artist-curated exhibition exists in inquiry" (Ibid.). I dissent that inquiry signifies the dichotomy between artists and independently curated projects, as my curatorial work is equally made through "dialogue and/or inquisition" and "subject as hypothesis, understanding (or not) through process." Yet, Ranchetti and Doubtfire summarise that the independent curator also "uses the exhibition as medium for creative expression and employs creative methods" and that, by thinking through the process of curating, it becomes a self-reflexive practice "in a similar way to the artist who thinks through making" (Ibid.).

With these arguments and Milevska's understanding of the curator as "an active societal agent" in mind, artist and e-flux founder Anton Vidokle's claim that the sole function of curators ought to be "intermediaries between producers of art and the power structure of our society" and his allegation that "[c]uratorial work is a profession, and people working in the field are not free agents but are rather employed to perform a task on behalf of an institution or a client" (Vidokle, 2010) appears indeed rather outdated, reductive and as pure provocation. I can sympathize with his fear as an artist to be overrun by the creative curatorial methods and impulses that have become acceptable, and some curators surely might see their position as one of power, but it feels hyperbolic to generalize and compare curators with tyranny and as "supervisors of the workers" (the artists):

it does not imply the necessity of an aesthetic or relational object (e.g., in Tiravanija's cooking sessions, the aesthetic relational object consists of the soup). I am in accordance with Bourriaud's definition of relational aesthetics as having the social exchanges and interactivity at the core, but as he further states "within the aesthetic experience being offered," I understand aesthetics in my practice not in its conventional connotation of the appreciation of beauty, but rather according to its etymological connotation of *aisthesthai* "perceive," sensing (elaborated earlier in this chapter) the experience itself.

The nightmare scenario for artists is that the supervisors bypass the workers altogether and begin producing art themselves, or automate the process of art production to render artists redundant (Ibid.).

As a curator, I do not understand myself as a supervisor, as usually my work is rather dialogical and exactly trying to overcome such outdated hierarchies (including the role of the audience). And yes, even if curatorial work becomes more artistic and the borders between artist and curators more blurred, could the question and fear of becoming redundant not also be reversed by artists curating? Instead of creating dichotomies, I rather see that both practices have agency (not only the artist, as Vidokle claims) and ought to be in dialogue with each other and even could be cross-fertilising. In addition, aren't both artistic and curatorial practices at their core similar in that they are quests for finding something out? In the Afterall Symposium "Artist as Curator," curator Ruth Noack, for example, shares artist Willem de Rooj's comment that he is learning from "the stuff" that he is making, and she likewise makes exhibitions to find something out (Noack, 2012).

Rather than retaining the dichotomy between artist/curator, it seems important to open a third term: one that can fulfil and elaborate on Sternfeld's notion of "post-representation" and that can engage with contemporary institutional constructs which are often shaped by neoliberal politics. Director of Kunsthalle Basel and curator Elena Filipovic highlights, in her contemplation of why it took so long for exhibitions to be considered a valid subject for study (while referring to artist-curated exhibitions), "the tenuousness of the exhibition's – any exhibition's – ontological ground, no matter who curated it" and that it is an ambiguous object of study, as it is not "a clear product of any single hand."⁴¹ I would argue that even a con-

41 ——— (Filipovic, 2013, 157).

This, of course, again brings to mind the long history (in particular those of the 1960s and 1970s) of precedents for questions of the blurring between the roles of curator/artist/viewer, and the innovations and challenges that came with them. For example, the paradigm shifting figure of Harald Szeemann about whom Hans-Joachim Müller writes, "Szeemann thought he was the 'most important artist since World War II.' His faith in the [...] social and anthropological responsibility of the aesthetic paradigm and the vital reinforcement of visions was the strongest reflection for those utopias to which Szeemann's exhibitions tried to lend substance" (Müller, 2006, 108). Terry Smith calls Szeemann's strategy an "curator-as artist approach" (Smith, 2012, chapter "Co-Curate With Artists," ebook, 366,3 / 446, \$21.96), which means that the curator's vision and conceptual thinking dominates the presentation and hence also the experience and perception of the exhibition.

ventional monographic exhibition of an artist is not “a product of a single hand,” but a collective process. The concept and ideas of the artworks in an exhibition are always interconnected and in dialogue not only with its producers (the curator in dialogue with the artist or, if posthumous, the curator’s reflections on and conceptual curatorial approach to the artwork to be exhibited) but also with its publics and the moment when the artwork and exhibition are perceived and experienced. As Marcel Duchamp states in “Le processus créatif,” it is the viewer who completes the artwork with her perception and attention.

Thinking further about the blurred ontological ground of “the exhibition” (including the relationship to its audience), it can be productive to look at scholar Lisa Blackman’s idea of thinking of new sets of relations as “entanglements.” This idea emphasises that the visitor, or in this research the protagonist, herself brings her own background, memories, experiences, feelings, etc., to the project, entangling with it in submerged and displaced forms.⁴² She points out the importance of the question “of what becomes ‘available’ for both conscious and non-conscious reflection and experi-

Another example is art critic Lucy Lippard who, also in the era of the 1960s, curated exhibitions—for example, her “numbered shows” for which she received criticism. She elaborates on the blurring of roles: Peter Plagens, reviewing *557,087* in *Artforum*, accused me of being an artist. She wrote: “There is a total style to the show, a style so pervasive as to suggest that Lucy Lippard is in fact the artist and her medium is other artists.’ [...] I was annoyed by this at the time, but in another sense it is not such a bad assessment of all curating, as it pinpoints one of the prime issues of the period in which these shows were made – the deliberate blurring of roles, as well as boundaries between mediums and functions. Over the years I admit I did my best to exacerbate this confusion, collaborating with several conceptual artists, LeWitt, Barry, Huebler, David Lamelas, among others. In a labyrinthine text in which I fused my contributions to a book and exhibition project by Lamelas and a collaboration with Huebler, I wrote: ‘It’s all just a matter of what to call it. Does that matter? ... Is a curator an artist because he uses a group of paintings and sculptures in a theme show to prove a point of his own? Is Seth Siegelaub an artist when he formulates a new framework within which artists can show their work without reference to theme, gallery, institution, even place or time? Is he an author because his framework is books? Am I an artist when I ask artists to work within or respond to a given situation?’” (Lippard, 2009)

42 ————— Blackman refers, for example, to her embodied experience of visiting the Foundling Museum in London, which through the displayed narrative of the foundlings triggered sentimental feelings in herself, which led Blackman to raise “critical and creative questions about the entry of affect into the arts and humanities, and ways of newly conceiving interactive publics no longer considered primarily as consumers of meaning” (Blackman, 2016, 32).

ence in exhibitions, foregrounds the importance of developing new concepts for exploring these relations” (Blackman, 2016, 53).

In her view, curatorial practice is capable of enacting and amplifying such “scenes of entanglement [...] in order to educate, inform and move audiences within more intensive realms and registers of experience” (Ibid., 43). Transposing issues from other practices (like yogic techniques, meditation, Deep Listening, multi-sensorial experiments, etc.) into the context of curatorial practice and along with what the protagonists bring and add to the project (in terms of biographies, memories, cultural, geographical backgrounds, etc.) allows these experiences (affective on a conscious and non-conscious level) and “scenes of entanglement” to produce something new or unexpected. Such practices could be regarded as “inventive methods” as referred to by in Blackman. Hence, I share Blackman’s understanding of curation as a “performative practice that has the potential to perform, move, animate and re-move those narratives and experiences that are often disqualified, disavowed, submerged, displaced and discredited within particular scenes of entanglement” (Ibid., 36).

The Indian artistic and curatorial collective Raqs Media Collective define one of the responsibilities of the curator (they refer in particular to the context of biennials) as “custodianship” and discuss the Hindustani-Urdu notion of the word that implies “the notion of being a guarantee of something or someone [...] who is willing to act as a guarantor, to compensate for the consequences of action”; this person is often also a person of honour. Their emphasis is placed upon “what it means to care enough for something or someone to stand as its guarantor to the wider world”; the emphasis of custodianship lies hence on responsibility and taking a stand for which one can be made accountable (Raqs Media Collective, 2010, 100). They distinguish and elaborate between artistic and curatorial practice, deliberately so in a binary pair and as a hypothesis for a heuristic purpose: artistic practice is described as “engaged, passionate, subjective production of meaning and affect,” whereas curation is described as “careful, apparently disinterested, ostensibly objective imperative of display, arrangement and discourse” (Ibid.).

Again, it seems important to challenge such dichotomies, and I claim with my research practice and own involvement as a protagonist in it that curation is just as engaged, passionate and very much a subjective production of meaning and of affect like artistic practice. As elaborated previously, I also argue against curation as an imperative of display and arrangement of artworks and discourse. (And while talking about the blurring of practices, this, of course, can also apply to artistic work).

Through my own active participation as a practitioner in my curated projects, I strive to challenge the tri-partition of the audience, artist, and curator even further and seek to question the paradigm in which the cura-

tor (if not an artist-curator) ought to operate. Can the curator become a protagonist herself in her project, or remain a sole conceiver and producer of representation of the curatorial concept? Can there be a holistic paradigm shift in curatorial practice, in which the curatorial mind does not become detached from its body?

Lucy Steeds argues that by rethinking the exhibition, the modernist thought of art's autonomy and putative universal appeal is usurped. She reasons that the role and categorical differentiation and definition of artists and curators are not what is important, instead arguing for broadening the focus and stressing the integration of the respective roles "in order to take in the multiple agencies responsible for exhibitions: to consider not only artistic and curatorial contributions [...] but also the work of those concerned with other dimensions, aspects [...]" (Steeds, 2014, 13). Hence, I understand my role as a curator not as the "stager" or "displayer" of the curatorial idea, but rather as actively enacting some aspects myself and becoming an equally active protagonist myself.⁴³

2.1.5 Possibilities of Post-Representational Curation – and a Specific Approach to It

The specific approach to the idea of post-representational curation in this research project extends Nora Sternfeld's concept, in that it adds the emphasis of deepening the relational and a holistic and somatic notion of "conscientization," which turns curation into an embodied, first-hand and immersive experience. As mentioned in section 1.1.3, holistic is understood here not only as relating and actuating both the body and the mind, but also as the accentuation of the inter-relational and inter-connectedness of systems as wholes in general, and not as divided component parts. The aim of this present study and practice of post-representational curation within what Sternfeld calls the processual "contact zones" is to activate critical consciousness. First, on the very micro level of the self, as an essential starting point, to then expand towards a broader level, becoming aware and being part of a collective (social) body. To achieve such embodied experiences of critical consciousness, the practical explorations experiment with transdisciplinary practices and with holistic and somatic approaches. The 'corpo-real' experience is a powerful and alternative tool for generating and comprehending knowledge, and for challenging the structures of cognitive capitalism. This method derives from my interest in creative and critical forms of experimental ways of conscientization, holistic practices of mindfulness and of listening that focus

43 ——— As previously mentioned, this method has been exemplified in my projects *The Vibratile Body* (2016) and *Affective Listening* (2017) and will be elaborated further in the specific chapters.

on the inward gaze and contemplation and methods that are often excluded from mainstream curatorial practices, such as yogic techniques, meditation or Deep Listening. Fusing aesthesis with holistic interdisciplinary, non-representational and solely first-hand experiential approaches allows for the stimulation of an “alternative imaginary” and a hybrid and polymorphic making of the curatorial. This research seeks to offer a variety of such ontological processes as possible alternative epistemological vehicles in curation, and as a substitute for product-oriented representation.

These embodied experiences not only stand practically in ample juxtaposition to the notion of “re-presenting,” but also foremost in opposition to the conceptual and philosophical understanding and impetus that it implies. Representation is predominantly motivated by exteriority and display (for example, “self-presentation”), whereas my research perspective strives towards a practice of interiority by turning the gaze inwards towards “self-observation” (versus, e.g., self-presentation), creating a critical consciousness through which one then relates and positions oneself in the larger, i.e., macropolitical social realm and collective social body.

In contemplating representation further, it is informative to look at post-human feminist theorist Astrida Neimanis’s standpoint that representation is an active form of constructing, rather than being passive and only mirroring or mimicking the real. Matters represented are distinct, co-constitutive and independent from their representation; yet, there is a hierarchisation within representationalism. Neimanis refers to feminist physicist Karen Barad who advocates a “flat ontology” (i.e., flat hierarchy) between what is considered “real” and that which is considered “representation” by accepting the same ontological and independent status for both. In her view, everything is representation, and from this perspective, the critical question rather is how to engage with it. Barad emphasises that it is “not about [a] right response to a radically exterior/ised other, but about responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which we are a part” (Neimanis, 2015, 150).

Applying this concept of “flat ontologies” to the idea of post-representational curation, it resonates with its notion of care-taking, responsibility and accountability for the creation of new sets of relations, for “the lively relationalities of becoming” (Neimanis, 2015, 150). It helps to rethink the binary structures of concepts of authorship, artist/curator/spectator, interior/exterior, body/mind, subject/object, reason/aesthesis, etc., allowing for hybrid entanglements.

Yet, more important in the analogy to Barad’s proposal is that it is the entanglement of co-constitutive entities that performs reality, and that the “coming-to-matter of the world” is not about representations of an independent reality, as she states, but that it is “about the real consequences, interventions, creative possibilities, and responsibilities of intra-acting within and as part of the world” (Ibid., 136).

It is in this analogy that I understand (what I earlier called the need for a “third term”) my curatorial approach as “intra-curatorial.” Considering this analogy, my approach and methods applied appear to be instructive in thinking through and opening neglected modalities of relationality and will be further elaborated in Chapter 2.3.1 *Conscientization and Thinking Through the Body* and in the chapters on the practical part of my research, the *Radical Empathy Lab*.

2.2 Theoretical Vantage Points

“We would ensure that our exhibitions become sites where concepts learn to walk in the world, taking tumble if need be and acquiring the flesh and muscle tone of feelings, and that they become laboratories of knowledge that are not necessarily about art and artists, but in and of the world, and of ourselves, through art.”

(Raqs Media Collective, 2010, 102)

After a general introduction of the conceptual genesis of this research in Chapter 1.1, and a positioning of this research in the contemporary discourse of curating as an idea extending from Nora Sternfeld’s rationale of post-representational curation in Chapter 2.2, this Chapter 2.2 unfolds key topics that relate to my specific approach of post-representational curation. Completing the introductory concepts of this research, this chapter elaborates on the idea of “conscientization,” the creation of critical consciousness with an emphasis on extending the cognitive with somatic knowledge as tools to think through the body in the creation of social empathy. Empathy is understood here as “affective translation,” a rationale developed by scholar and theorist Carolyn Pedwell, which likewise will be developed in this chapter. Moreover, the notion of micropolitics will be reflected through the rationale of curator, writer and theorist Suely Rolnik, as an affective and social process in the production of subjectivity, decolonisation and de-subjectivation of the (social) body and its relationality to the Other. We are then led to some thoughts on the notion of affect that touch upon the contemporary perspective of scholars Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, and that of 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza through the readings of political philosopher and literary theorist Michael Hardt and philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Affect is foremostly understood in this research as a thinking tool to activate new sets of relations and links, assemblages that might allow for new imaginaries and new forms of creativity.

Both the theoretical and practical parts of this curatorial research attempt to “invent new points of departure” for creating critical awareness and to transcend (in a secular sense) the notion of a separated self.⁴⁴ They aim to extend beyond representational modes, to allow for embodied immersion and an experience of affectivity and relationality. On a parallel track to ideas of embodied cognition theory (believing that cognition is carried out by properties of the whole body of an organism) or phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s argument that the body constitutes the permanent condition of experience and the basis for perception, this research engages with corporeal and processual ontologies as an epistemological method through which knowledge is activated instead of referring to a product or representation.

2.2.1 Conscientization and Thinking Through the Body

“It is the human body, young or old, fat or thin, of whatever color, the conscious body that looks at the stars. It is the body that writes. It is the body that speaks. It is the body that fights. It is the body that loves and hates. It is the body that suffers. It is the body that dies. It is the body that lives!” Paulo Freire (Darder, 2016)

This research finds guidance in Brazilian educator, activist and educational theorist Paulo Freire’s idea of “critical consciousness,” also called “conscientization” (*conscientização*). It is an educative approach that he developed during the 1960s and 1970s to address and experience “readings of and being in the world,” moving towards new levels of critical awareness.⁴⁵ Conscientization stands as an emancipatory and collective approach

44 ——— With regard to curatorial practice, Irit Rogoff argues for “kidnapping knowledges and sensibilities” in order to engage with our own contemporaneity via new forms and conditions for subjectivities and sensitivities that lie beyond the given structures in order to “invent new points of departure” (Martinon, 2013, 5).

45 ——— In his book, *Education for Critical Consciousness*, Freire illuminates his credo that education should lead to the recognition that individuals have the ability to choose their activities and to transform their own life trajectories through dialogue and learning that is based within their daily lived experiences.

The book was published 1974 and written in exile during the peak of the Brazilian oppressive authoritarian military dictatorship (1964–1985) that implemented strong reprisals to control civic uprisings. The death penalty was introduced, all cultural production succumbed to censorship, and numerous critical thinkers, politicians, artists and professors were under surveillance, arrested, tortured or sent into exile. After imprisonment, Freire emigrated to Chile.

for self-empowerment and decolonisation of the self as an object. Although the concept was developed especially relating to education systems and is strongly linked to the production of knowledge, it encompasses the crucial aspect of creating new knowledge through experience and awareness of the self within a certain context and in relation to others.

While the notion was developed during the times of dictatorship in Brazil in the 1960s and '70s, the institutions and discourses of colonisation of subjectivity still do exist and still systematically subjugate the individual today, for example, through economic forms.⁴⁶

Conscientization is a process of creating a critical consciousness, an awareness of forms of oppression, of formative and demanding representations that reside within us. The practice embraces both critical reflection (here, I include creating self-awareness) and taking action to change one's own reality. Freire calls this critical reflection a "reading of the world" that strives towards not only being *in* the world but being *with* the world (Freire, 1974/2013, 41)—reminding us of Donna Haraway's idea of "sym-poiesis" and "worlding with" mentioned in Chapter 2.1.1.

Already before the dictatorship in the 1960s, Freire's pedagogical work emphasised creating critical consciousness through communication, reflection and conscientization as methods for self-empowerment. He had developed a programme for "alphabetisation" against illiteracy, which not only focused on a fast process of learning how to read and write but was equally a method for creating critical consciousness. At that time, illiterates were not allowed to vote, hence, Freire's alphabetisation programme (and his life's work in general that promoted critically conscious, active, non-apatetic civilians) not only had a strong political relevance in the process of democratisation of Brazil but is still more than relevant and unfortunately still of urgency today, also outside the geographies of Brazil.

Even though Freire's work (or to be more specific, his language) has been criticised by feminist thinkers as representing white patriarchal supremacy, the core and principles of his ideas (to critically reflect the self, the construction of one's identity in relation to one's political circumstances and the shifting from subaltern object to subject) are nonetheless of high relevance today and have a strong influence in feminist, anti-racist and anarchist approaches that define the rights of being a subject in resistance defining her own reality. (See, e.g., Afro-American feminist writer and thinker bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress: education as the practice of freedom*, 1994). It is Freire's core principle that is of guidance to this research and the reason why I chose to refer to him over, for instance, feminist or more contemporary thinkers.

46 ——— For example, socio-economic conditions, deficits and debilitating assumptions and preconceptions regarding race and gender through heteronormativity, abled and class minority discourses, education systems, subjugated knowledges, hegemonic power structures, effects from semio-, cognitive and neoliberal capitalism, just to name a few.

Conscientization strives towards what Freire calls “critical transitive consciousness” that fosters the ability to enter into a dialogue with others and with the world, to become transitive, permeable, interrogative, dialogical and to replace disengagement with that of full engagement (Ibid., 14-15). Informed by Freire’s line of thought of conscientization, this research stresses the notion of creating a (critical) awareness that in particular emphasises the ‘in-corporation’ of the embodied knowledge and consciousness of the knowing body, the “corpo consiente. (Freire, 1974/2013, 67).”⁴⁷ It suggests that the first step in creating a critical consciousness and awareness lies within the individual itself. The materiality of human existence and its sentient qualities appear to be a key starting point for experiencing a critical practice, for liberatory and emancipatory learning and for acts of knowing. Scholar and activist Antonia Darder,⁴⁸ for example, elaborates that the physical and expressing body as a political and organic entity plays a significant role in making sense of the material conditions and social relations of the powers that shape our lives.

She argues that the body is also central to the Freirean thought with regard to educational dialogue-based processes, in which the materiality of the body must also be understood as an equitable component in the formation and expression of collective consciousness.

As teachers and students participate more fully in the dialogical process of communal learning, the materiality of their bodies also must be understood as rightful allies in the formation and expression of collective consciousness (Darder, 2016, 1).

Indeed, the human is a multidimensional being, and alternative ways of knowing are often ignored or disregarded over the assumption that knowledge formation is primarily cognitive. Other forms of expression and knowledge production are often systematically silenced in educational structures (Ibid.)—and, in my view, this extends beyond the educational sector and applies to a general understanding of knowledge production as often being disembodied and based on the conventional tradition of rational thought.⁴⁹

The view of the body being governed by cognisance and subjugated to physiological processes of the nervous system has deeply engrained the

47 ——— An overview of the cultural history of the body and the notion of the self would unfortunately exceed the framework of this research.

48 ——— Darder studied and worked with Paulo Freire; his thinking has immensely influenced her work and research on inequalities, politics of social exclusion, racism, gendered relations of power and public pedagogy.

49 ——— This is what this text reiterates.

Western cultural perspective.⁵⁰ Holistic approaches can assist in challenging the dualistic, hierarchical and naturalistic conception of the conscious and the unconscious, of body and mind as separate entities. The understanding that the body is an integral and fundamental part in the process of conscientization allows us ‘re-embody’ such advances.

In a similar line of the Freirean thought of the “corpo consiente,” the aforementioned scholar Lisa Blackman argues for a “thinking through the body”:

[That] might mean we need to be aware both of the bodily basis of thought and the cognitive component of bodily processes and vice versa. We also need to move beyond thinking of bodies as substances, as special kinds of things or entities, to explore bodies as sites of potentiality, process and practice.⁵¹

Understanding “bodies as sites of potentiality, process and practice” allows us to rethink the individual’s relationality to others around him or her, and as a constituent of the social body, as “being with” the world. Freire states:

50 ——— This Cartesian dualism between body and mind has been challenged throughout history and cannot be elaborated thoroughly in this study. However, just to name a few examples, already René Descartes’ contemporary Baruch Spinoza criticized the split between body and mind; further challenges of the concept go back to the Age of Enlightenment and, e.g., Immanuel Kant who argued in *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) against the idea that the “cogito” is based on an internal experience of time, and, for the subject to be defined within time, an external, spatial experience is needed. Martin Heidegger critiqued that Descartes investigated the notion of “cogito” but not that of the “sum,” i.e., being. G.W.F. Hegel critiqued that Descartes didn’t make the distinction between mind and reason, while Ludwig Wittgenstein questioned the presupposed account of the mental being as based on a first-person perspective and from one solitary thinker. Michel Foucault regards Descartes’ idea of the human as a machine as the basis for the development of technocratic and disciplining processes and for bio-politics. The list goes on. In particular, during the 1960s and 1980s with the rise of feminist, gender, queer and race studies, along with neurosciences, the conception of the mind-body split and the view of the body as being governed by cognisance and subjugated to physiological processes of the nervous system were heavily opposed. And, of course, the issue has gained new relevance in contemporary digitalised complexities.

51 ——— (Blackman, 2008). In this book, she analyses and offers a whole history of theoretical approaches on the body within the humanities and sociological studies that began in the 1980s.

The human being is a conscious body. His or her consciousness, with its “intentionality” towards the world, is always consciousness *of* something. It is in a permanent state of moving towards reality. Hence the condition of the human is to be in constant relationship to the world. In this relationship subjectivity, which takes its form in objectivity, combines with the latter to form a dialectical unity from which emerges knowledge closely linked with action. This is why unilaterally subjective and objective explanations which sever this dialectic are unable to comprehend reality.⁵²

Freire’s approach not only emphasises the importance of corporeal consciousness, the corporeality of thought and the body in thinking about social conditions and change, but it also implies that the body is always in process, in a state of becoming and in intertwined affectivity with its environment, the social body and the systemic social structures, institutions and power relations that come with it.

Lisa Blackman elaborates the interrelation of “corporeality of the social and the sociality of corporeality” (Blackman, 2008, 3). Similarly to Freire, she highlights that the body is never a singular separate entity but always an “unfinished body,” as it is continuously mingled with its social and cultural inscription. It is continually the cultural inscription and our encounter with others through which we become subjects; the body is constructed through symbols, codes, signs, signifying activity and discursive practices (Ibid., 22). But thinking through the idea of an “unfinished body,” I suggest that the body still bears other dimensions of knowledge that might not yet be fully inscribed or captured, for example, what Brazilian curator and theorist Suely Rolnik refers to as the “knowing body” or “vibratile body,” and which I seek to activate in the practical part of this research which will be discussed further in the respective chapters of the *Radical Empathy Lab*.

52 ——— (Freire, 1974/2013, 128).

This quote brings previously mentioned Merleau-Ponty’s approach on phenomenology (*Phénoménologie de la perception*, 1945) to mind again, in that he argues that we should regard the body not as a mere biological or physical unit, but as a body that structures one’s situation and experience within the world.

There is a complex history of the notion of “being in the world”; in this context, I briefly want to point to Martin Heidegger’s understanding of it, which does not merely refer to a spatial idea, but goes more in the sense of “belonging,” which underlines Freire’s conception of interconnectedness and relationality. See, for example, Michael Wheeler, “Martin Heidegger,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed 5 October 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger/#ModEnc>.

Such approaches not only allow us to see the body as “the central metaphor of political and social order” (Ibid., 17), but it again stresses the notion of the affective and sensing body, which is permeable and porous to the outside (also to the power structures and effects of neoliberal cognitive capitalism) and that the self is constructed through relationality and the encounter with the Other.⁵³

53 ——— Introducing the “Other” written in upper case offers an additional sub-text and layer of reflection that embraces the notion of Otherness and Otherring. The intellectual history and concept of Otherness is a massive field of enquiry within philosophy (e.g., regarding the notion of intersubjectivity as in Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology), psychology (e.g., Jacques Lacan, who describes the Other as the radical counterpart of the Self), within ethics (e.g., Emmanuel Levinas with *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 1974), within critical theory and anthropological and social discourse. Equally, postcolonial critical theory discusses the question of the Other, Otherness and Otherring, with the most important thinkers being Stuart Hall, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

For example, in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), sociologist Stuart Hall talks about the “racialized Other,” the constructions of national and masculine identities and gendering. He elaborates that identity is always constructed and that difference is judged against the dominant group, namely White, middle-to-upper class, heterosexual Christians, with cis-gendered men being the default against which Others are judged. He details that visual representations of Otherness hold cultural authority.

Edward W. Said critiques Western cultural, political and historical perceptions of the East in his book *Orientalism* (1979) in which he unfolds the Western perspective on the Middle and Near East as the “Orient” and understood as “the other than.”

The question of Otherness also brings the notion of the “subaltern” to mind, which comprises the social groups that have been made subordinate in terms of class, caste, age, gender, etc., and that are subject to the activity of dominant groups. The term was defined by the subaltern studies group, which is supported and critiqued by cultural-literary critic and postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who argues in her text, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988), that even in the postcolonial era and in postcolonial studies, the notion of the subaltern ironically re-inscribes the concept of the Other and that it rehearses neo-colonial imperatives of political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure. She talks about the arrogance of colonial and postcolonial theory and practice of speaking and acting *for* the Other with the consequence that the Other always falls silent. Spivak argues that, in current power and discursive structures, the Other does not get heard, and that speaking and getting heard is based on the construction of identity (referring to Antonio Gramsci, who argues that if you can speak you are no longer a subaltern).

Homi K. Bhabha, scholar and critical theorist and equally important

figure of postcolonial studies, has coined new terminologies with regard to the discussion of the Other. Notions such as difference, hybridity (e.g., multiculturalism and the need to transform our understanding of cross-cultural relations), mimicry (taking on and imitating the colonisers' culture) and ambivalence (hybrid of the colonised's own and the coloniser's cultural identity) describe forms of resistance of the colonised subjects towards the power of their colonisers.

According to Bhabha, cultures are not stable pure entities, but rather based on constant change and differences.

The notion of "Otherness" is also a subject of feminist studies. It finds its roots back in Simone de Beauvoir's feminist critique of the female being considered as the "Other of man," which is still topical in contemporary feminist critiques. In *The Second Sex* (1949), she argues that masculinity is socially constructed as the universal norm by which social ideas about humanity are delineated, debated and legislated. The concept of "the Other" is equally central to gender, queer and sexuality discourses and, for example, discussed by Judith Butler (e.g., in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*) in that she understands gender as a reiterated social performance rather than the expression of a prior reality such as the categorization of "the masculine" and "the feminine." Additional thoughts on this particular aspect will be found further along in a footnote in this chapter.

And, lastly, New Materialism/Post-Humanism must be mentioned, in which Otherness is discussed in an understanding of non-hierarchical and non-binary realities of humans and nonhumans. In fact, I would be very intrigued to extend this current research under this viewpoint and in the light of its concern for embodied circumstance and subject formation, but the scope of this particular research unfortunately does not allow for it. Inspiring literature is provided by leading scholars like Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz and, e.g., readings of the aforementioned Karen Barad and Donna Haraway, to name but a few. See, for example, an overview by Kameron Sanzo, "New Materialism(s)," *Critical Posthumanism*, 25 April 2018, accessed 2 October 2018, <http://criticalposthumanism.net/genealogy/new-materialisms/>.

Philosophically, I situate my understanding of "Otherness" within a more general comprehensive sociological, ontological and phenomenological approach, which, of course, encompasses the postcolonial critique of processes of Othering, feminist and gender-related thinking. My interest is critically focused on the social and cultural construction of identities and social hierarchies in which certain groups are established as being superior to other groups. Who inscribes and recognises difference? Simone de Beauvoir said, "Otherness is a fundamental category of human thought. Thus it is that no group ever sets itself up as the One without at once setting up the Other over against itself" (de Beauvoir, 1949).

Who do we think we are, how is the notion of the self and intersubjectivity described in relation to the Other, and most importantly within the context of this research, how can we achieve post-Otherness? And more specifically, how can we achieve a holistic making of social empathy within the curatorial?

The practical projects of this research aspire to create an experiential awareness about this interconnectedness in encounters with the self and the Other and in the relationality between micro and macro agency.

Similar to feminist thinking, sociologist Chris Shilling highlights that the body is not a private but a public political issue.⁵⁴ The body is a permeable foundation that is fundamentally affected by social relations. It is a key means for reflecting on social change and inequalities and looking at opportunities, as he argues.

Blackman refers to Shilling's book *The Body and Social Theory*, stating that, "The body is not simply a body defined by a fixed human nature, but, rather, bodies can, will and do change and transform given the particular set of historical circumstances within which they are socialized. Thus, the talk of the body is always talk of the social context, social practices and ideological processes that produce bodily matters."⁵⁵

For further elaborations of mine on the subject of post-Otherness, please see my paper, "The Xeno-Episteme and post Otherness," in Lomme, Freek, ed., *We Are The Market! The Commercial City Centre as the Financial Commonplace*, *Onomatopoe* 142 (2018): 47-55.

Within my practical projects of this research that seek to mobilise these discourses, for me the Other also literally means the specific individual right next to me with whom I try to engage in a transformative process *together with them*, bearing in mind that one is always also an Other and part of that relationship.

54 ——— (Shilling, 2016). Shilling gives further examples like the discussion of robotics and artificial intelligence that came up in the 1980s with the conclusion that intelligence needs a body, since thoughts are reciprocally relating to bodily receptors that stimulate us in the way we are intentionally positioned within the environment. He insinuates how today our bodies have become our passwords for access and to cross borders (iris scan, fingerprints, etc.) and how, in neoliberal capitalism, we as biological citizens have become responsible for our own health. And, of course, let us not forget the whole beauty body industry and the commodification of bodies in prostitution, organ selling, human trafficking, etc. The body is a valuable vehicle for displaying gendered, robotic, governmental and commodified dimensions. The journal *Body & Society*, e.g., gives further insight into the field of body studies.

55 ——— (Blackman, 2008, 17).
 The importance of the body as our interface with society and as crucial to our epistemological and ontological engagements brings to mind constructivist thinking, in that knowledge and reality are a product of the cultural context and a social construct. De Beauvoir's phenomenological and existential critique of the philosophical *status quo* focused on the significance of lived experience and on the ways that the meanings of the world are revealed in language. Of course, this also brings to mind J. L. Austin's elaborations on performative utterance (*How to Do Things with Words*, 1962) and in particular Judith Butler's idea of performativity, in which gender and identity are socially constructed through often hegemonic linguistic structures, norms

Agency—the ability to resist and negotiate the mechanisms of hegemonic power structures and social division that are articulated through our bodily being (e.g., racism, different abilities, corporeal imperialism, etc.)—is dependent on our corporeal existence. Tuning into our sensing and bodily matters beyond social inscriptions—for example, through holistic practices of mindfulness and awareness that are experimented with in this research—is vital in allowing us to extend ourselves into the environment and finding new ways of relating and being together. Similarly to the open collective of researchers and practitioners, *nanopolitics group*,⁵⁶ I assume the body as political and “as event.” Comprehending the body as event, soaked through with social and political tensions, opens pathways for thinking about the relationship of micro- and macropolitics and to reconsider questions of strength, stability, set boundaries and habits (Plotegher, Zechner, and Rübner, 2013, 13).

The body perceived as event implies the processuality of a becoming body and helps to overcome binary notions of generalized singularity, separation, identity and selfhood and makes it possible to think beyond the sovereignty of the “I,” to embrace the interstitial, trans-individual processes, intersubjectivity, the self as constructed through and in an affective encounter with the Other.⁵⁷ It encourages us to think in the direction of

(e.g., that of hegemonic gender) and speech acts that predetermine the act that one performs before it actually happens. See, e.g., Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1990, or *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, New York: Routledge, 1997.

56 ——— The collective thinks politics through and as embodied experiences and practices. It offers proposals for producing new collective subjectivities. The nanopolitics group formed in London in early 2010. They have organized monthly movement-, theatre- and bodywork-based workshops, as well as discussions and interventions in the context of social movements. See: The Nanopolitics Group, *The Nanopolitics Handbook*, Wivenhoe, New York, Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2014.

57 ——— In this context, of course, the critique around heteronormative and binary definitions of black/white, binary socio-sexual normativity of male/female, and discourses around LGBT, gender transsexuality, queerness, etc., has its relevance (to name but just a few thinkers on the subject: Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1998; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, 1993; Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men – English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1985). The conception of the “becoming body” can be discussed from various additional points. As mentioned before, Judith Butler’s approach to performativity and constructed identity, a performative accomplishment in which the actors come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief, such as gender identity. (See, e.g., *Gender Trouble*, 1990). Or

entrainment, tuning into the rhythm of others, thinking phenomenologically and kinaesthetically (Greek: to move + sensation) and towards the nurturing of social improvement, overcoming exclusionary systems in favour of ethically oriented forms of inclusiveness.

The processual and becoming body as event allows us to muse on *how* we live (in) our bodies instead of musing on its representation, and it encourages an embodied paradigm shift that emphasises the impulse of “doing and enactment” instead of “having or being” (Blackman, 2008, 83). In the following chapters that will analyse the practical projects of this research, we will learn about different holistic, relational, experiential methodologies (meditation, yoga, sensorial experiments, Deep Listening, Biodanza and Social Presencing Theatre) that are incorporated and experimented with as alternative tools and vocabularies to think through the body. These methods not only physically move the body, but also exercise the mind and activate the awareness of one’s body knowledge and the “corpo consiente.” I chose to focus my practice on these kinds of methodologies that literally focus on the activation of the body to challenge traditional ideas of cognition and to amplify, activate and expand an academic theoretical work on the subject. Through the physical and strongly processual and experiential nature of the projects, they attempt to embody such a paradigm shift that challenges representation—not only on the curatorial level of re-thinking post-representational curation, but equally on the embodied corporeal level.

again, de Beauvoir’s take on becoming and formulation, in the *Second Sex*, that one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.

The Deleuzian conception of “becoming” is equally relevant in this context, as it underlines the notion of inter-subjectivity. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari believe in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), that one (and identity) cannot exist without the many (and difference) and that systems are based on the processual and becoming, on a symbiotic emergent mix or assemblage.

In post-humanism and material feminism theorist, Elizabeth Grosz, for example, extends this understanding of difference as an ontological category and encourages thinking beyond the category of the human and nonhuman, in that the space between humans and nonhuman nature constitutes only a difference of degrees. Grosz interprets sexual difference as the condition for the emergence of all other existing differences—a complex approach to Charles Darwin’s non-essentialist and non-reductive accounts of nature and material bodies.

I would have liked to delve more deeply into these areas, but the framework of this specific research has precluded such extended contemplation. I also decided to keep the subject focused on the idea of “becoming” multiversal and open so that it might be possible to encompass all of these and even more specificities.

2.2.2 Empathy as “Affective Translation”

In thinking about holistic and relational agency and a consciousness for enactment, the notion of empathy comes into play. Empathy has been discussed in various fields such as biology, neuroscience and psychology, but less so within the curatorial field. This research aims to examine the holistic making of “social empathy” in particular and to create a new area of knowledge and set of questions around it.⁵⁸ Referring to scholar and theorist Carolyn Pedwell’s rationale (elaborated further subsequently in this chapter), I have come to understand the concept of empathy as “affective translation,” as a negotiation with the Other by accepting her difference and possible “foreignness” and by embracing that difference as the potential for dialogue.

58 ——— As a concept, empathy has been part of philosophical and interdisciplinary debates on how to access or understand the Other going back to Plato. The history of empathy is yet to be written, and to elaborate its cultural history is not the aim of this research and would yet again unfortunately exceed its framework. However, historian Karl F. Morrison, for instance, outlines the long tradition of thought in Western culture regarding the notion of “I am you,” as a bonding element of empathy but which goes back as far as Vedic theology (God/Atman is in all things, and the human soul is identical with God). He lays out how empirics and sciences, which are solely based on material causation and that are governed by laws of physics, expelled the notion of affect and feeling from the world of knowledge and of human solidarity. He argues that this tradition has blinded us to truths of empathic bonding and made us deaf to the call of the Other (Morrison, 1988).

Since the 1990s, researchers in cognitive neuroscience and cognitive psychology believe to have evidenced mirror neurons as the neurological source for empathy. (Mirror neurons are nerve cells in our brain that “mirror” the behaviour of the other as if the viewer was acting herself. Giacomo Rizzolatti, neuroscientist at the University of Parma, states: “Mirror neurons allow us to grasp the minds of others not through conceptual reasoning but through direct simulation. By feeling, not by thinking” (Blakeslee, 2006).

Neurons have been discussed as the reason for our sophisticated social abilities in understanding and sharing the actions and intentions of others, for social meaning and behaviour. These discoveries lead to the essentialist perspective and conclusion that empathy is deeply engrained in the human DNA and innate to humankind. The human species (and some of our fellow animal beings) seem to be biologically programmed to survive as a social and collective being and fundamentally built to inter-relate, for sociability, attachment, affection and companionship. Thus, in a contemporary, hyper-capitalistic, profit-striving, globalized world of extreme individualism in particular, the question of empathy appears vital in thinking about intersubjectivity and Otherness.

The OED dictionary defines empathy as the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. It is regarded as a process to affectively experience another's emotion.

Economic and social theorist Jeremy Rifkin, who offered a new direction in the debates on globalization with terms like "global empathy" and the "race to global consciousness" (Rifkin, 2009) with regard to universal urgencies such as climate change, the negotiation of cultural differences, global levelling or the disillusion of the social state, argues for empathy as a pro-social affective capacity. Rifkin reasons that empathy is the key to civilization, the "invisible hand" that allows us to stretch our sensitivity to another so that we can cohere in larger social units: "To empathize is to civilize, to civilize is to empathize" (Rifkin, 2010). For the human race to survive, he argues for the necessity to rethink the human narrative and the institutions of society by bringing out our empathic sociability. To him, extending our identities to our biosphere, the human race and fellow living beings as fellow sojourners, is the only way to avoid the entropy of civilization and of the planet (and again, bringing to mind the parallel with Donna Haraway's ideas of "sym-poiesis" and "worlding with" and Freire's idea of "being with the world").

Of course, there are also downsides and limits to the capacity of empathy: capitalism, with its purchasing behaviour, mood tracking and algorithmic governmentalities, has long instrumentalised empathy as a key to successful business and the maximising of profits. Politics exhaust people's empathy in order to legitimize actions, obscuring the complex but real and pressing questions that might be at stake. Psychologist Paul Bloom, for example, pleads for compassion in its place. He argues that since empathy is based on feeling the other's feelings, it also can blind our capacity for decision making, whereas compassion (feeling sympathy and concern *for* the Other) keeps emotions at a distance and hence allows for clearer decision making and the ability to help.⁵⁹ He warns about an egoistic drift in which the empathizer becomes more worried with easing her own distress than with caring about the other person's feelings (Bloom, 2014). I would add that, in the concept of empathy, the danger of hierarchical structures exists and might be reproduced; who is the empathizer and who is the one to be empathized with?⁶⁰ Moreover, if empathy projects

59 ——— According to Bloom, compassion does allow for clearer decision making and implies the notion of taking care and action for the Other more than empathy does. He problematizes further that we tend to empathize more with those whose needs are salient, who are similar to ourselves, and who are close by in space and time (Gielas, 2015).

60 ——— In this context, it is interesting to look at filmmaker Harun Farocki's approach to the concept of *Einfühlung* (German: feeling 'into' someone), which to him has a transgressive overtone in its meaning, *eindringen* (in the sense of invading someone else's space, mindset,

one's lived experience in an undifferentiated way onto another, cancelling out differences and Otherness, then it just reiterates a consumerist attitude towards other living beings.

Scholar and theorist Carolyn Pedwell brings an inspiring new contribution to the discussion. She challenges the Euro-American notion, the neo-liberal rhetoric of the "empathy economy" and the political genealogies and emotional politics of empathy as "put[ting] oneself in the other's shoes," and the universalist discourses of empathy.⁶¹ She argues for decolonizing emotion and reflecting on how visions and practices of empathy can be reinterpreted.⁶² Importantly, she asserts that, "Empathy, frequently

emotions, etc.). He connotes it with "forceful sympathy" and a form of alignment (Farocki, 2008, 21-22).

In his 1969 film, *Nicht lösbares Feuer*, Farocki also problematizes the efficiency of empathy through representation (e.g., via images or film) since the viewer will only close her eyes, memory and understanding for context—a condition that in our times of information overflow and developed anaesthesia by sensationalist media coverage has certainly reached its saturation. This is one of the reasons why this research attempts to distance itself from forms of representation and works with experiential face-to-face encounters instead.

The importance of the "face-to-face" encounter and thinking about empathy through structures of controlling, dominating or totalising the Other into systems, brings to mind French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas' conception of the Other. In his belief, the "face-to-face" encounter and intersubjective and precognitive experience implies a subjection to the Other, an ethical responsibility and allowing the Other to be absolutely the Other in her differences while also recognising one's own particularity and Otherness. See, e.g., Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, 1961.

61 ——— The project "The Empathy Museum" for example quite literally translates this notion into participatory art projects in which publics are invited to walk a mile in someone else's shoes while listening through headphones to someone else's story. Founded by social philosopher Roman Krznaric, (author e.g., of *Empathy Why it matters, and how to get it*, Random House, 2014) The Empathy Museum's projects strive to explore "how empathy can not only transform our personal relationships, but also help tackle global challenges such as prejudice, conflict and inequality" (The Empathy Museum, 2018). Although it is a rather universalist approach that does not grasp the complexities of the concept of empathy, I can appreciate the projects' dedication in particular to the dialogical encounter in their "Human Library" project, in which publics are invited to engage in a conversation with a person instead of borrowing a book. It engages the participants in a direct and non-representational way and encourages to overcome potential objectionable feelings for the Other.

62 ——— Her special focus lies on the context of transnational politics and relations of power. She is particularly interested in how "empathy expressed from the margins of dominant postcolonial social imaginaries

understood by liberals as a universal human quality, is framed as an affective bridge between subjects, cultures or societies, it cannot simply be assumed that it is understood, generated *or felt* the same way in different contexts or by differently positioned subjects (Ibid., 22).

Although she refers in particular to transnational politics, she stresses that empathy, or any other emotion, cannot be the sole cure for complex inequalities or conflicts because it is always already bound up with and produced through these very relations of power (Ibid., 27). Pedwell proposes rethinking empathy as what she terms “alternative empathies” and “affective translation” and asks the following:

What might it mean to understand empathy *not* as emotional equivalence (either by spontaneous fellow feeling or imaginatively conjuring an “accurate” sense of the emotional or psychic state of another), but instead as a complex and ongoing set of translational processes involving conflict, negotiation and attunement? What could emerge from a *giving up* of the empathic desire for cultural mastery or psychic transparency and a *giving in* to being affected by that which is experienced as “foreign” in the midst of transnational flows, relations and power structures? (Ibid., 20)

Since this has been a key component of what my practice has developed throughout this research, Pedwell’s approach to empathy as “affective translation” proves a guidepost for this research in thinking about alternative connectivity and conscientization of one’s relationality and affectivity to the collective social body and the encounter with the Other. By including the concept of empathy in the idea of post-representational curation as a space for debate and negotiation (Sternfeld), Pedwell’s position supports my account. She states:

[...] rather than posing *conflict* as what needs to be neutralised or eliminated through empathy (as per the liberal ethics of empathy), a conceptualisation of empathy as translation figures conflict, contradiction and even antagonism as vital to affective politics and political transformation” (Ibid., 21).

Equally within the context of the curatorial, I have come to understand the concept of empathy with Pedwell’s idea of “affective translation”: a negotiation with the Other by accepting her difference and potential “foreignness” and by embracing that difference as the potential for

might differ from mainstream liberal and neoliberal mobilisations, as well as how it might disrupt or refigure their affective logics” (Pedwell, 2016, 15).

dialogue. This approach nurtures my idea of “affective listening,” not only on a semiotic but equally on an embodied level, which the practical part of this research hopes to activate. My intention is not to create a dualistic—a good or a bad—mapping of empathy, but (with Pedwell) to show that there is a complexity to discourses and practices of empathy and to think and test out other, alternative and, in particular, holistic forms of activating it.

In my research projects, I do not attempt to flatten differences between subjects, but through the exercises and experiences applied, I hope to create a temporary moment of intertwinement, negotiation and tuning into frequencies and rhythms of the Other. The objective of the experiments is to create a consciousness for one’s own frequency and rhythm to then become cognisant of its intertwinement with the Other’s. This process appears similar to that of dance, in which one involves one’s own body in the rhythm of the music—and when danced with a partner, into a temporary “dialogical attunement” with the dancing Other.⁶³

In thinking through this process of intertwinement and affective translation, artist and writer Salomé Voegelin’s notion of “doubt” as an agent for critical reflection and an opening for new discoveries is engaging⁶⁴; equally, the conception of syncopation—the displacement or re-arrangement of rhythms and frequencies in which potential hierarchies between a supposed “strong” and “weak” become interchanged—serves as a stimulating tool to think through the idea of affective translation in which difference and Otherness are cross-fertilising.⁶⁵

63 ——— This approach will be explored quite literally in the third practice project that involves Biodanza and Social Presencing Theatre as embodied methods for experiencing social empathy. See the respective chapter. Both systems work on the principle of intent listening to one’s own and the other’s body, following its response. They require an attention towards our bodily sensitivity and openness to conjoin the Other, which cannot be put into linguistic language and operates beyond the brute physical sense.

Artist, cultural theorist, and political philosopher Erin Manning e.g., examines in her book *Politics of Touch: Sense, Movement, Sovereignty* (2006) the sensitivities of the body when learning Argentinian Tango. She suggests touch as a relational sense, it “connects us to others and is also a register through which we are articulated with others” (Blackman, 2008, 108).

64 ——— Voegelin talked about her understanding of doubt as an activating tool during the book launch of her recent book *The Political Possibility of Sound*, 2018 at Errant Sound, Berlin on 28 October 2018.

65 ——— This brings to mind Chantal Mouffe’s concept of agonistic pluralism with regard to political thought and democratic processes. For freedom to be generated, a realm in which conflict may arise and in which differences can be confronted is needed. See: Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox*, London, New York: Verso Books, 2000,

Instead of achieving an “accurate account” (Pedwell) of the Other (which entails having control), the research projects strive towards creating a curatorial environment in which to stimulate an empathic attunement that involves vulnerability and letting go of achieving “accurate” (and cognitive) knowledge and to allow for a mutual sensing, an opening for different ways of affecting and being affected, possibly even an affective solidarity. This way, the idea of empathy might holistically encompass a transformative potential that allows for debate, difference, negotiation, for the creation of newness and opening up for invention rather than the transcription of imaginaries. My research leans towards a feminist and anti-racist approach which embraces more affective experiences of embodied sensing workings of empathy and its political and ethical implications. I have come to understand empathy as a deepening of one’s sense of reality, as the stretching of one’s ability to understand—an exercise of the imagination and participation. Writer and occupational therapy expert Suzanne Peloquin states: “Empathy requires a growing from inside the self” (Peloquin, 1995). Today’s complexities of contemporary reality call for a new synthesis of the perspectives, and it is this “growing from the inside self” an awareness of intersubjectivity and interconnectedness, that I like to think of as creating an embodied critical consciousness that may enable us to build a more inclusive world and form of living together.

2.2.3 Micropolitics

In thinking about the concept of micropolitics, curator, psychoanalyst, writer and art and cultural critic Suely Rolnik’s approach has strongly nurtured this research. The rationale goes back to her close work with French philosopher Félix Guattari during her exile in Paris from 1970-79, and in particular back to 1982 when she travelled with him through Brazil. It was a time when the military dictatorship was coming to an end, and the country experienced a new vivacity and self-empowerment against the oppressive powers of the totalitarian regimes (Rolnik also refers to Brazil’s colonial, slave-holding, dictatorial and capitalist history). At the emergence of the new democracy, Guattari and Rolnik witnessed what they call a “revolution in practice,” a “molecular revolution” of ideas and politics. In conversations with many local dissident practitioners throughout their travels, they capture this spirit in the eponymous book *Molecular Revolution in Brazil*.⁶⁶ In its introduction, Rolnik points out the change in

or *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*, London, New York: Verso Books, 2013.

66 ——— It was originally published in Brazil in 1986 as *Micropolitica: Cartografias do desejo*.

The concept of micropolitics dates back to the 1970s to Guattari’s

capitalist logic and order during the early 1980s, which shifted towards the replacement of physical labour by “turning the forces of desire, creation, and action into a major source for the extraction of surplus value” (Guattari and Rolnik, 2007, 10). Guattari called it the *Integrated World Capitalism*. This capitalist logic has never been so dominant and well developed as it is now (e.g., in today’s neurocapitalism and serialized subjectivity). Guattari elaborates on micropolitics in the following way:

The micropolitical question—that is, the analysis of formations of desire in the social field—has to do with the way in which the level of broader social differences (which I call “molar”) intersect with the level that I call “molecular”. Between these two levels there is no distinctive opposition that depends on a logical principle of contradiction. It may seem difficult, but it is merely necessary to change the logic. In quantum physics, for example, it was necessary for physicists to admit that matter is corpuscular and undulatory at the same time. In the same way—social struggles are molar and molecular at the same time (Ibid., 179).

This delamination between micro and macropolitics remains a problem today, which keeps the question and urgency of micropolitics as important in current times as it was back then, no matter the cultural or geographical context.

Although the book spotlights a specific time in history marked by political change and hope at the end of the totalitarian regime, it has not only been a crucial reference for Brazil’s subsequent political movements, but it equally has proved to be a timeless inspirational guide of radical thought and optimism for self-empowerment and emancipation from oppressive systems and dominant, segregating politics of production of subjectivity. It seems history is starting to repeat itself, and the former urgencies have become just as urgent today as they were back then.⁶⁷ The theoretical

work with Gilles Deleuze in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, their first volume on capitalism and schizophrenia and a key text regarding micropolitics of desire, socioeconomic “complexes” and claiming that through its forces and relations, desire produces social acts and reality; in 1980 came in their second iteration, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. The idea of the molecular has since been of interest, not least in non-representational styles of working, with a methodological orientation toward pre-individual affects to which Rolnik is referring.

67 ——— It is a rather striking concurrence to be referencing this writing in a time in which a plurality of countries worldwide have gone politically backward in time, towards right-wing, nationalist and populist politics. It is particularly alarming that only thirty years after Brazil’s

engagement with two Brazilian thinkers (Freire and Rolnik) who lived and worked through the development from extreme hegemonic oppressive powers to the liberation from it, proves to be utterly instructive for this research. Even if the current socio-political backdrop is rather different, it is nonetheless alarming today—an era that is marked by right-wing nationalist and populist politics.⁶⁸ It is a time in which the orchestration of affect and desire has become much more meaningful for shaping links in contemporary politics and social relations. As elaborated in Chapter 2.2, my curatorial work takes its starting point from contemporaneity and urgencies at stake; so does this practice-based investigation. It is being written in a growing nationalist, conservative and populist climate worldwide. The dominant structures continuously gain power at the micropolitical, minute level of the individual through mechanisms of fear and manipulation of our desires and imaginaries, shaping the preferences, positions, and sensitivities of individual subjects. They profit from systems of separation, of creating Otherness to gain more control and power, decreasing sensibilities and empathy—or, with Pedwell, “affective translations”—between opposing views. It is this climate and contemporaneity from which this research and practice is being fuelled to search for new forms of curatorial practice in which new ways for relating to each other are central. Concepts like “micropolitics” have not only become

reborn democracy, a nationalist conservative retired military officer, Jair Bolsonaro, was democratically elected. A populist and right-wing politician who announced a repressive government, who openly asserted his devaluation of what was at the core spirit of the *Molecular Revolution*: human, women's and homosexual rights and those of minorities, the poor and people of colour, etc. Even more cynically, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, with whom Guattari had dialogued back then and who at the time was a young governmental candidate and future President (2003-2011), was now imprisoned for corruption during the 2018 election period, for which he ran as a presidential candidate again. His year-long prison sentence has been a complex and dubious affair that his supporters claim was a plot in order to eliminate him as the political competitor to Bolsonaro, also declaring that he is the first political prisoner since the military dictatorship.

68 ——— This includes the era of US President Donald Trump, the increase of right-wing politics throughout Latin America and Europe (like in Poland, Hungary, Italy, et al.) that is strongly related to the crisis of migration in Europe that peaked in 2016; the age of Brexit, and the time of the birth of the right-wing, nationalist populist political party AfD in Germany. Yet, just as well, the long-lasting uprisings of the heterogeneous people's movement of “the yellow vests” in France that started in 2018; a polytopia of a micropolitics that brings together strata of people that induct a thought and practice that express and instantiate a desire to undo the prevailing political power.

ever so important for capitalism to manipulate our desires, but equally as a productive force and a tool for critical thinking about possible and future ways of relating and being together, fostering self-empowerment, trust, empathic exchange, and sensuality for being within the world and inhabiting this planet.

A more contemporary take, in a lecture at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in 2015, Rolnik further elucidates her rationale of micropolitics from a psychoanalytical perspective, elaborating that there are two levels of experience that are happening simultaneously in this “knowing body.” One is “the familiar,” which fits our set of codes of understanding and perceiving the world; the second level of experience is one of “strangeness.” This sense of strangeness (or the uncanny), she argues, has no words, no image, but it exists as an experience outside-of-the-subject that results from our condition as living cultural beings and that produces affects in the body. She reasons that, paradoxically, both experiences are happening simultaneously, which creates a tension and an imbalance that leads to a state of destabilisation and estrangement; it “poses a question mark to subjectivity” and creates a desire to regain equilibrium (Rolnik, 2015).

If I am totally disconnected from my knowing-body, I don't have access to what is causing the distorted equilibrium. When I become this question mark, sensing this destabilized equilibrium that is the cause for this internal tension, I desire to recover the equilibrium (Ibid.).

This moment of desire is when micropolitical distinctions take place and different politics of desire can latch on.

Rolnik distinguishes between “active” and “re-active micropolitics.” She considers “re-active micropolitics” as “an anthro-phallo-ego-logocentric perspective” that is disconnected from the knowing-body and that she describes as “individual/homogenetic/identitarian/universal-capitalist.” She elaborates:

Consuming in order to project and make sense of the destabilisation, I avoid the question mark. I find something to create the equilibrium, for example [through] consumption. [The] consequence [is]: the actions of desire have reproduced mere redundancy [of] the colonial-capitalistic unconscious (Ibid.).

However, she considers “active micropolitics” as an “anthropophagic perspective” (relational/heterogenic/singularizing, see further elaborations in Chapter 2.3.3) that, in contrast to “re-active micropolitics,” is not avoiding but in fact guided by that question mark: “A new state of things could shift towards new ways of deciphering what is going on, facing the strange-

ness in the knowing-body, giving words, gestures, new strategies of resistance” (Ibid.).

Referring to Rolnik, disassociating from the knowing-body implies the risk that the system produces an illusion with the same references that we already have, and thus merely reproduces the colonial capitalist unconsciousness and its politics of desire. An “active micropolitics,” however, that is consciously aware and in tune with the knowing body constitutes the only way toward change, according to Rolnik. A chance to gain new subjectivity, new configurations of the unconscious and its relation to the world for breaking from the dominant references, as a resistance and liberation of the “colonial capitalist unconscious.” It is this concept of active micropolitics of hers that is relevant for my understanding of conscientization and that the practical research experiments seek to motivate.

Thinking has to do with the knowing body. If you disassociate from the knowing body, thinking becomes a reactive action, an action to deny what is asking for change, [it] invents a kind of illusion of truth that explains everything. It is our responsibility to make this shift! It is dangerous to deny the knowing body (i.e., in academy), thinking must come from the knowing body which is creating the politics of thought. Explaining, reflecting, re-feeling (Ibid.).

For example, in particular the first practical research experiment of the *Radical Empathy Lab* (elaborated in the subsequent chapters), *The Vibratile Body*, strives through embodied exercises to activate such sensibility and thinking that is in resonance with and “re-feeling” its knowing and vibratile body.

Active micropolitics equally means being vibratile and resonant with the macropolitical, making new connections in the world; a “worlding with” that has the potential to bring about new differentiation, new singularity and resistance.

Concordant with Rolnik’s thinking, I argue that the reconnection and re-acquaintance with the vibratile, the social, erotic and poetic body can in the longer term generate the potential for a critical consciousness and a form of resistance against the determinist structures and dominance of “the colonial capitalist unconscious” and “cognitarian subjectivation” (Bifo, 2010).

2.2.4 Thoughts on Affect

In this practical research experiment, the notion of affect is used less with an explicit focus on the complexities of affect theory and the precognitive implications of affect, but rather as a thinking tool to activate new sets of

relations and links, assemblages that might allow for new imaginaries and new forms of creativity that are activated through the holistic practices applied, interwoven with some theoretical ideas of affect.

Having thought further about embodiment, listening and its notion of affectivity, my research led me to prominent authorities in affect theory, Gregory J. Seigworth's and Melissa Gregg's *The Affect Theory Reader* and their emphasis on the corporeal quality of affect, of it being relational and temporal; "a passage" that focuses on the "intensities that pass body to body."⁶⁹ Their emphasis on the quality of embodiment underpins the practices applied in this case study, which endeavour to create awareness of and experiment with such "body to body passages." They state:

Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of x) of forces or intensities. That is, affect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010, 1).

The notion of "affect" is understood in this research not only as referring to subjectivity as the capacity of affecting and being affected, but in particular through Gregg's and Seigworth's rationale of being a relational "passage."

Having focused on the contemporary approach to affect as a "relational passage" and "intensities that pass body to body" by Seigworth and Gregg, 17th-century philosopher Baruch Spinoza's idea of "the power to affect and to be affected" was inspirational for this research and was investigated further through political philosopher and literary theorist Michael Hardt's and philosopher Gilles Deleuze's reading of Spinoza's philosophical treatise, *Ethics*.⁷⁰

69 ——— As authors and editors of their field defining *The Affect Theory Reader*, they bring voices of prominent theorists in affect together and give a good overview of theoretical possibilities and topics of affect. In particular, their introductory chapter, "An Inventory of Shimmers," brings the different approaches together and was thus chosen to be read collectively in the second case study of this research "Affective Listening". Further prominent readings of affect theory are, for example, Massumi, B. *Parables of the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002, or Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, eds., *The Affective Turn, Theorizing the Social*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007 – just to name a couple.

70 ——— It was written in 1664-65, and first published posthumously in 1677. Deleuze, for example, also highlights affect as a non-representational

Michael Hardt highlights the relationality between body and mind. He argues that reason and the “action of the mind” are in correspondence with the “actions of the body,” which he calls “corporeal reason,” and that affect poses the “passions of both body and mind” together in a continuum (rather than the often assumed dualism between it).⁷¹ In his argumentation, he refers to Spinoza’s ethical and political thinking, “to transform passions to actions,” and to replace encounters that are based on external causes with encounters that are “determined by internal causes, which are necessarily joyful.” Hardt stresses the following:

And yet we need to remember that Spinoza’s preference for internal causes does not lead to an isolation of any sort since every increase of the power to act and think corresponds to an increased power to be affected—the increased autonomy of the subject, in other words, always corresponds to its increased receptivity (Hardt, 2007, x).

Hardt’s idea that increased affect leads to increased autonomy of the subject (and hence, I argue, the process of de-subjectification) not only resonates with my approach and aims for “affective listening” (see Chapter 3.2.1), and with Suely Rolnik’s rationale of an active micropolitics that I have referred to in the previous Chapter 2.3.3. It equally resonates with my position on post-representational curation, seeking to stimulate encounters of increased affectivity and receptivity—“passages” and inter-relationality in the collective body—to potentially boost the autonomy of the subject.⁷² Hardt understands Spinoza’s approach of being in flux with

mode of thought: “Any mode of thought which doesn’t represent anything,” which appears productive for my approach on post-representation in the context of curation (Deleuze, 1978).

71 ——— The body and mind dualism was challenged long before the “affective turn” in the humanities and sciences by feminist and queer perspectives and their work on emotion.

72 ——— In thinking through the idea of “affective listening,” a short excursion to the notion of emotion is stimulating. Erin Manning differentiates between the notion of feeling and emotion:
 Becoming-bodies feel-with the world. Feeling-with is not without thought. It is a force for thought. Don’t mistake feeling with emotion. Emotion is the rendering of an effect, feeling is its force. Affective ton is an environmental resonance of a feeling-in-action, a vibratile force that makes a resonant milieu felt. (Manning, 2009, 219)
 Feminist scholar and author Sara Ahmed examines the notion of cultural history, and the implications and cultural politics of emotions in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. By exemplarily drawing on the emotion of disgust (in Chapter 4), she emphasises the notion of performativity in thinking about emotions. She refers to Judith Butler’s approach to performativity and elaborates its paradoxical temporality: “On the one hand, the performative is futural; it generates effects in

one's passions, joyfulness and exploration of "yet unknown powers" as a new "ontology of the human that is constantly open and renewed" (Hardt, 2007, x). It is to be emphasised that the Spinozist notion of "joy" is to be understood as a radical and affirmative criticality, and it needs to be carefully differentiated from the everyday notion of joy and away from neo-liberal imperatives towards engineered and coerced "positivity."

Moreover, Michael Hardt underlines Spinoza's fundamental principle that all is inter-related, that individual sovereignty is non-existent, and that sovereign decision-making is minimal, as we are affected by the world outside of us. A second central Spinozan belief that is most significant to this research is that the body is not a closed-off entity but is composed by relation: a body or an individual, he [Spinoza] explains, is formed when a great number of parts agree with each other and thus communicate in a consistent way.

[...]. Essential to a body is the relation: the body lives as long as that relation is maintained. Instead of thinking in terms of unities, then, we need to think the relation among multiplicities and recognize the consistency of dispersed landscapes. To identify the locus of decision

the constitution or materialisation of that which is 'not yet'. On the other hand, performativity depends upon the sedimentation of the past; it reiterates what has already been said, and its power and authority depend upon how it recalls that which has already been brought into existence." (Ahmed, 2014, 92-93). Drawing on Butler, performativity is hence about the power of discourse to produce effects through reiteration.

Ahmed's hypothesis is that emotions are not psychological states that reside within and emerge from inside oneself as personal or subjective, but rather that they are cultural practices that, through the repetition of words/signs, elicit emotional responses, which on the other hand can, e.g., create binary divisions between popular and marginalised bodies. Emotions are hence performative, relational and social in nature. [E]motions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place. So emotions are not simply something 'I' or 'we' have. Rather, it is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that surfaces or boundaries are made: the 'I' and the 'we' are shaped by, and even take the shape of, contact with others (Ahmed, 2014, 10).

Her analysis of emotion as sociality is helpful in contemplating critical consciousness, how we relate to our social norms and how emotions might relate to our subjugation. In the second iteration of the *Radical Empathy Lab*, it is through affective listening that we strive to activate awareness and a critical consciousness for our contact and response to the Other (and to what we might define as the Self and the Other) and to allow for such surfaces and boundaries to take shape.

or acting or being acted upon, we need to look to not the one but the consistent relation among the many (Hardt, 2015, 216).

Furthermore, in Spinozan thought, there is equality between the power to act and to be affected. Hence, the question of agency of the body (understood relationally) and what it can do, is of great interest and relevance for the experiments of this research:

The most powerful is not the one least affected but, on the contrary, the one affected the most and in the most ways. The more you are affected in many ways, the more alive you are, and to the extent you cease to be affected, to the extent you close off from the world, that much you die (Ibid., 217).

Spinoza distinguishes between the increase and decrease of our powers and passions and relates it to causality, and that this causality can have either a joyful and empowering or a saddening affect.⁷³ By consciously and actively sustaining the conscientization of our affect of joy, the stimulus of our passions, desires and imaginaries, the power of our acting and agency will be increased. This appears not only reminiscent of philosophical and practical goals, e.g., of practices of mindfulness, but equally of Hardt's argument that by actively making the affect of joy last (and thus also reminding us of Rolnik's "active micropolitics"), it becomes a political project. It extends from the micro- to the macropolitical.⁷⁴ That means for this practice-based research that, with a consistent practice, these curated micropolitical projects hold the potential to become political, evolving into the macropolitical sphere and thus recapping the transformative potential of the curatorial as an incubator or ignition plug for social transformation as contemplated in Chapter 2.2. In other words, thinking about micropolitics, following and acting upon our passions and imaginaries, that which makes us thrive, not only helps us fight reactionary an-aesthesia (see the last research project, Chapter 3.3.) and the loss of our sensing ability. It suggests that, from within the micropolitical, a potential strategy for

73 ——— A saddening affect (Deleuze gives the example of a bad encounter) means "that the body which is mixed with mine destroys my constituent relation, or tends to destroy one of my subordinate relations. [...] one of the relations that compose me" (Deleuze, 1978).

74 ——— Hardt expounds: "A political project, though, must not leave it to hazard but instead discover how to make last and repeat what is good, that is, what brings us joy." And: "Conceiving our ethical and political tasks, [...], in terms of not our power to act as sovereign subjects but instead our power to be affected shifts the orientation of our political landscape and opens new political possibilities" (Hardt, 2015, 222).

resistance and resilience against dominant separating structures (that detach us from our sensing and knowing bodies, from ourselves and the interconnectedness with others) on the macropolitical plane is pertained.

Contemplating the connection to one's joyfulness as a potential methodology and tool for self-empowerment, renewal and resistance against oppressing structures led me to draw further attention to the final experiment of this research, *The Articulating Body, Experiments in De-Configuring Reactionary Anaesthesia*.

The next three chapters on the practical part of this research, the *Radical Empathy Lab*, will elaborate on the creative energies, on the holistic practices and methodologies, on how these topics get mobilised and enacted in this curatorial practice experiment.

CHAPTER 3:
RADICAL EMPATHY LAB

3.1 The Vibratile Body

To expand beyond representation, to conquer an intimacy with the body as a vibratile surface that detects the waves even before they arise.
(Rolnik, 1998, 17)

After having learnt in the introductory chapter about the general positioning and key concepts that I embed in this exploration, this chapter examines its first practical experiment within the *Radical Empathy Lab: The Vibratile Body*. The chapter lays out the key holistic methodologies that were applied and that activated the theory and concludes with an assessment.

In conversations with curator Dr Aria Spinelli, one of the two members of the art collective Radical Intention, we recognized an overlap in curatorial interests. She was keen on my research and my first practical experiment, on “the vibratility” (Rolnik) of the sensing body as a potential methodology for creating social empathy within a curatorial practice. She invited me to undertake the research experiment in their “Decompression Gathering Summer Camp 2016” from 27 August – 3 September 2016 at Corniolo Art Platform.⁷⁵

The project invited artists and cultural workers, through the means of an international open call within the cultural field, to participate in a holistic experiential and discursive exploration of the relation between the micro and macro dimensions of agency, looking to test whether changes in the individual self can trigger other collective manifestations.⁷⁶

75 ——— The “Decompression Gathering Summer Camp” is “a one-week long residency of decompression, communal living and group working that takes place at the end of the summer, before urban life and its busyness picks up again.” The Decompression Gathering Summer Camp raises questions like: “Can the act of gathering and isolation contribute to articulating new forms of mutual learning and group working? Does experiencing communal life in isolated areas shift social relations? Can the experience of leisure and unproductive daily tasks be a generative process with critical potential?” <http://www.radicalintention.org/>, accessed 28 January 2019. Also see www.cornioloartplatform.net.

76 ——— See the open call in the Appendix.
The open call within the cultural field resulted in that I worked with a demographic of politically aware, highly educated cultural cognitive workers, namely five participants: Alex Brown, (researcher/artist), Glenna Cole Allee (artist/curator), Orla Gilheany (artist), Zoë Peterson (artist), Ann Schnacke (artist).



fig. 1: *The Vibratile Body* protagonists.

The framework for the experiment was one week of communal living in an antique remote Italian villa with a big walled-in garden in Mugello near Florence, Italy. The week encompassed and was structured in a way such that a diverse range of holistic practices invited us to engage and relate to our mind and body, building up to exercises of relating with each other (i.e., daily yoga practice, sonic meditations by experimental composer Pauline Oliveros, and the re-enactment of artist Lygia Clark's Multi-Sensorial Experiments). These key methods will be elaborated and described in the following respective sections of this chapter.

On a theoretical and discursive level, we engaged in collective readings (with texts from Marxist theorist and activist Franco "Bifo" Berardi and Suely Rolnik), discussions and the possibility for each participant to present her or his work. Furthermore, we visited local holistic practitioners, took nature hikes that encompassed awareness exercises and had some visiting guests from the cultural field to contribute and participate discursively.⁷⁷

As a general problem with open calls that stay within the cultural realm, such project is sadly rather exclusive. Yet at least, like with all cultural projects—and with ones that require registration or even the payment of a fee—the project can be seen as a micro test laboratory for creating new imaginaries. But, of course, it would be very intriguing to open the lab to a wider public in the future, one that might encompass protagonists with more diverse backgrounds.

77 ————— These included Morena Selva, a local botanist who took us on a walk of local healing herbs, and curators Maria Rosa Sossai (Ala Group) and Gaia Tedone who joined the discursive moments of the week.



fig.2: Reading Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s *Cognitarian Subjectivation*, 2010.

The week, it was hoped, would see us unfold a practical and critical exchange, experience and exploration, one that questioned whether new connections of flows, heightened awareness, empathy and sensitivity could produce new conditions of possibility, forms of self-empowerment and an exploration of the notion of “post-otherness” on a micropolitical level (please refer to Chapter 2.3.1 for further elaboration on the notion of Otherness). The carefully developed week with its hybridity of holistic engagements allowed to test out an embodied activation of ideas within the participants rather than displaying or simply discussing them. By integrating body and mind, it was an alternative and ambitious approach of post-representational curation to stir the participants away from a passive onlooking audience towards momentarily becoming critically more aware protagonists.

The experiment deepened the theory that I engaged in my research by taking a stand on what Franco “Bifo” Berardi calls “cognitarian subjectivation” (the inscription of determinist automatisms into cognitive activity, which leads to the inscription of determinist chains into the social sphere (Berardi, 2010, 4); the project was theoretically guided and fuelled by collective readings of his eponymous text *Cognitarian Subjectivation*. This text proved to be a good general introduction for the week, as it elaborates the complexities of today’s hyper-abstract semio-capitalism and the problems it causes for the emotional, psychic individual and social body. Berardi elaborates that semio-capitalism produces info-commodities that feed off the neuro-psychic energies of the cognitive workers and submits them to compel with mechanistic speed. He talks about the colonisation

of time in the era of hyper-productivity, cyberspace overloading the organic time of attention, memory, and imagination, which cannot be sped up beyond a certain point. This can result in stress to the emotional sphere that is linked with cognition. He argues that “the social brain” is assaulted by overwhelming supplies of attention-demanding information products and that its acceleration leads to impoverishment of experience and sensuality, to desensitisation and the de-activation of empathy. He pleads:

To speak in a way that sensibly enacts a paradigm shift, a resemiotization of the social field, a change in social expectations and self-perception. We are forced to acknowledge that we do have a body, a social and a physical body, a socioeconomic body [...] (Ibid., 5).

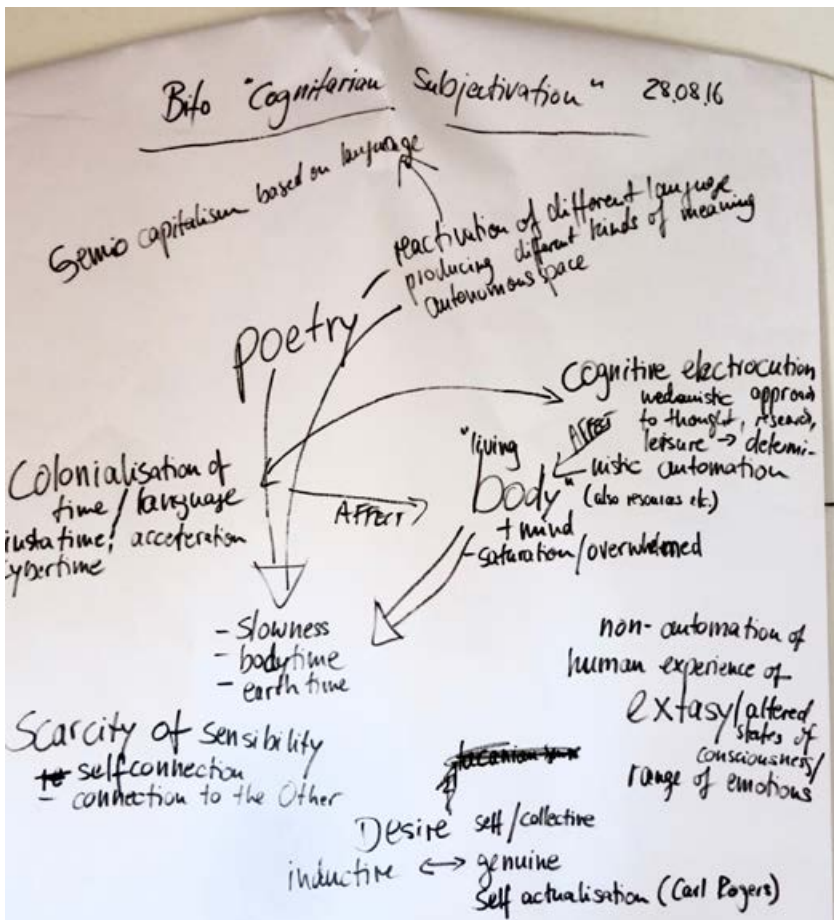


fig. 3: Reading Franco "Bifo" Berardi's *Cognitarian Subjectivation*, 2010. Notes.



fig. 4: Reading Suely Rolnik's "The Body's Contagious Memory: Lygia Clark's Return to the Museum," 2007.

In particular, the theoretical thought of curator, psychoanalyst, writer, art and cultural critic Suely Rolnik provided strong guidance in this research. What Berardi calls "the cognitarian subjectivation," she approaches as the "colonial capitalist unconscious" and reasons that our subjectivity is dominated by the subjectivating politics of desire and thought. Her semiotic choice of "colonial" does not refer to the geographical, nationalistic notion of colonising, but rather to "the dominant production of subjectivities in Western capitalistic modernity" (Rolnik, 2015). Similarly, it is in this sense that I use the term decolonisation in this research, not in reference to the geopolitical implications of colonialism, but in its connotation of overrun, occupied, taken over, seized, captured, taken in possession of, annexed, subjugated, homogenised and hegemonised.⁷⁸

Reading about cognitive capitalism, this research engaged in and resonated with her writings, and particularly with her propositions and emphasis on somatic knowledge and on the experience of knowledge created by the body. It prompted not only some of the theoretical structure for this pro-

78 ——— In reference to Chapter 2.3.1 that elaborates on the notion of the body, it should be mentioned that the shift from agriculture to industrialisation and cognitive capitalism with innovative technologies has had a massive impact on our social conditions and has profoundly affected how we relate to our bodies, measuring and monitoring progress of bodily goals and striving to standardized appearances, alienating a natural unity between body, mind and spirit.

ject and for the research, but it also made me recognise sympathies within her theoretical thinking to my own practice. Rolnik's argument on the concept of micropolitics (see Chapter 2.3.3) and on the notion of "the vibratile body" not only lent this project its title, but also allowed me to engage in a dialogue with her rationale and to imagine another form of knowledge, which I have come to define as "holistic knowledge." My theoretical examination created the foundation for experimentation to temporarily activate and initiate the "vibratile body" through holistic exercises, and as a potential tool for gaining critical awareness and autonomy from the "cognitarian subjectivation" (Berardi) and the "colonial capitalist unconscious" (Rolnik).

Rolnik's concept of the "*corpo vibrátil*," the vibratile or the resonant body, designates "the capacity of all sense organs to allow themselves to be affected by otherness. It indicates that the whole body has this power to resonate to the forces of the world" (Rolnik, 2007, 13). Affects of the world are experienced and perceived within and through the vibratile, resonant and affective body and produce another way of seeing and of feeling nuances and new states of being. According to Rolnik, the "knowing body" "has no images, no words, but is totally real; it is like a seed of the world" (Rolnik, 2015).

Despite having had a whole week for this practical research module to unfold, the duration of the project was unfortunately still too short and did not allow us to experience such potentiality and assertions to the fullest. But as laid out in the introductory Chapter 1.1, such projects can only be a micro experiment as an experimental laboratory and incubator for new imaginaries for society. Sharing Rolnik's and Bifo's thinking, I believe, though, that with practice and devotion, the re-activation of our psychocognitive apparatus—i.e., being more in synch with our sensing, vibratile body, listening to and trusting what it is communicating—can lead to, what I—thinking with Franco Berardi (2014)—would call "neuro-emancipation" and to thinking about a decolonisation of the body and mind. These are ambitious claims, but they encourage striving towards creating new imaginaries and new ways of thinking.⁷⁹

79 ——— Thinking from a capitalist, metric-driven ontology—that at its core has measurability, figures and statistics, and defines the 'success' of such endeavours on the plane of commensurability or tradability—the research experiments do not provide a measurable outcome. Rather, the research aims to think in a different ontology of measurement and value: to overcome capitalistically established forms of measurement of value creation by experimenting with alternative forms of value that arise through the process of togetherness, relationality and interaction between the stake holding participants of the project. This is a process and needs to be continuously enacted and practised.



figs. 5–6: Reading Suely Rolnik’s “Anthropophagic Subjectivity,” 1998.

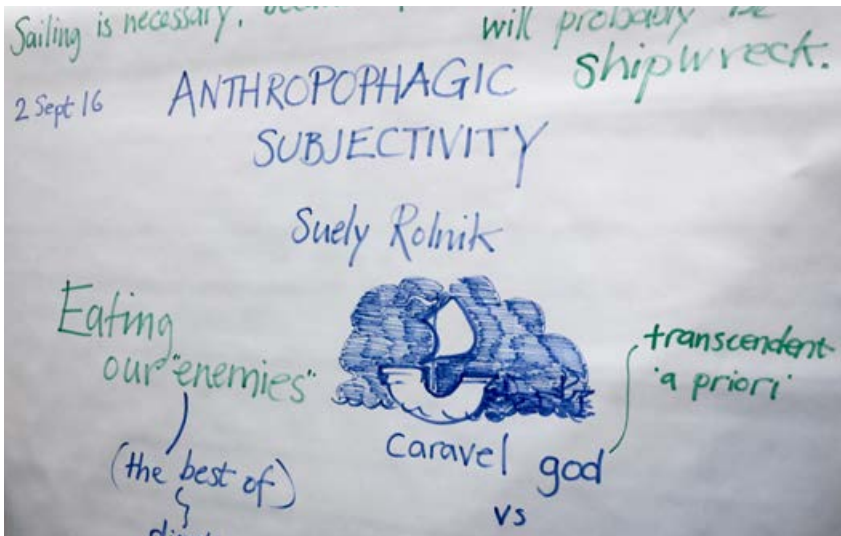


fig.6

Similar thinking on the re-imagination of value can be found, for example, in the theory of the commons. The field of the commons is, of course, very complex which cannot be further elaborated in this context. But author, activist, blogger and consultant David Bollier, for example, gives a short line of thought on it in his blog: *Re-imagining Value: Insights from the Care Economy, Commons, Cyberspace and Nature* (Bollier, 2017).

A further theoretical component in reference to an active micropolitics (see Chapter 2.3.3) was Rolnik's approach to and theory on the "anthropophagic perspective," her text "Anthropophagic Subjectivity" (Rolnik, 1998) was introduced and discussed via a discursive collective reading session as an approach to think about relationality and Otherness.

In the text, Rolnik introduces the idea of an "anthropophagous mode of subjectivation" (Ibid., 10) as the highest condition for active micropolitics and for the activation of the vibratile body. She describes it as "a certain state of the body, in which its nerve fibers vibrate to the music of the universes connected by desire; a certain tuning with affective modulations provoked by this vibration; a tolerance to the pressure that such unfamiliar affects exercise on the subjectivity so it will incarnate them, re-inventing itself, becoming other." (Ibid., 11).

Her approach to anthropophagy stems from the alleged custom of Brazil's various ethnic tribes of indigenous cannibalistic Tupí people, who ate their most powerful enemies in tribal rituals to incorporate their courage, strength and virtue.⁸⁰

80 ——— Rolnik describes it this way: "It consisted in eating their enemies—but not just any enemy, only brave warriors. A certain relationship with alterity thus ritualized itself: a choosing of their others in terms of the vital power that their proximity would intensify; allowing themselves to be affected by those desired others to the point of absorbing them into their own bodies, so that particles of their virtue would integrate into the chemistry of the anthropophagous' souls and promote their refinement" (Rolnik, 1998, 3).

The idea of anthropophagy as a metaphor for creating a critical and creative reflection and engagement with foreign cultural influences, and the idea of the Other for the construction of one's own cultural identity was proclaimed by Brazilian poet and polemicist, and key figure in the cultural movement of Brazilian Modernism, Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto Antropófago*, the Anthropophagic Manifesto, which was published in 1928. At the time, it meant in particular raising an awareness in cultural producers for finding their own Brazilian cultural identity and liberation from the dominant Eurocentric cultural imperialism through appropriating and devouring it productively. In the 1960s, during the dictatorship, it was rediscovered as a metaphor for self-empowerment from the dominant and oppressive structures by the cultural producers of the Tropicália Movement, Bossa Nova, Cinema Novo and concrete poetry as a metaphor for self-empowerment from the dominant and oppressive structures. In 1998, Paulo Herkenhoff curated, with Adriano Pedrosa, the 24th Biennale of São Paulo, *Bienal da Antropofagia*, which was dedicated to the cultural cannibalism that extended the specificity of the Brazilian colonial and totalitarian history in a transnational and more universalistic approach.

The anthropophagic logic cannot be thought without the body and opposes dichotomous thinking of a separation between body and mind, nature and culture.

Anthropophagy as an idea for the critical construction of one's own cultural identity through the incorporation of the Other works as a metaphor for the practical part of this research to think through the concept of conscientization by creating critical embodied awareness of being colonised by oppressive structures or the capitalist unconscious, and for one's interrelation with the Other. Rolnik describes the anthropophagous mode in its most active actualization as follows:

[...] to be in tune with the transfigurations within the body, resulting from the new connections of flows; to surf the events that such transfigurations trigger; to experience concrete arrangements of existence that incarnate these palpable mutations; to invent new life possibilities. Such operations depend, of course, on the exercise of powers of the body equally inactive in contemporary subjectivity: to expand beyond representation, to conquer an intimacy with the body as a vibratile surface that detects the waves even before they arise, to learn how to surf, establish zones of familiarity within the movement itself – that is “sailing is necessary,” because if we don't, our destiny will probably be shipwreck (Rolnik, 1998, 17).

I found correspondence between the theoretical propositions on the holistic making of social empathy, inter-relationality and “worlding with” that I wanted to test within the framework of post-representational curation, and Rolnik's approach to these propositions. They seem to engage the kinds of issues that I am committed to examine in this practice-based enquiry. The concepts underline the emphasis on the bodily awareness and appreciation of its non-semiotic knowledge as a crucial method for achieving critical consciousness and an active micropolitics that might lead to forms of self-empowerment from dominant structures.

Conceptually, an anthropophagic argument additionally adds to Pedwell's idea of empathy as “affective translation” (Chapter 2.3.2), in that it not only accepts difference, but encourages to even anthropophagically “devour” aspects of this difference.

Methodologically, Rolnik's cultural theory and anthropophagic logic metaphorically supports the hybrid approach of this exploration and curatorial practice, in that it anthropophagically incorporates the most fruitful appearing transdisciplinary ideas and practices to emphasise interconnectedness and interrelationality, moving the curatorial towards an experiential activation, incorporation and embodiment of ideas.

Being a concept that cannot be thought without the body, it further nurtures my specific approach to post-representational curation, by focusing on an embodied, incorporated experience and holistically engaging in questions of contemporary urgencies rather than merely displaying them. These theoretical approaches and discussions were activated and intertwined by holistic practices that sought to make the theories experiential within the “vibratile bodies” of the protagonists. The key methods applied will now be further elaborated in the following sections.

3.1.1 Yoga—Education Not Of, but *Through* the Body

Yoga is not now, nor has it ever been, a practice aimed at physical mastery for its own sake. Nor is it a practice aimed at “stress reduction” so we can function as better producers and consumers in a capitalist society.

(Barkataki, 2015)

During *The Vibratile Body*, each day of the project started with Ashtanga yoga to introduce and build up a temporary routine of mindfulness.⁸¹ The practice was accompanied further by collective meditations and Pranayama (breathing exercises) throughout the days.

81 ——— I am a trained yoga teacher and practitioner and lead the morning classes myself. I teach in the tradition of Sri Pattabhi Jois K. and in the traditional style of Mysore, which is a bespoke one-to-one practice within the group, whereby a sequence of specified series is carried out in one’s own rhythm of breath and adapted to the individual condition and body. Ashtanga yoga is a dynamic meditation that stimulates our sense of mindfulness and awareness through a strong focus on the union of breath and movement, energy flows and focus. Thinking about the notion of continuous process and routine, it might be constructive to briefly contemplate the notion of “the ritual” in this context: a practice, a procedure, understood as sequential and repeated performative gestures and actions. Lucy Steeds (introduced in Chapter 2.2) argues that a politics-based potential of art might be complemented or inflected with “ritual” practices with grounding in inter-subjectivity and activated by new forms of affective and discursive “rituals.” This is what this practical module of the research is seeking to unfold. (See Steeds, 2014, 20). Ritual as a performance technique was, of course, also quite fashionable for the avant-garde of the 1960s. Allan Kaprow, for example, differentiated between rituals and “ritualism,” “the latter being formal, artistic, and ultimately mock adaptations of the idea of the ritual” (Kelly, 2004, 64).



fig.7: Daily Ashtanga yoga practice in Mysore bespoke teaching style.

Yoga is an ancient philosophical and Ayurvedic healing system that is based on routine to develop knowledge and awareness about oneself on a mental, emotional and physical level. It is a perfect method for gaining access to the knowing body and to activate its “vibratility,” and if practised on a regular basis, it brings a new sensitivity towards “facing strangeness in the knowing-body” (Rolnik), a new sensual awareness, clarity, and stability in the process of the making of active micropolitics (that might lead towards new gestures, words, behaviours and strategies in molecular everyday life and that thus might have a potential impact on the molar level).

Problematic in the context of this research is, of course, the temporal restriction of the project, but again, it might act as an inspiration for a future committed practice and awareness.⁸² Within a short-term artistic project, yoga unfortunately can function merely as an inspirational and hopefully activating experimental tool for connectivity and relationality within and outside the protagonists. In addition (and as elaborated in the previous section of the chapter), there is no aim of a quantifiable measurement of value in such a relational practice; the value is the relationality itself and can best be experienced in the moment of living it. In thinking about post-representational curation, the outcome here is—just like with a yogic practice—the present moment and the process itself, which cannot be calculated or represented other than, for example, via archival documentation like in this research. While the yogic practices are often con-

⁸² ——— In fact, it did, as some of the protagonists told me long after the project.

ducted in a private and isolated spirit, I engage with them in a collective and discursive curatorial setting and as part of a set of holistic practices that seek to activate agency and a consciousness of our inter-relationship. Each one of the practical projects of this research work towards such a collective experience and imaginary that might extend beyond the artistic world, referring back to my elaborations in Chapter 2.2. on art as an incubator and test laboratory for the potentiality of social change.

Yoga is often reduced to mere physical practice for achieving physical flexibility and relaxation.⁸³ The physical postures, the Asanas that we practised, indeed are one component of the yogic process that work as a

83 ——— Yoga is often disregarded as a solipsistic stress reduction or leisure practice that is mostly associated with the white, affluent middle class, as classy gymnastics that feeds right into the passive authoritarianism of the neoliberal imperative of self-optimization, efficiency and functionalism of productive and normative standardized bodies that are shaped by self-commodification and personal branding for economic gain. It equally can be regarded as a “5000 year old medicine system and Vedic teaching that has been culturally appropriated by the white Western world as a fetishized and marketed commodification, a play-form, about consumption focusing on the physical body, which is only half knowledge and a form of fitness, entertainment, personal or financial gain.” (Tochluk, 2016) And, of course, there is truth to that, just by looking at the billion-dollar industry absorbing, converting, re-instrumentalising and rebranding yoga to gain monetary profits. Yet, at the same time, it shows how much our mind and the original yogic system has been colonised and eradicated by the capitalist unconscious. Research scholar Mark Singleton, for example, provides a historical and cultural background on the origins of modern postural yoga in his book, *Yoga Body, The Origins of Modern Posture Practice*, Oxford University Press, 2010. Popular postural yoga came into being in the first half of the 20th century as a hybridised practice of colonial India’s dialogical encounter with the worldwide physical culture movement and owes a debt to modern Indian nationalism. Carol Horton, Ph.D., is a writer, educator and activist working at the intersection of mindful yoga, social science, and social justice, and elaborates in her book, *Yoga Ph.D. Integrating the Life of the Mind and the Wisdom of the Body*, Kleio Books, 2012, that physical culture, as conceived by the Indian YMCA (The Young Men’s Christian Association of India, founded in 1891), was education *through* the body, not *of* the body and was intended to contribute to the even development of the three-fold nature of man—mind, body and spirit. Popularized posture-oriented contemporary yoga often also finds roots in the legacies of the spiritual materialism of the Sixties, a cultural experiment mostly symbolised by the encounter between the Beat Generation and Eastern philosophy. In contemporary India, yoga is partially also critically considered as a political tool of the Hindu-Nationalist party, and instrumentalised as a strategy against India’s minority groups.

tool to prepare and keep the mind and body fit for concentration, awareness and meditation.⁸⁴ The yoga philosophy is complex and would exceed the realm of this research, but a few aspects ought to be mentioned: yoga is a philosophical teaching that strives towards self-knowledge through mental and physical exercises. Through yoga practice, we might gain what sociology lecturer at Cà Foscari University in Venice, Italy, and yoga practitioner Francesca Coin calls “dis-identification of our own tendencies” beyond coercive values of a neoliberal identity: “the attempt to stop the cacophony of the mind and align the five elements in our body with the wider intelligence of life. In a way, yoga is precisely about undoing our identification with external [exterior] values or functions” (Coin, 2015). In Rolnik’s rationale, this describes an active micropolitics and an empathic way of tuning into the world around us.

The most ancient Sanskrit text, the *Yoga Sutras*, describes yoga as an eightfold path, called *ashtanga* (“eight limbs”; Sanskrit: *ashta* eight, *anga* limb), and offers guidelines not only for the physical, but also for ethical conduct and self-discipline.⁸⁵ *Samadhi* is the ultimate stage of the eight

84 ——— Although in the original yoga Sutras and original teachings, yoga is centred around its philosophical aspect and the healing of the body.

85 ——— It was written by scholar Patañjali probably between the second century BC and fourth century AD; the exact date is unknown.

The first four stages of the “eight limbs” of Patañjali’s Ashtanga Yoga encompass the postural aspect, the *Asanas*, and concentrate on refining our personalities, and developing an energetic awareness of ourselves. (*Yama* deals with one’s ethical standards and sense of integrity, focusing on our behaviour and how we conduct ourselves in life. Practising one of the ethical teachings of yoga, *Ahimsa* (non-harming), teaches us responsibility towards others. *Niyama* has to do with self-discipline and spiritual observances; the fourth limb, *Pranayama*, is generally translated as breath control, consisting of techniques designed to gain mastery over the respiratory process while recognising the connection between the breath, the mind and the emotions. All of this prepares us for the second half of the eight limbs of the yogic journey, which deals with the senses, the mind and attaining a higher state of consciousness. For example, in the stage of *Pratyahara* (Sanskrit: gaining mastery over external influences, withdrawal of the senses), we make the conscious effort to draw our awareness away from external stimuli and focus on the inward gaze. This practice helps us to step back and take a look at ourselves, allowing us to observe our habits that might interfere with our inner growth and supporting the process of striving towards a critical consciousness. *Dharana* is the sixth limb and stands for concentration. *Dhyana* is the seventh limb of Ashtanga Yoga. At this stage, the mind has been quieted, and, in the stillness, it produces few or no thoughts at all; it is a state of being keenly aware without focus.

Carol Horton, e.g., points out the effects of yoga paralleling cognitive therapy that strives to re-programme negative self-conceptions, internal emotions and narratives:

limbs of Ashtanga Yoga. Continual practice transcends caring for the self and encourages ethical conduct and awareness of one's interconnectedness with all living things.⁸⁶

In the context of thinking of caring for the self, a short excursion to philosopher Michel Foucault's discussion of his historical studies of ancient Greek and Roman ethics, *The Care of the Self*, is instructive, as he elaborates that it was the foundational principle of all moral rationality.

Socrates and ancient ethicists understood that caring for oneself was to exhibit an attitude not only toward oneself but also toward others and the world, attend to one's own thoughts and attitudes in self-reflection and meditation, and engage in ascetic practices aimed at realizing an ideal state of being. [...] [E]thics denotes the intentional work of an individual on itself in order to subject itself to a set of moral

1. "Becoming aware of, questioning, and learning to let go of internal narratives of 'who I am' that keep me locked into a needlessly restricted sense of self;

2. Becoming aware of repressed emotions, allowing myself to feel and process them, and starting to release them; and

3. Becoming aware of my intuitive and other extra-rational capacities of mind, trusting them more, and increasingly integrating them into my everyday awareness" (Horton, 2012, 62).

These processes support creating critical consciousness and a development towards an authentic individuation that resists (e.g., capitalist) subjugation.

Horton also introduces the term "felt sense" that goes back to psychologist Eugene Gendlin from the 1970s. She elaborates that to apprehend the mind's significance on a deep, intuitive level "gives rise to a sense of what you need to do in order to move toward enhanced integration and well-being" (Horton, 2012, 76). This "felt sense" hence can become a methodology for what reminds us of Freire's idea of "dialectical process of praxis," the transformation of reality that is based on critical reflection and action.

86 ——— This state of mind can neither be bought nor possessed (not even by neoliberal capitalism); it can only be experienced through sustainable practice. It was, of course, impossible to reach this stage within the short timeframe of the week-long experiment, but the idea was to offer a miniature insight towards that experience and maybe inspire the participating protagonists to delve further into it—not different, in fact, to what a traditionally curated exhibition can offer.

The state of *Samadhi* proves to be a counter-argument to a popular critique of yoga as being part of a current trend of hyper-individualism, just feeling good in oneself and the belief of being one's own truth and being solely accountable for oneself without any ethical implication towards others.

recommendations for conduct and, as a result of this self-forming activity or “subjectivation,” constitute its own moral being (Robinson, 2011).

Foucault’s reflections are supportive in thinking about the relational and ethical aspect of yogic practice (and holistic practices and processes in general), in the exploration of the activation of critical consciousness and in thinking about representation within the context of this research. He elaborates:

This [mental] inspection is a test of power and a guarantee of freedom: a way of always making sure that one will not become attached to that which does not come under our control. [...] To keep constant watch over one’s representations [...] is not to inquire [...] concerning the deep origin of the idea that presents itself; it is not to try and decipher a meaning hidden beneath the visible representation; it is to assess the relationship between oneself and that which is represented, so as to accept in relation to the self only that which can depend on the subject’s free and rational choice (Foucault, 1986, 65).

He concludes that the “task of testing oneself, examining oneself, monitoring oneself in a series of clearly defined exercises, makes the question of truth—the truth concerning what one is, what one does, and what one is capable of doing—central to the formation of the ethical subject” (Ibid., 68). Foucault posits that caring for the self is not about retreating into the self, but about new means of apprehending oneself in one’s relation to others, and to the civic and political events around us.

The three practical experiments of this research seek to unfold such new ways of apprehending oneself, to activate moments of conscientization and of questioning where one places oneself amongst others: through a collective experience and within a temporarily created micro-community and miniscule laboratory, in which the protagonists move from “retreating within the self” towards inter-relational activity (i.e., the curated experiences that ranged from self-awareness in yoga to collective experiences in the sonic meditations and discussions), which might encompass the potential to be thought on a larger social level.

Yoga is indeed a social practice, ultimately a relational trans- and inter-individual process that recalls the idea of empathy as “affective translation,” and one that appreciates uniqueness and hence diversity. Yoga is a continuous process of becoming, not only “a longing to become other” (Coin, 2015) but of re-subjectivation and intersubjectivity. As Coin states:

Oppression is not inherent to the upper class. It simply produces it. In this sense, there can be no real social change unless relationships change, and there can be no peace in the world unless individuals learn how to be peaceful [...] (Coin, 2015).

The *Radical Empathy Lab* does not aim to solely to give the nurturing experience of the self, but to create spaces for experimenting with social relations and for critical debate. (See Chapter 2.1.1 on Oliver Marchart's emphasis on the importance of critical debate in the curatorial). The collective readings and discussions of critical texts helped this project to reflect the experience analytically and to create such a space for debate. *The Vibratile Body* was not solely about an embodied experience, but the somatic experience helped to activate embodied knowledge and cerebral critical consciousness through it.

3.1.2 Multi-Sensorial Experiments

Brazilian artist Lygia Clark's late work *Estruturação do Self* (*Structuring the Self*), 1976-1988, is not only a historic example for an artistic practice within this context but also proves to provide guidance in this research module.⁸⁷ In this later body of work, Clark emphasised sensory perception and subjective and physical experience with a strong focus on the inner life and feelings of her participants. This was fully elaborated through abstract and holistic artistic methods that were rooted in the non-visual senses and on the awareness of the body with a motivation for healing and with a concern for psychotherapy. Clark was not interested in the physicality of the body itself, but in working with the unconscious memory of the body and a body's imaginary that originates at the preverbal stage: what emotions are triggered, what kind of affective unconscious memories could be activated that verbally cannot be detected—an approach to unify the self and the body. *Estruturação do Self* entailed private sessions in which the artist would carry out perceptual-sensorial experiences with the help of so called “relational objects” to activate all senses.⁸⁸

87 ——— Lygia Clark (1920-88) was a Brazilian constructivist artist (painting and sculpture) known from the 1960s and '70s who is, along with artist Hélio Oiticica, considered one of the leaders of Brazil's *Neo Concrete* art movement (1959–61). The movement rejected a pure rationalist, representational and scientific approach of concrete art and embraced a more phenomenological art that was supposed to be organic and subjective, a multi-sensorial experience that would make the spectator feel more aware of their bodily and organic existence. Clark was also part of the cultural-political Tropicália Movement of Brazil's late 1960s that was strongly informed by the concept of cultural anthropophagy, as a cultural concept for relationality to the Other.

88 ——— These were various objects, such as stones placed on different parts of the body, fabrics, cushions filled with objects that varied in weight,

Clark's unorthodox style of treatment, on the edges of both psychoanalysis and art, was never recognised during her life. Chief Curator at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, Christine Macel argues that this body of work went beyond the two categories and towards the still developing fields of the phenomenology of perception, the psychology of perception, the cognitive sciences, and even neuropsychanalysis (Macel, 2017). Reminding us of Foucault's idea of the care of the self, Macel states:

The whole of Clark's life and art were turned toward the invention of a new way of being in good health, for herself and for others—not the health of normalcy or adaptation to the norm, but a kind of health that can be picked up implicitly through the borderline pathologies that interested her so much. Unlike research on power or submission, that type of individual health—an aesthetic but also a political project, never stable and always at the edges—was based on fundamental values of art, spontaneity, intuition, and the creative space (Ibid.).

As a specialist on Lygia Clark's work, Suely Rolnik argues that this body of work was far from being a variant of body art; on the contrary, the therapeutic experience of *Estruturação do Self* opened the resonating capacity of the body, in the attempt to create a new aesthetic subjectivity in which the "client" (as Clark called the participants) "would be open to become other and other in an endless process [...] aiming at a treatment, which [...] would connect the aesthetic, the clinical and the political realms as an inseparable, existential force" (Bang Larsen, 2007).

Clark's late body of work proves inspirational to me for this practical research module, as it moved away from the politics of subjectivation, critically reflecting on representational formats of art production that reinforce the static relation of spectator/consumer, which might be but:

[...] a sterile exercise in entertainment contributing to the neutralization of aesthetic experience – the affair of *engineers of leisure*, to paraphrase Lygia Clark. [...] Such practices establish a relationship of exteriority between the body and the world, where everything remains in the same place and the attention is *entertained*, immersed in a state of *distraction that renders subjectivity insensible to the effects of the forces shaking up the environment around it* (Rolnik, 2007).

objects made from stockings containing different materials (balls, stones, shells), and plastic bags filled with air, water, or sand. Some objects originally stemmed from previous experiments with sensory objects.

Christine Macel notes that, “Where art and therapy came together was doubtless in her [Clark’s] desire for the gift, in an openness to others and the wish to help them express themselves” (Macel, 2017). It is this wish for expression and finding of the self that I consider part of creating conscientization, a critical awareness of oneself and an active micropolitics with an anthropophagic perspective towards its surrounding others.

In this practical and experiential part of the research, Clark’s sensing elements, the sense of smell and touch were enhanced, entwined by awareness exercises of breathing and interconnectedness with the other protagonists. Based on my thorough research of video interviews that Suely Rolnik conducted with artists and cultural workers that had worked with Lygia Clark, I re-enacted some elements of Clark’s experimental and multi-sensorial experiences as close to their descriptions as possible.⁸⁹ In this multi-sensorial experience, the visual sense was suspended into the awareness of the body, working with its vibratility. The body became the main stage for sensorial experiences.

Like Clark, I used inexpensive everyday objects (plastic bags, stones, cooling gel pads, etc.) that would become a relational object when they came into the direct contact with the protagonists’ bodies.

89 ——— The series of 66 video interviews were part of Rolnik’s project *Lygia Clark, from Object to Event* (which became part of the exhibition *Lygia Clark, de l’œuvre à l’événement. Nous sommes le moule, à vous de donner le souffle*, that Suely Rolnik and Corinne Diserens curated at the Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes, 2005) that framed the artistic and intellectual legacy of Lygia Clark’s experimental work that she had created after her practice in painting and sculpture, and that sought to give a polyvocal remembering and lively activation of the archive of Clark’s work. Some of these interviews were also shown at Raven Row, London in the exhibition *A History of Irritated Material*, curated by Lars Bang Larsen in 2010. (<http://www.ravenrow.org/texts/16/>, last accessed 6 November 2017).

I was particularly interested in the interviews with Clark’s students at the Centre Saint Charles of the Sorbonne in Paris where Clark had taught sculpture and art theory (and a class named “The Gesture of Communication” in 1972) during her exile 1968 through 1976, and when Clark discovered the fundamentally therapeutic dimension of her work.

Specifically, the interview with artists Gaëlle Bosser and Claude Lothier (2004) who attended several semesters of Lygia Clark’s classes at the Sorbonne was of immense informational help. Gaëlle Bosser was one of Clark’s closest students, and, in the interview, they elaborate in fair detail how Clark’s Multi-Sensorial Experiments were conducted.

For example, I proposed to inflate a plastic bag with our breath, which would then—lying on the floor—be positioned on the bellies with the hands resting on top, as if one was hugging that bag, observing the movements that the bag created through the breathing.⁹⁰ Obscuring sight with a blind-fold was an additional method to enhance the somatosensory perception of the other senses, touch, smell (through the etheric oils of herbs that were rubbed near their noses) and listening (pouring water with a cup).



figs. 8–12: Re-enactment of Lygia Clark's *Multi-Sensorial Experiments*, 2016.



fig.10

⁹⁰ ——— This is a proposition that Clark had called earlier in her career *Pedra e Ar* (Stone and Air), 1966.



fig. 11



fig. 12

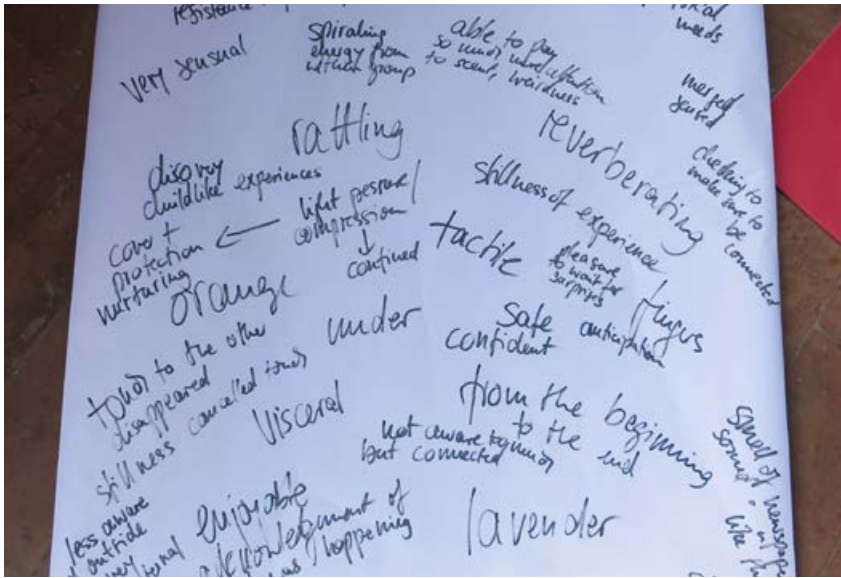


fig.13: Automated verbalisation feedback of the *Multi-Sensorial Experiments*.

It created an attentiveness of the boundaries between the protagonists' bodies and the external space. By passing on objects between them or covering them up with newspapers to unify them into one breathing body, it nurtured an awareness of the co-experiencing and interconnectedness with the fellow protagonists.⁹¹

The research of Rolnik's video interviews disclosed that it was important to complete the experiment through a sort of automated verbalisation of words that spontaneously came to mind after the somatosensory experience (while sitting and still being blindfolded). This shifted the sensorial experience into a further level of cognitive awareness.⁹²

91 ——— For further visual impressions, please refer to images on the website www.beritfischer.org.

I gave initial instructions for the experiment in order to delve into the sensorial perception that would go beyond words and intellect and extend the individual's sensing towards a sensing collective body. I invited the protagonists to try to connect with their knowing/vibratile body, and to dive into another potency of the body in the attempt to break with forms of representation.

92 ——— I asked the following questions to initiate the automated word flow:

How would you describe your experience?

What were your sensations?

What is your sensation of yourself now?

What is your sensation of your surroundings, the space around you now?

Do you feel your senses are stimulated/activated?

Observe throughout the day if your relation to the Other has changed?



fig. 14: After a collective sonic meditation in the woods.

3.1.3 Pauline Oliveros' Sonic Meditations

Inspired by experimental composer Pauline Oliveros' Sonic Meditations, I enacted two simple sonic meditations as a methodology to holistically stimulate the awareness of the senses through listening,⁹³ listening to our surroundings and the collectively shared and interrelational experience in this research experiment. The instructions and exercises were quite unpretentious. For example, the meditation that is called "Native" simply implies taking a walk at night but walking very silently, imagining that the sole of the feet could become ears. This resulted in mindful individual listening experiences that, through attentive listening and acoustic orientation in the dark, connected the individual with the listening experience of the other protagonists, attuning us to nature and its nocturnal sounds that surrounded us.

93 ——— Oliveros (1932-2016) was a leading figure in post-war experimental electronic art music and writer on new music theories, sonic awareness (the conscious attention on environmental and musical sound) and practices of listening and responding to environmental conditions. See, for example, Pauline Oliveros, *Sonic Meditations*, Smith Publications, 1974. The term meditation is used here simply to mean dwelling with or upon a sound without distraction or divided attention.



fig. 15: Collective sonic meditation on the last evening of *The Vibratile Body* with invited guests from Florence.

Another meditation was exercised during a hike through the woods, in which one person tried to mimic a sound that was perceptible in the woods, which thereafter was answered by another protagonist's sound imitation so that in the end it became a nonverbal acoustic conversation amongst us that was based on mindful listening and intertwined with the immediate response and embrace of our lively surroundings. Striking in its simplicity, these meditations did activate our sensibility and communication through the Sonic Energy within the group and helped to achieve greater attentiveness and sensitivity towards each other.

Having activated only a couple of these sonic meditations in this project, I became intrigued by their complexity and effectiveness as a tool for consciousness raising and activation of the vibratile body. This led me to the decision to dedicate more time and space to listening meditations and exercises in my second practical research project that I called "Affective Listening" and which will be elaborated further in Chapter 3.2.

3.1.4 Outcome

The week-long experiment aimed at horizontal exchange, co-thinking and a collective co-experience, to create a space for temporality and a new relationality that itself became the artistic or curatorial work and practice; it became an embodiment of the curatorial idea. For the most part, the horizontal exchange appeared to be working, but halfway through the week-long experiment, a short crisis and form of resistance by a couple of protagonists occurred. They expressed their displeasure about the process of the collective readings not being truly communal and not appropriately allowing for each individual to contribute their thoughts to the fullest. From their perspective, this critique was legitimate, as I indeed moderated the readings and in parts summarised and highlighted para-

graphs to more quickly reach the key arguments that were of particular interest to my research. I did this not only for self-regarding research reasons, but also to accommodate some of the other participants who indicated discomfort in meticulously discussing each aspect of the theoretical texts. This not only verified the sometimes practical dilemmas of curation, of not being able to fully accommodate every protagonist, but it also posed a more complex question to me, in how far my role as the curator did not reproduce the exact same hegemonic structure that my practice and research is trying to challenge? Is there ever a truly horizontal exchange and encounter possible in a project that is conceptually conceived and organized by one or several individuals? Having been the sole conceiver and executor of the chosen exercises and conceptual backbone that was activated in this project, I decided to spread out the responsibilities again for the next project (*Affective Listening*) and invited further contributors with their areas of expertise to help me activate the concepts with which I wanted to experiment.

Equally, also in the daily yoga experience, one protagonist resisted following the specifically announced, traditionally carefully elaborated series of Asanas of the Ashtanga Yoga system, wanting to continue her own free-style practice. This proved to be a daily challenge not only on the curatorial level of “imposing” something onto the artist and using her for the expression of my own creative ideas (bringing Anton Vidokle’s critique of the curator in Chapter 1.2 to mind). My curatorial position (that in this project implied also the “curare” and responsibility as a trained professional yoga teacher) seemed to turn into a paradoxical act of resisting and reproducing ruling social structures.⁹⁴ I was torn between my credo in the benefits of my traditional yoga teachings and a critical self-awareness of a curatorial rigidity that appeared to be happening. Being part of these transformative research experiments myself and opening myself equally up to the potential of my own transformational curation, I realised an incongruence within my practice of being a traditionalist on one hand when it comes to the yoga system and trying to be progressive in finding new approaches and understanding for curatorial practice on the other hand.⁹⁵ I came to reflect that my implementation of the conceptual ideas

94 ——— My traditional yogic training and experience demands precisely following a carefully elaborated series in which each Asana builds upon the previous one, thus securing a safe practice and avoiding injuries and generating an individual and collective energy flow between the practitioners.

95 ——— Since it is a curatorial research experiment, I followed my ethical understanding as a curator in the end not to foster hegemonic power structures within the project and agreed to her freestyle yoga practice, but with close observance to avoid potential injuries and trying to keep a collective energetic flow alive.

might have been partially rigid. This reflection did not fully occupy me right after this project, but it certainly did create a critical awareness and a new sensitivity towards the question of rigid practice, which eventually led me to invite the authors of the book *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times* to the last iteration of the research project, as they—amongst other progressive concepts—discuss terms like joyfulness as a tool to fight rigidity in social movements. (Please see Chapter 3.3 on this practical research project called *The Articulating Body*).

Furthermore, it was thought-provoking to see that this curatorial critique was posed by non-European protagonists (while the European ones stated their contentment with the proceedings of the exercises and the week). It made me understand that—even despite some parts of this research being strongly influenced by critical theories and practices from the Global South—the contemporaneities and urgencies that I am trying to negotiate in these experiments are rooted within my own cultural background as an educated, white, middle-class European, and that the discourse and questions that *REL* brings about certainly shift and define how the experiment is experienced depending on the cultural background of its protagonists or the cultural settings in which it is taking place.

On a small scale, we nonetheless experienced and critically explored whether these theoretical and cognitive stimuli intertwined with holistic practices did have an impact to re-think and to create new conditions of possibility, self-empowerment and “post-otherness.” We unfolded a practical and critical exchange that questioned and activated new connections of flows and heightened awareness, which stimulated more empathy and sensitivity within the group.

Since this is a practice-based research within the fine arts and with a methodological focus on experiencing and extending beyond the semi-otic level, there are limitations in describing the experience and in particular having a result as an empiric outcome or metric measurement. I endeavoured to capture and archive the lively experiential collective experiences and video-interviewed the protagonists at the end of the project about what they had experienced and learned. I wanted to find out if indeed the vibratility of the bodies was heightened through the week’s programme and the exercises and if the protagonists could detect changes in the individual self that might manifest in a different awareness of a collective interrelationality that the experiment had hoped to create and sought to test.⁹⁶ All protagonists clearly stated that the exercises of the

96 ——— Moreover, on the first day of the project I had asked the protagonists to privately journal their experiences, encouraging them to become aware of the shifts in perception, emotions, sensations and vulnerabilities that they might experience during the week. This helped to train their critical awareness and also prepared them for their reflection at

week, and in particular the daily yoga practice, did alter their state of sensitivity and resonance towards their vibratile body and towards its relation and interconnectedness to the others. According to these interviews, the project confirmed my thesis that the participants did become more susceptible to the affective knowledge of their vibratile bodies, through a cognitive and holistic experience of their own subjectivity that stimulated intersubjective relations and social empathy.

The momentary dissent of the two participants⁹⁷ showed me that, with continuity and discipline in working on one's critical consciousness, differences and debate can inspire a reciprocally affective translation (Pedwell) in which the difference between the parties involved can constructively co-exist. It encouraged me to experiment further in this direction by opening up the design of the next project to more debate and potential dissent.

Furthermore, a general critique about the relevance of this kind of curatorial or artistic work on a miniscule and short-term scale keeps arising; questioning whether it might require larger systemic changes and moving beyond a focus on personal consciousness-raising, in order to change the systems that negatively impact our way of living together. Equally, a slight sensation of incongruity might evolve since, after we collectively were willing to open our minds to an experience that temporarily took us beyond the boundary of regular everyday consciousness, we fairly quickly thereafter relapsed to our socially defined potentially separationist thinking, individualistic identities, habits, roles, and statuses as soon as the project was over. It appears to leave the unanswerable question wide open: Can creating new imaginaries within the arts have a lasting, sustainable impact and affect beyond its experimental potential? This research being optimistic, it argues that it does. Even if only on a miniscule level or by triggering just the inspiration to take other actions in the everyday life of the protagonists. And just like with yoga, the more you practise, the better you become in creating this sensitivity and trust in the vibratile body as your own agency.

the end of the project.

My closing interview questions were the following:

1. Can you feel a difference in the vibratility of your body since the beginning of the week?
2. Has your perception of the "self" as a micropolitical agency (as in Rolnik) changed with this week?
3. Has your empathic capacity to the Other been heightened?
4. What is your position towards empathy as a creative tool?

97 ——— Interestingly, the participants who had expressed their disagreement halfway through the project have since expressed their gratitude for the experience and the efficacy of the practices that were applied.

3.1.5 Appendix Chapter 3.1

1) Open call for The Vibratile Body

D_Camp 2016 - The Vibratile Body

www.radicalintention.wordpress.com

www.cornioartplatform.net

Cornio Art Platform hosts

Decompression Gathering Summer Camp 2016

Open Call - Application Deadline: May 30th



The Vibratile Body

Radical Intention

in collaboration with visiting curator Berit Fischer

August 27th - September 3rd

Cornio Art Platform, Florence Italy

D_Camp 2016 - The Vibratile Body

“...to expand beyond representation, to conquer an intimacy with the body as a vibratile surface that detects the waves even before they arise.” *Suely Rolnik*



Can the act of gathering and isolation contribute to articulating new forms of mutual learning and group working? Does experiencing communal life in isolated areas shift social relations? Can the experience of leisure and unproductive daily tasks be a generative process with critical potential? Radical Intention addresses and discusses these issues by setting up Decompression Gathering Summer Camp, a one-week residency of decompression, communal living and group working that takes place at the end of the summer, before urban life and its busyness picks up again.

This year berlin-based visiting curator Berit Fischer invites artists, curators and cultural workers to participate in The Vibratile Body, an exploration on the relation between the micro and macro dimensions of agency looking to test whether changes in the individual self trigger other collective manifestations.

Participants in D_Camp 2016 will engage in a one-week self-experiment focused on a reinterpretation of Paulo Freire's collective practices of 'conscientization' (i.e. Ashtanga yoga, meditations and breathing exercises; no prior experience necessary). These daily activities will be intertwined with discussions around the notion of the self as a 'vibratile body' in Suely Rolnik, and as a 'social body' (e.g. in Franco Berardi Bifo). There will also be visits to local arts and cultural centres, as well as experiences of local holistic practices. The week hopes to unfold a practical and critical exchange that questions whether new connections of flows, heightened awareness, empathy and sensitivity can produce forms of self-empowerment and 'post-otherness'.

In an era marked by immaterial labour, hyper abstraction, technology, automation and by capitalism's constant demand of increase in productivity, we – the self as a "resonant and vibratile body" and as a "social body" – not only undergo dominant politics of subjectivation and manipulation of relation to the 'Other', but equally are hastening to adapt to transhuman requirements of today's cognitive capitalism.

D_Camp 2016 - The Vibratile Body

Accompanied by some theoretical readings e.g. by Suely Rolnik and Franco Berardi Bifo and engagement with local holistic approaches, we will embark on a one week collective self-experiment that is strongly focused on experience and sharing of a daily practice of conscientization of our own vibratile body; a re-interpretation of Paolo Freire's dialogue based form of creating awareness as a practice of freedom. We will create new connections of flows, heightening our awareness, empathy and sensitivity as a social body. On a small scale, we will experience and critically explore whether these holistic practices have an impact to re-think and to create new conditions of possibility, self-empowerment, 'post-otherness' and freedom.

Each day will start with Ashtanga Yoga, in the tradition of Mysore and Sri Pattabhi Jois K., a bespoke and individualized practice within the small group, whereby a sequence of specified series is carried out in one's own rhythm of breath and adapted to the individual condition. It is suitable for everyone regardless of prior knowledge and physical prerequisite. Ashtanga Yoga is a dynamic meditation with strong focus on the union of breath and movement, energy flows and focus. This practice will be accompanied by further meditations and Pranayama (breathing exercises) throughout the days.

Berit Fischer is a PhD candidate at the Winchester School of Art/Southampton University and an independent curator and writer who has worked internationally since 1999. Previously based in New York and London (1997–2009), she currently lives in Berlin. Her research interests focus primarily on socially produced spaces, the specification of art as a producer of new knowledge and a means to permeate the status quo, the creation of fields of action, and the development of spaces for critical engagement and social change. She has published articles in *Afterall* (London) and *be Magazin* (Berlin), among other publications, and both edited and contributed to the books *New Spaces for Negotiating Art (and) Histories in Africa* (co-edited with Kerstin Pinther and Ugochukwu-Smooth C. Nzewi, 2015), *Hlysnan: The Notion and Politics of Listening* (2014), and *Other Possible Worlds – Proposals on this Side of Utopia* (2011). She has presented tutorials, lectures, and workshops around the world, including at Freie Universität Berlin, Nottingham Trent University (UK), and the Soma organisation (Mexico City). She was a member of the advisory board for the B32 exhibition space (Maastricht) and was a co-founding curator of The Brewster Project (New York, 2001). Her curatorial projects include *Revolution Without Movement* (Galeria Hit, tranzit.sk, Bratislava), *Hlysnan: The Notion and Politics of Listening* (Casino Luxembourg Forum d'Art Contemporain, Luxembourg), *Part of the Game*, (nGbK, Berlin), *Other Possible Worlds – Proposals on this Side of Utopia* (nGbK, Berlin), *Brooklyn Waterfront Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition* (New York), *Dumbo Arts Festival* (New York), *Intrude 366* (Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai), and *City Beats* (BankART, Yokohama).

Cover image : Lygia Clark's proposition *Rede de elásticos* (Elastic net), 1974. Shown in use, in Paris, in 1974. Courtesy Associação Cultural "O Mundo de Lygia Clark," Rio de Janeiro.

3.2 *Affective Listening—A Two-Day Immersive Experience of Giving Time and Attention*

Affective Listening was the second iteration of the *Radical Empathy Lab*; a two-day immersive experience and experiment of giving time and attention, to stimulate and expand our sensing interrelational capacities—a post-representational curatorial experiment for a holistic creating of social empathy and critical consciousness.

I was invited by artist, writer and theorist Brandon LaBelle, founder of the Errant Sound working group, for the experiment to take place at its project space in Berlin, Germany, in May 2017.⁹⁸ I have worked with Brandon LaBelle in the past, as our interests intersect regarding his approach to aesthetics and politics of invisibility, questions of social life, politics of listening, cultural agency and micro-actions. He generously thoroughly followed and accompanied my research with many insightful discussions.

I approached this iteration of the research experiment slightly more traditionally, in that I did not conduct the two-day experience by myself but invited two artists—Ximena Alarcón and Ying Le—with their specific expertise to help me activate the concepts that I wanted to test. We engaged with nine protagonists to immerse ourselves into “Deep Listening” (listening meditation practices developed by experimental composer Pauline Oliveros) and into what I called a “Discursive Teahouse”; this will be elaborated in the respective sections of this chapter. The Teahouse incorporated collective awareness exercises for sensing and building trust and relationships combined with a discursive collective reading element and

98 ——— The event was publicised through an open call via personal and the Errant Sound working group’s networks. The international protagonists came from diverse backgrounds and were all interested or active in cultural production, forms of listening and various approaches of interconnectedness. They were artists, performers, curators, researchers, a psychologist and an exhibition designer; it was an interesting mix of people complementing each other in our co-listening experience: Jee Young Sim, Matt Burnett, Bernd Eickhoff, Francisco Petrucci, Tina Mariane Krogh Madsen, Anita Walter, Ayah Halilah, Charlotte Pauwelyn and Daniela Berenika. In order to share with a wider audience, I invited Ximena Alarcón to give a public presentation on her work the evening prior to the experiment.

explored what I name “Affective Listening,” which gave the project its title. The immersive weekend investigated and experimented to determine if, through these particular methods, a greater awareness of one’s affectivity and one’s *Selbstverortung* (German: positioning of the self) and connectivity towards one’s immediate environment and co-fellows could be stimulated.

3.2.1 Affective Listening

Having enacted only a couple of very simple Pauline Oliveros sonic meditations in the previous *Vibratile Body* project, I wanted to work with the complexity and a/-and effectiveness of listening further in this experiment, as a methodology for consciousness raising and stimulation of the awareness of interconnectivity with one’s environment and the social body.

As mentioned in the introductory Chapter 1.1, listening, and its emphasis on the notion of attention and intent, has been of curatorial interest to me before, as it reflects social (and political) relations, resonance and interconnectedness between the micro- and macropolitical. While listening, a mutual space is produced that brings together and bridges the internal and external worlds. It is the making of a common space. We learned in Chapter 1.1 about German sociologist and anthropological philosopher Helmut Plessner’s approach to the human as being “in” the boundary between the body and the environment:

Only first when a living organism takes up a relation to its border, does it become open (in its own characteristic way) to what lies outside and to what lies inside. Only then does it allow its environment to appear in it and it to appear in its environment (Plessner, 2016).

To listen means to enter a spatiality in which the “outside” becomes the “inside” and vice versa, and in which time becomes space, located between past, present and future.

The act of affective listening involves a transitional state between attention and imagination, between sensual experience and understanding or seeking a possible meaning. Philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy elaborates:

[M]eaning and sound share the space of a referral, in which at the same time they refer to each other, and [...], in a very general way, this space can be defined as the space of a self, a subject. A self is nothing other than a form or function of referral: a self is made of a relationship to self, or of presence to self [...]. To be listening will always, then, be to be straining toward or in an approach to the

self [...]. When one is listening, one is on the lookout for a subject, something [...] that identifies itself by resonating from self to self [...] (Nancy, 2002, 8–9).

This research experiment seeks to stimulate critical consciousness in this space of referral. Moving between action and reflection, between holistic methodologies and embodiment of theory, the cognitive and conceptual reciprocally intertwines with the non-semiotic, with perception, the sensual and experiential. I define this process with a neologism, as “affective listening.” Listening is comprehended as an affective and an empathic engagement,⁹⁹ as agency, as gesture, as attitude and as taking a position with the sensing body as the point of departure.¹⁰⁰

99 ——— Empathic understood in the sense of Carolyn Pedwell’s rationale (see Chapter 2.3.2) of “affective translation” in which differences can coexist and are not looked to be homogenized.

100 ——— The most prominent theorists in affect theory, Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, define a reciprocal intertwinement between creative practice and thought as “research-creation,” which they activated through a series of events in Manning’s *senselab* that she founded in 2004 as “a working and thinking environment for the creation of new modes of encounter” (See: <http://erinmovement.com/about-senselab>. Accessed 14 February 2019). (I argue that “research-creation” could also be seen as another way to describe “artistic research,” or what practice-based doctoral research and curatorial practice intend to do.)

Although similar to their approach in their project “Dancing the Virtual” (2006), in rethinking the body as “a processual entity that transforms and is transformed by the relational sensing matrices,” my practice and research differs from their emphasis on the social potential and political implications of technologies in the process of producing the body actively, through a “technologically mediated environment” (even if they include the body as an “originary technology”). (See: <http://erinmovement.com/dancing-the-virtual/>. Accessed 14 February 2019).

Different and specific to my curatorial practice-based research is that it works post-technology, post-digitally and purely analogue within the human face-to-face encounter. It invites holistic methodologies into the research experiment, to inform the way of thinking of the applied theory, and vice versa, how the theory and thinking introduced in the experiments inform how we practise being together through the holistic methods that are invited. Through this (e)merging and interrelationality between theory and practice, the research experiences strive to test and create a new affective perception, experience, thinking and potentially even acting.

3.2.2 Deep Listening

As a methodology to deepen the aspect of sensuality, listening and the idea of *Selbstverortung*, I invited artist and Deep Listening practitioner, Ximena Alarcón, for the first day to guide us through what is called “Deep Listening.” It is a meditation practice and aesthetic experience developed by experimental composer Pauline Oliveros (1932-2016).¹⁰¹ It is a unique approach that strives for a heightened consciousness of the world of sound, and the sound of the world. The listening practice is based on sonic meditations and focuses on attention (how it affects one mentally and physically), listening and responding. It cultivates an increased awareness of the sonic environment—both external and internal. The meditations include “interoception,” meaning listening “inwards,” like to the sounds of our body (e.g., breathing, or the sounds our organs might make) and “exteroception,” listening to the sounds around us, like everyday sounds caused by the environment or the other participants. This can be a meditative process that heightens our awareness of the sounds that we are surrounded by, but not necessarily aware of.

The interoceptive Deep Listening exercises, for example, encompassed listening to interstitial spaces like one’s own thoughts, imagination, dreams and listening to listening itself.



fig.16: Deep Listening. Focal hearing exercises.

¹⁰¹ ——— As an experimental and improvising composer, Oliveros developed this work grounded on her observation of a lack in musicians who are merely “hearing,” rather than listening with intent, including listening to the environment and the audience.

Moreover, we trained in focal hearing,¹⁰² or listening awareness through walking in the room as silently as possible, which was accompanied by vocalisations that created an awareness of sharing a space and time, and for one's positioning, movement and relation to the others. We engaged in non-verbal communication during a silent lunch, which proved to create amazingly creative forms of alternative ways of communication.¹⁰³ Furthermore, we exercised a non-verbal empathic listening practice, based solely on communicating through gestures that were observed, repeated and then continued further through gesture.

Throughout the day, through listening, we engaged from our singular sensitivity of aural perception towards developing a shared common space. Ximena Alarcón describes Deep Listening as an inclusive and embodied practice of attention. By cultivating an increased awareness of the sonic environment—both external and internal—it promoted experimentation, improvisation, collaboration, playfulness and other creative skills that are vital to personal and community growth and interconnectedness.

Oliveros highlights the importance of practice and conscious attention. She states that Deep Listening needs to be practised in order to be understood, and that it “require[s] active engagement with attention. [...] The ear is constantly gathering and transmitting information—however attention to the auditory cortex can be tuned out. Very little of the information transmitted to the brain by the sense organs is perceived at a conscious level. Reactions can take place without consciousness” (Oliveros, 2005, xxi).

In a posthumous feature on Oliveros, writer Kerry O'Brien elaborates that listening is activism, a fully embodied taking position of attending to sounds and to the world, listening as a necessary pause before thoughtful action: “Listening is directing attention to what is heard, gathering meaning, interpreting and deciding on action” (O'Brien, 2016).

102 ——— The focal hearing was triggered through a singing bowl as a first sonic focal point, after which the focus of listening was guided to slowly expand towards the perception of the room, the participants, street sounds and back to oneself.

103 ——— The collective silent group conversation of twelve people was even more inclusive, as if it would have been a conventional verbal conversation, which, in a group size like this, would usually quickly split up in smaller groups or into one-on-one conversations. It became an incredibly interactive and creative communal conversation, in which found items, such as napkins, etc., were used to develop narratives collectively. Although “silence” was the parameter for non-verbal communication, the conversations were very vivid, and, given the constraints, even fairly complex in subjects. It was a very creative and playful experience that triggered a lot of collective awareness, empathic listening, care and resonance between us.

Listening proves to be a powerful method for a holistic making of social empathy in the context of thinking about post-representational curation. Oliveros' position on consciousness appears inspirational for this research, not only in thinking about a post-representational practice—and how to engage with space, ideas and time—but in thinking through Paolo Freire's approach of conscientization. Oliveros states:

Consciousness is awareness of stimuli and reactions in the moment. Consciousness is acting with awareness, presence and memory. What is learned is retained and retrievable. Information, knowledge of events, feelings and experiences can be brought forward from the past to the present. In this way one has self-recognition (Oliveros, 2005, xxi).

A key aspect of Deep Listening is the somatic experience and the recognition of a “multidimensional” listening that not only includes the temporality and spatiality, conscious and unconscious perception of aural stimulus, but also the awareness of the impact and the effects that listening and auditory stimulation has on the whole body.¹⁰⁴

Influenced also by Eastern philosophies (e.g., somatic warm-ups for the meditations during the weekend stemmed from chi kung practice), Deep Listening reflects on the relationship between sonic affect and intensified emotional and somatic awareness of sound that can foster transcendental and transformative experiences.

Through Deep Listening practices, we were guided to experience inner and outer listening (enlarging our sense of belonging and space), encountering many possible audible forms beyond ordinary sound perceptions in daily life, to expand our individual and collective awareness.¹⁰⁵

104 ——— For example, in Oliveros' meditational exercise “Extreme Slow Walk,” we strove to listen with the whole body and to create awareness of somatic and aural movement through the connection of our feet with the ground and the space and with the others around us. The soles of our feet are sensitive, as they are connected by nerve endings with many of our organs. We were instructed to vocalise a vowel with the beginning of the movement, and to stop at the end. It shaped a collective improvised vocal composition, which created a sense of collectiveness and belonging in the group.

105 ——— Another example was a group work in which the protagonists were asked to become creative and to develop a one-minute Deep Listening exercises themselves. One exercise invented by the protagonists became a collective improvised vocal sound composition while lying in a circle, head-to-head. One person started with one sound, which was added to by a sound made by the next person, and so on. Everyone repeated their own sound in the circle, so that the composition of



fig. 17: Enactment of Pauline Oliveros' meditational exercise "Extreme Slow Walk."



fig. 18: A one-minute Deep Listening exercises invented by the protagonists.

the individually produced sounds became louder and the unity of the group composition became stronger and more complex with each sound addition.

Another Pauline Oliveros exercise called "Zina's Circle" proved to foster awareness of relationality: we stood close together hand in hand (right palm up and left palm facing down) to first take time to sense the energy between the palms of the hands, to then transmit short energy pulses from the right hand, traveling from hand to hand around the circle as fast as possible. The pulse was a gentle squeeze of the hand, and the goal was to react as instantly as possible, aiming to

3.2.3 Discursive Teahouse

I named the framework for the second day of the research experiment the *Discursive Teahouse*. It metaphorically and playfully alludes to ancient Chinese teahouse culture, as the teahouse was often associated as a place for sharing ideas, for literature, arts and philosophy and a place where social rank and political allegiances were temporarily deferred for an open conversation. Still today, communal tea consumption is of cultural importance not only in Chinese culture; the tea's potencies encourage conviviality and open exchange.



fig.19: Set-up for the Discursive Teahouse at Errant Sound project space.

transmit the impulse simultaneously while receiving it. In a further stage of the exercise, a soft whisper of “ha” was added to the pulse, so that a communal circling sound of breath was created, which was then completed by a full voiced sound of “ha.” Due to the lapses in attention, the velocity of the pulse increased or slowed down. Through this exercise the awareness of oneself and the interconnectedness of one’s own reaction time and rhythm with the group was heightened. The exercise trained us to learn to listen to one’s awareness, detect the tiniest shift or movement of one’s neighbour, and be conscious of the overall sound “composition” of the group. It became a collective, improvised polyrhythmic group composition of breath and sound. It also stimulated and increased our reaction time and awareness of our interconnectedness.

For the Discursive Teahouse, I invited artist Ying Le to perform a tea ceremony (informed by the traditional Chinese Gong Fu style), as the holistic method and practice for this research module. It aimed to create a space and a framework for mindfulness, and to stimulate awareness and exchange on a theoretical, cognitive level, as well as on the sensual, experiential level. Tea ceremonies are embedded in Asian cultures, like in Japan, for example, and beyond.

In the classical Japanese work by Okakura Kakuzo, *The Book of Tea* from 1906, it says:

The tea ceremony seen as an extension of a particular world view, a view that encourages participants to find a moment in the present upon which they can focus...the sublime movements of the tea master, the meticulously prepared tea set, the rustic and humble, but exquisitely designed tea room. By focusing on these carefully orchestrated things, it is then possible to loosen the shackles and demands of the ego. Mindfulness, which itself has become a twenty-first century buzzword, lies at the heart of the tea ceremony (Juniper, 2000, 12).

Gong Fu (or often also called Kung Fu, and in the mainstream refers to the martial arts) is a traditional Chinese philosophy grounded in the thinking and teachings of Taoism by Lao-Tzu (604-531 BCE), for living in harmony with nature, other people and within yourself. One of the predominant concerns of this holistic philosophy is how to cultivate and conduct one's life. Professor of philosophy and author of "Confucius" (2016), Peimin Ni explains Gong Fu as an art form that emphasises practice and effort and "that requires the cultivation of the artist, the embodiment of virtues/virtuosities, imagination and creativity" (Peimin, 2010). The translation of Gong Fu implies "hard work" to improve oneself through constant effort. To learn it, it needs time, endurance, discipline and a strong will, in the understanding that if we improve our actions, we improve ourselves. The holistic view of Gong Fu recognises that everything is interconnected and that everything one does affects everything else around. It is based on the belief that one's state of mind or attitude can be passed easily to others, and mutual respect and appreciation for nature are equally essential to the spirit of a tea ceremony.

In this line of thought, Ying Le's artistic practice focuses on the potential of drinking tea in relation to nature, rituals and the social and bodily dimensions surrounding it; she understands it as a means of participation. The Discursive Teahouse became a communal place of exchange, in which Le shared insights on the complexities of tea drinking and the potencies of the pure high-quality tea leaves, which noticeably activated the sensing body, and nurtured a vivid and sensual exchange. Our sensi-

tivity and awareness of each other, and the experience of being together became amplified and gave the sensory framework, for what I aimed to activate as “affective listening”: the intertwining between cognitive (reading of theory and discussing) and the non-semiotic, the sensual experience and exchange through the tea ceremony and collective trust-building exercises that I guided (see Chapter 3.2.4).



figs. 20–21: Ying Le inviting us to sense tea leaves.



fig. 21

After several rounds of tea and fuelled vivid exchange, I prepared us for the cognitive discursive element of the teahouse (the collective reading of theory) with some short warm-up exercises based on Kundalini Yoga, to stimulate the body and mind for the theoretical engagement. We thereupon collectively read selected excerpts, mentioned in Chapter 2.3.4, of the introductory chapter, “An Inventory of Shimmers,” in Seigworth and Gregg’s *Affect Theory Reader* to inspire critical thinking and exchange about the notion of affect.

Due to the time constraint, to avoid the potential discontent of not being able to read the whole text and not to repeat a potential critique of a curatorially imposed hierarchical summarizing of text passages, as had happened in *The Vibratile Body* experiment (see Chapter 3.1), this time, I had sent the text to the protagonists and had indicated the very specific sections that were to be read ahead of time.

Unfortunately, as often happens in such projects, no one had read the text, and the practical and experiential process of the reciprocal interweaving of cognitive with the non-semiotic, the sensual and experiential as my idea of “affective listening,” did not work out as smoothly, in my opinion, as I had hoped. The induced reading session broke the organic flow of dialogue and debate that had developed within the tea ceremony. Initially, it even appeared as an interruption and disconnection from the collective experience, towards a personal and inwards focus and concentration; maybe there was even a slight initial resistance by the protagonists towards this apparent interruption of flow. This was also on the



figs. 22 – 23: Collective reading of Seigworth and Gregg’s “An Inventory of Shimmers,” 2010, during the Discursive Teahouse.



fig.23

grounds that the majority of the participants in this experiment appeared less interested in theoretical input than in the experiential aspect of the two-day experience.¹⁰⁶ After the transitional moment of adjusting to the switch from convivial organic conversations to academic theoretical reading, the collective experience and the vivid discussion returned, but it took a moment to recover its energetic flow.

The Gong Fu tea ceremony proved to work as a strong format for interconnectedness, conviviality and exchange, while the practice of reading and discussing academic writing temporarily clashed and disrupted its flow. The difficulty of holistically stimulating a critical awareness to elevate social empathy—through unconventionally and intra-disciplinarily merging embodied, sensual practice with cognitive, theoretical academic discourse—substantiated the curatorial challenge and the novelty of this research. In this specific curatorial practical reality, it might have been advisable to solely have stayed in the verbal exchange, and to integrate the theoretical and discursive part in the same formal manner of a dialogue without the collective reading. Learning from this, I decided to develop a different experiment format for the theoretical discursive input, exchange and debate for the last practice module that will be elaborated in Chapter 3.3.

106 ——— It was interesting, though, to see that the public announcement and open call appeared to have attracted more people that were eager to practise rather than to engage in the theory of affective listening.

3.2.4 Body Locomotion

The dramaturgy of the applied exercises was carefully curated in all three research experiments, so that they increasingly built up on each other, towards an amplified awareness of the protagonists' own interconnectedness and a heightened potential to experience social empathy, in the hope that the protagonists might feel more strongly connected and aware of themselves as part of a collective body.

I concluded this practical research module with a communal exercise called the "Body Locomotion" that I enacted. I borrowed and adapted this exercise from the *Radical Education Workbook* (2010) by the Radical Education Forum.¹⁰⁷ Practised in silence, the exercise aims to build trust and to enlarge personal freedom by taking collective risk; it fosters self-organisation for the responsibility of risk taking and safety.

The protagonists were asked to form groups of three, in which one person at a time would turn to the centre of the group and slowly play around with his or her balance, to eventually let go and fall to whatever side, in order to be caught by the other two players in the group. These two protagonists had to not only organise themselves without speaking, but also

107 ——— The Radical Education Forum is a group of people, including members of the sound art and political collective Ultra-red, who work in a wide range of educational settings in the UK and who meet regularly to discuss radical pedagogical theories and techniques. The workbook was printed as part of the exhibition *Best Laid Plans*, curated by Cylena Simonds at the Drawing Room, London, in 2010. See: <http://undercommoning.org/radical-education-workbook/>. Accessed 13 March 2019. The exercise is based on "Body Pedagogy," an educational methodology that originated from "Soma," an anarchist therapy by Brazilian anarchist, medical psychiatrist and writer Roberto Freire in Brazil in the 1970s. (He is not related to Paulo Freire but together with him and Augusto Boal, Roberto Freire took part in the radical pedagogical, educational and cultural projects which were changing Brazil before the military coup). "Soma" is a group therapy format that he developed by referring to the research of psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957), a radical psychiatrist and dissident student to Sigmund Freud, who shaped innovations such as Gestalt therapy and body psychotherapy. It works on communication and the relationship between body and emotion to empower the individual to become more creative and to challenge hierarchical rules and social conventions with playfulness and cooperative games. "Soma has been used as a social laboratory, bringing art, activism and learning new skills together. Participants are invited to play as a way to rediscover the body, sharing collaboration games to rethink relationships." (See <https://somaexperiments.wordpress.com/about/>. Accessed 13 March 2019).

needed to sharpen their perception and interconnectedness with the person in the centre, carefully observing and anticipating the moves of the person entrusting him- or herself to be caught when falling over.

In the second stage of the exercise, each group verbally reflected and exchanged their experience in a particular method that I had created: aspiring to generate an even stronger awareness of interconnectedness within the collective body, one person per group was designated to report back to the general group about their experience in a way, as if it was their collective experience, in the first-person plural.¹⁰⁸ This detail in communication had a powerful effect for bonding and perceiving oneself as part of a collective body, and it created a lot of enjoyment and playfulness.

The two-day experiment ended with a “Collective Earth Meditation” that I developed from a meditation that aids one’s grounding—which conventionally focuses on solely the individual experience—and that I changed towards a bonding collective grounding meditation, offering a sense of feeling strongly somatically interconnected and as an intersected entity through the breath.¹⁰⁹

108 ——— I was inspired by artist Cassie Thornton who applied a similar method in a workshop that I had attended for research earlier in 2017, called “Feminist Economist Seminar” at Supermarkt in Berlin.

I developed the following instructions:

Only one person in the group tells his or her experience, one person engages in empathic listening (an exercise I developed and already had used in *The Vibratile Body* workshop 2016), to listen carefully and repeat the other’s experience in his or her own words, how s/he heard and apprehended it, but without any interpretation and judgement. This repeating helps the third person, who is in charge of asking the questions to stimulate the flow of narration and who takes notes. I prepared the following questions:

- 1) How did you feel when playing?
- 2) You know who you are, but do you know your body?
- 3) How were you affected by the other’s support? How did your body react?

Comfort/discomfort?

Confidence/able/unable/disorientation?

- 4) How did you feel when you affected the other while supporting?
- 5) How did your body react?

Thereafter, the person who takes the notes reports the experience back to the group in the first-person plural, as if it was their collective experience. The notes became a map of their experience and sensations.

109 ——— The protagonists formed two groups, sitting in a comfortable position on the ground in a circle, each other’s shoulders touching. I then guided them through a relaxing and grounding introspective meditation. In the next step, I brought their awareness to the interconnection to the others in the circle, guiding their awareness on how their shoulders touch, how their breath is flowing as the individual within the group, and to notice the attuned breath as a group.



figs. 24 – 25: Adapted version of “Body Locomotion” from the “Radical Education Workbook,” 2010.

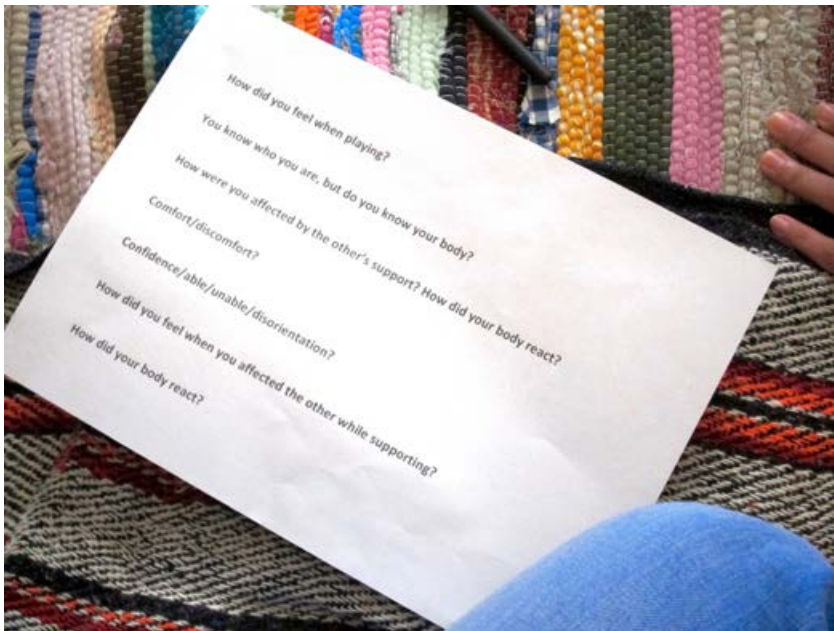


fig. 26: Suggested questions to stimulate feedback discussions after the Body Locomotion exercise.



fig.27: Discussion and feedback round of the Body Locomotion exercise.

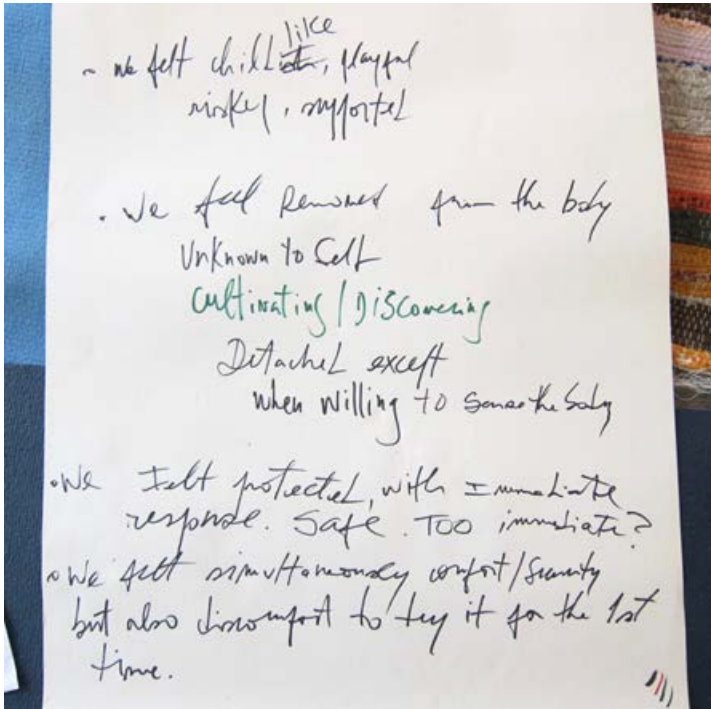


fig.28–29: Protagonists' notes for the feedback session of the Body Locomotion exercise.

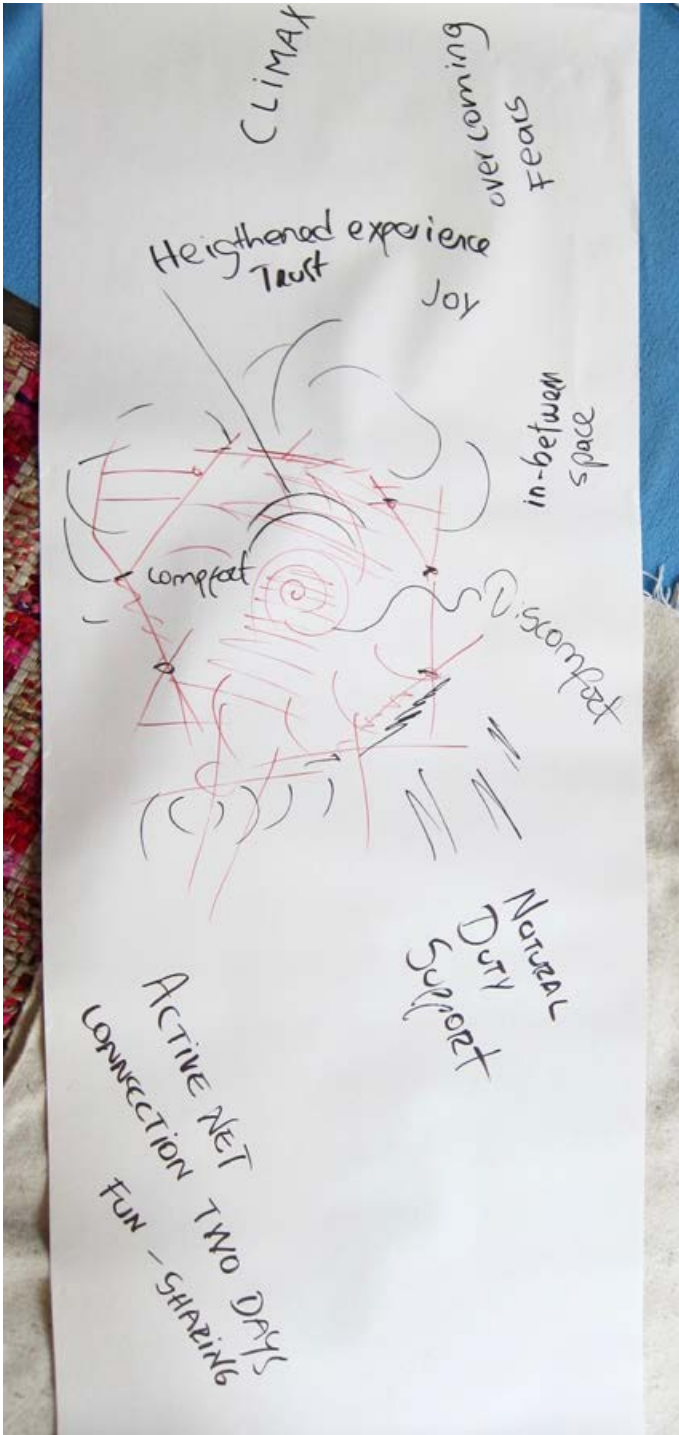


fig.29



fig.30: Guided Collective Earth Meditation.

3.2.5 Outcome

The first research case study *The Vibratile Body* had taken place in a communal living situation; this time, the research experiment took place in an exhibition/art project space, which allowed to put the idea of challenging the traditional notion of what an exhibition can be (elaborated in Chapter 2.1) to the test. It strove to rethink and experiment how literally an “ex-hibition” can be “embodied” and how it can “in-hibit” (a word play alluding the meaning of inhabit),¹¹⁰ encompass and embody ideas, rather than to display and merely represent them, as one aspect of my approach to the rationale of post-representational curation.

In all three praxis modules, this research does not seek to produce a work of art or an exhibition in the conventional sense, but it rather endeavours to invent new curatorial formats that create holistic experiences, temporalities, new spaces and new relationalities for being together that as an embodied experience become “the (art)work.”

110 ——— “In-hibiting” approaching it from Latin *in-* + *habere*, approaching the meaning with “holding in, encompassing”; see Chapter 2.1.1.

Equally, referring to my theoretical elaborations in Chapter 2.2, on post-representational curation and the question of activating “the on-looking audience,” this experiential proposition puts the theoretical approach into action. The notion of an “on-looking audience” was fully dissolved (solely active participants, and no observing audience members were accepted to the experience) and the protagonists’ agency was actuated towards the active role of a protagonist (at least in most of the exercises), in which one’s own creativity, responsibility and trust was encouraged. Retrospectively and prospectively thinking, the protagonists could have been even more activated as stakeholders, but this would require a longer duration of the project that would also allow, e.g., for the protagonists to have themselves become part of the programming of the project’s progression on an equal, horizontal level. This would mean practically, though, allowing for “blank” periods of time that encourage spontaneity and additional outlets in the programme. Unfortunately, in a short experiment like this, the overall programme needed to be somewhat tightly structured to build up towards the result that it aimed for. A brief project like this is certainly too short in duration to implement such a possibility, but nonetheless it made me think about how to create enough space for a more organic “stake-holding” to unfold for the next case study.

I argue that the question of the sustainability of a temporarily achieved change of social awareness is a general difficulty with short-term curated and artistic projects that aim for transformation and social change. A solution to this issue can only be long-term projects and/or many consecutive short-term projects, to increase the longevity of critical consciousness, reflection and impact on the potentiality of social change.

In addition, and as mentioned before, the theoretical and discursive element, which was supposed to organically interweave with the sensual/experiential, did not unfold in a natural organic way that was hoped for. And due to its time restraint, this format was not the most suitable for inspiring and allowing for enough controversy and debate. Hence, I decided to work on a more encouraging format to stimulate agency and debate for the protagonists in the third and last experiment *The Articulating Body – A Two-Day Experiment on De-configuring Reactionary Anaesthesia*, which will be elaborated in the next subchapter.

Since the feedback video interviews proved to be really helpful in *The Vibratile Body* project, I also interviewed the protagonists this time.¹¹¹ The interviews reveal a common tenor that the two-day immersive experience of being together, sharing experiences of the holistic exercises, did succeed in stimulating more interconnectedness and social empathy. The programmed structure of practices had created a trustful space, in which it appeared that one could develop the courage to fully be and express oneself without being judged. The exercises seem to have had the effect (at least temporarily) of increased affectivity, of heightened mindfulness, and awareness of interconnectedness to the environment, one's immediate surroundings and how one affects and interacts with it.

The feedback interviews further showed that the experiment fostered an experience of peaceful coexistence of differences and an appreciation, not only of the other protagonists, but equally of everyday encounters.¹¹² The protagonists felt that the structured holistic programme provided a nurturing setting in which to build confidence in experiencing empathy, relating to each other and (at least temporarily) changed their perspectives and judgement of others. The video interviews confirm further that, through the finding of one's own awareness and the sharing of experiences, their willingness to explore togetherness, teamwork and collaboration was heightened. For example, protagonist Bernd Eickhoff states that, "Instead of creating art as something to exist detached from ourselves, we created moments of deep awareness of ourselves and the people around us. The art that was created became the experience of very special moments" (See Appendix).

111 ——— My interview questions were the following:

- 1) Can you feel a difference in your affective awareness since the beginning of the immersive weekend?
- 2) Do you feel that your perception of the "self" has changed?
- 3) During the weekend, could you perceive an interconnectedness to the other participants, or other people (or the collective body) in general?
- 4) Has your empathic capacity for the Other been heightened?
- 5) What are your thoughts on interpersonal empathy as a creative tool?

Please refer to two written pieces of feedback in the Appendix of this chapter.

The second question appeared not so well chosen, as the answers proved to be difficult. The question might have been better formulated as, "Do you feel the immersive experience made a difference in feeling and awareness within yourself?"

112 ——— One protagonist reports that (at least temporarily) she could see more beauty in human encounters and that she showed more interest in a total stranger's (a shop owner's) personal daily experience.

This confirms what I mentioned above about what this curatorial research as an approach to post-representational curation strives to bring to life, i.e., that the “artwork” becomes the experience itself, a shared temporality and sensitivity of being together.

The feedback equally indicates that the aim of the experiment, fostering social empathy, was achieved at least for the duration and for a few days after the project. This was inspirational and encouraging to continue to investigate the research issue and to fine-tune the approaches and practices further in the last iteration of the *Radical Empathy Lab* that will develop in the next subchapter 3.3.

3.2.6 Appendix Chapter 3.2

Written answers of the feedback interviews by two protagonists after the Affective Listening weekend at Errant Sound, 13-14 May 2017:

1. Protagonist Bernd Eickhoff:

Can you feel a difference in your affective awareness since the beginning of the immersive weekend?

Because the weekend has been incredibly immersive, my affective awareness is, at least for the moment, very much changed. The whole weekend was about perception and reflection of perception. Thus, it has moved my awareness away from thinking and reacting towards a more active state in being in the body a state of expressing myself in the body and receiving signals through the outside world through body/space perception. I feel like I am very strongly IN the body, my body being an extension of my sensual apparatus.

Do you feel that your perception of the “self” has changed?

I often am afraid to contribute to a group dynamic, because I am afraid of how it would reflect on me and so am often rather timid and reserved. This weekend I felt that I would not be able to have the full experience if I did not contribute fully. That my thinking and overanalysing habit of myself in an interpersonal dynamic takes away from my own experience as well as the experience of the other people. So, I feel I was rather successful this weekend of putting my ego aside and just immersing myself into what was going on.

During the weekend could you perceive an interconnectedness to the other participants, or other people (or the collective body) in general?

As the weekend developed, I felt like there was a growing interconnectedness between the participants. I loved the discussion we had over the text. When everyone expressed their ideas, and they were weighed against each other. There were also so many exercises in small changing groups, I felt I got the chance to get close to almost everybody. At least for my part, I felt we had so much to talk about, BECAUSE we did not have to talk about our personal biography but just about the experiences of the present moment. I also vividly remember Charlotte's amazing impromptu performance at lunch, which became possible only because we were forced to interact in novel ways. We then passed the napkin around the table, and everyone contributed, improvisation in his/her very own and special way. There was a strong echo at the end of wanting to continue the experience as a group, and I love the thought of it.

Has your empathic capacity for the Other been heightened?

I feel that over the course of the weekend, I was able to overcome a sense of self-consciousness that often separates me from a group experience. I usually prefer exchanges on a one-on-one basis, where I am able to fully concentrate and build connection to the one person. At parties I often just turn off, because I cannot interact with many people at once. On this weekend, however, I felt that through the deeply sensual exercises I was able to undercut my fears, through opening up to the experience of the moment I was able to open up to everyone in the group.

What are your thoughts on interpersonal empathy as a creative tool?

I love the idea of art as a creative spirit of people working and building together. To me, art is about creating a special "moment," an instance where we are pulled out of our preconceived awareness into a space that encompasses something that is more than our individual self. The exercises, the whole dynamic was geared towards thinking and feeling in ways that challenged our day-to-day awareness and share this challenge with like-minded people around us. I loved how the boundary between performer and recipient was blurred as everyone was performing and receiving at the same time. Instead of creating art as something to exist detached from ourselves, we created moments of deep awareness of ourselves and the people around us. The art that was created became the experience of very special moments.

Protagonist Jee Young Sim

Can you feel a difference in your affective awareness since the beginning of the immersive weekend?

I am realizing that I tend to focus on the sounds around me and attempt to listen to them as a meditative source.

Do you feel that your perception of the “self” has changed?

I am more aware of my thoughts as reflections from the third person perspective.

During the weekend could you perceive an interconnectedness to the other participants, or other people (or the collective body) in general?

Yes, it was a very special interconnecting experience. Even though we didn't have much chance to get to know each other on individual level, the discussions and exercises became tools to create delicate appreciations of one another, forming a soft and gentle membrane to surround ourselves as a whole.

Has your empathic capacity for the Other been heightened?

I keep going back to the comment that was mentioned during the workshop, “no judgement.”

What are your thoughts on interpersonal empathy as a creative tool?

Interpersonal empathy plays a huge role in the creative process. From my own performance art practice experiences, I find that the outcome of the performance is not just about production but also cultivating relational and interconnecting engagements.

3.3 *The Articulating Body, Experiments on De-Configuring Reactionary Anaesthesia*

The project was realised on 2 and 3 April 2019 at the Faculty of Fine Art, Music and Design at the University of Bergen, Norway. After further numerous stimulating conversations with Brandon LaBelle (who is also professor at the University of Bergen), he invited me once again to realise this project; this time, it was at the university and working with his students as the protagonists. After having experimented with the different settings for the practical research modules to happen, i.e., communal living and within an exhibition space, I felt privileged and enjoyed the idea of experimenting with and sharing my specific approach to post-representational curation with students, and at the institutional level of the university, thus at the cradle of the creative industry.¹¹³

We learnt from the previous chapters about the concepts and practices that were applied to test out the making of social empathy and stimulating our critical consciousness by raising the awareness of the “vibratility” and “affectivity” of the body. We found out about various different holistic approaches such as yoga, meditation, multi-sensorial experiments, along with collective reading and discussing of related theory, which was set within the framework of communal living in the first practice experiment. In the second experiment, we learnt about Deep Listening exercises, trust, responsibility and interconnectedness-raising exercises, along with heightening of social exchange and relationality through sensory immersion

113 ——— The two-day event was announced to the students within the communication system of the University of Bergen, and it was optional for the students to attend. Approximately 20 art students voluntarily committed to participate on both days. The students were international, mostly from the European context and in their mid-twenties; unfortunately, I did not get the chance to get to know them a bit and find out more about their backgrounds.

Like in the *Affective Listening* experiment, the first day was open to the public to share the core of the project with a wider audience. It was publicized through the University of Bergen network. It brought further protagonists and cultural players of the local art scene and of different age groups, some of whom also participated on the second day, which diversified the group and made it cross-generational.

into the potencies of tea leaves, which took place within the setting of an exhibition space in the second experiment. We reflected on the necessity of active micropolitics (Rolnik), learnt about affect as “intensities that pass body to body” (Seigworth and Gregg) and touched upon and anticipated the notion of “joyfulness” as a tool of self-empowerment and de-subjectification.

In this final research project, these notions and practices were further experimented with as tools to overcome what, in this instance, I call “reactionary an-aesthesia” (Greek: *an-aesthēsis*: without sensation). An-aesthesia in the present political and environmental dystopian climate, and in capitalist and dominant systems that colonise and govern our subjectivity on the micropolitical levels of desire and imagination.¹¹⁴ They hold the potential to disconnect us from our sensing and knowing bodies, from our passions and deep aspirations and, ultimately, as I have come to understand through this research, from our collective thriving, joy and imagination. Hence, I decided to draw these notions into scrutiny in this concluding experiment that I structured over two days, and around two—what I have come to call—encounters. Within this specific perspective, the project attempts to bring together and culminate in the idea of non-representational curation through a micropolitical and holistic making of social empathy.

In line with the Spinozan thought on joyfulness and affect as transformative collective powers, I invited authors carla bergman and Nick Montgomery who co-authored the book *Joyful Militancy: Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times* (2017), which strongly resonated and guided this last research project.¹¹⁵ I decided that their concepts, terminologies and questions on how to undo what they call “rigidity” and “toxic ways of relating” would refine and culminate in the developed approach and process of this research. This motivated my invitation to them for the first encounter of this project, to offer their theoretical impulse and to motivate our critical thinking and debate for the two-day experiment. I encouraged them to specifi-

114 ——— Here, I am thinking about the rise of neo-authoritarian regimes, nationalism, populism and reactionary neoliberal capitalism, corrupted market interests, climate change, sensationalist media coverage, hyper-digitalism with constantly mediated reality and self-representation, to name but a few and what was touched upon previously.

115 ——— In their writing, they focus in particular on the phenomenon of what they call “rigid radicalism” that covertly sneaks into radical and social movements and society at large; congealed and poisonous ways of interrelating and imposing rules of being radical. The book is refined by morphing and giving voice to many conversations with different players in the field. They bring the concept of joy and militancy together, with the aim of thinking through the connections between fierceness and love, resistance and care, combativeness and nurturance.

cally unfold their concepts of “co/re-learning,” “response-ability” and “joyfulness” as strategies for cultivating relationships that are based in trust and strong bonds and to overcome toxic and inflexible ways of relating that are imposed by what they call “Empire.”¹¹⁶ Before I draw up the specificity of their theoretical input, I will first flesh out the setting in which it took place (see next section). They were invited to elaborate these concepts within the setting of a discursive participatory dinner, called *Food for Thought, Room for Conversation* by community engaging artist Katrine Meisfjord. Its format strived to encourage a non-hierarchical activation of self-organisation, debate, exchange and conscientization of the protagonists.

In this project’s encounters, we aimed to increase “aliveness,” empowerment and awareness of our relational existence through a curated sequence of different affective and transformative processes. On the cognitive and verbal level, this discursive dinner activated the aliveness of the protagonists to take charge, create and debate the notions of joyfulness, response-ability and co/and relearning. And on the second day, this “aliveness” was activated through embodiment and experience of such notions—within ourselves and within the encounter with others—through the social and holistic practices of Biodanza and Social Presencing Theatre, which I had researched and tested beforehand, and which appeared fruitful to activate and make the notion of a collective “thriving” experiential (elaborated in the respective sections).

3.3.1 The Format: *Food for Thought, Room for Conversation*

As indicated previously, I was not too satisfied with the outcome of the discursive format in particular in the previous *Affective Listening* experiment, since it did not provide enough space and time for a more self-empowered activation of the protagonists and for critical debate, antagonism and asymmetric relations (Sternfeld) that I refer to in Chapter 2.2—which also reminds us of Oliver Marchart’s idea of the curatorial function as being essentially collective. “Organizing is a collective activity. One cannot establish a political counterstandpoint, a counterhegemony, on one’s own, [...]”¹¹⁷ Therefore, I wanted to improve the collective activity of the cognitive discursive element in this last research experiment and particularly focus on an even more engaging and activating setting for exchange and debate to unfold on the first day.

116 ——— With “Empire,” they are referring to the complex of colonialism, capitalism, bureaucracy, racism, ecocide, heteropatriarchy and other interlocking processes of domination and control.

117 ——— See also Chapter 2.1.1 (Marchart, 2011, 45).

I commissioned Bergen-based artist Katrine Meisfjord to engage us in a methodically elaborated participatory discursive dinner, called *Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No. 2* in which the theoretical stimulus by bergman and Montgomery was activated and discussed. In close dialogue, Katrine and I had further developed the structure of her previous project *Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No. 1* into a meticulous process and setting for the engagement and conversations on the specific theoretical input to unfold (see the sketch for the course of action in the Appendix). How the body was placed, how the food was being served and how it was presented were all key elements for the conversations to unfold.

We prepared the room carefully to create an inviting environment. We set up a table with a variety of food ingredients for the protagonists to creatively assemble into dishes; we offered different types of seating (lounge chairs, chairs, blankets for sitting or lying on the floor) spread out throughout the room for the protagonists to choose and move around with.

Furthermore, four banners with the four key concepts on which I had invited bergman and Montgomery to elaborate—Empire, joyfulness, co/re-learning, and response-ability—were positioned within the spatial setting of this first encounter.

Referring to what I laid out in Chapter 2.2 on my own position and active involvement as a curator within my post-representational experiments—which also applies to my own role as the curator shifting from the realm of solely displaying to actively activating and embodying ideas myself—also this time, I became a contributing element within my curation.

In addition to my active creative dialogical involvement with Meisfjord for the development of the dinner structure, I opened the two-day experiment first with a conceptual introduction, followed by what I called an “awareness warm-up” session. These awareness exercises aimed to restore the balance and synchronicity of body and the mind, to bring us into the present moment and thus holistically to be activated and prepared for best affectivity for the theoretical stimulus to come and to understand oneself as a collective social body. I had developed and carefully chosen exercises that were inspired by practices of meditation, yoga and by some Deep Listening exercises that we had practised in the previous *Affective Listening* experiment (Chapter 3.2) that proved to be very successful. The process aimed to stimulate awareness of one’s presence and body, and again was structured to gradually become more and more interactive and aware of the social field and one’s relationality to the others within it.

Thereafter, I invited the protagonists to position themselves—their relational bodies—comfortably wherever and however they wanted to in the room for best “en-joy-ment” of the theoretical stimulus to come. The intention of the curated scenery of the room was to dissolve the conven-



fig. 31: Setting up for *Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No. 2*.



fig. 32: In the process of setting up for *Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No. 2*. From left to right: Nick Montgomery, Katrine Meisjord, carla bergman, Berit Fischer.



fig. 33: carla bergman and Nick Montgomery talk about *Joyful Militancy* within the set-up of *Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No. 2*.



fig. 34: Berit Fischer giving a conceptual introduction.



figs. 35–36: Berit Fischer leading an “awareness warm-up” session.



fig. 36



fig. 37: Half of the group of protagonists create dishes from the offered ingredients.



fig. 38: The other half of the group of protagonists build improvised architectures that refer to the four introduced concepts.

tional and hierarchical structure of a presentation or lecture—in which the presenter is usually physically positioned in front of (and at times even above) the passive, listening audience that is “fed” with information—and to create a communal convivial discursive structure instead.¹¹⁸

After carla bergman and Nick Montgomery shared their conceptual insights (on Empire, joyfulness, co/re-learning and response-ability, detailed in the next section of the chapter), the group of protagonists was divided into two groups. One unit was invited to create dishes from the offered ingredients, and the other one split into four subgroups to configure the scenography (with the existing resources in the room, paper and scissors as building materials) by corresponding to the four discussed concepts.

118 ——— This reminds us of Paolo Freire’s pedagogical dialogical approach to education in the 1960s and ‘70s, or authors such as philosopher Ivan Illich’s *Deschooling Society* (1971), Jacques Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (1987) or further alternative and radical discourses and pedagogies that are again or still recalled today, but that unfortunately cannot be elaborated further in this context.

The communal set-up idea worked nicely except that the speakers had pre-chosen their seats on lounge chairs for technical reasons (to avoid feedback from their microphones in the speakers) and also to be visually positioned in front of the banner with the concept of “response-ability.” This would, in theory, not have been a problem, but since most of the protagonists in proximity to them had chosen to sit or to lie on the floor, a physical hierarchy between “lecturer and audience” re-appeared after all. Had the protagonists decided to position themselves on chairs near them, the desired eye-to-eye setting would have worked—an interesting sociological phenomenon that alludes to presumed role positioning, but that at this point unfortunately cannot be looked into further in this research.

The results were four very creatively improvised architectures that suggested certain aspects of the concepts at stake. For example, for the setting of “joyfulness,” colourful blankets were used for seating, the white lighting was changed to green, and the set-up was decorated with hanging paper spirals.¹¹⁹



fig. 39: Protagonists discuss the concept of “Empire” in its respective built improvised architecture.

119 ——— The protagonists in this group refused to discuss the offered concepts but instead chose to “enjoy the joy,” they themselves being the joy, as one of the group members explained. The “Empire” group built a very square architecture with four paper columns (which could also allude to the idea of towers) and placed the banner reversed below them, metaphorically turning “Empire” upside down. The improvised architecture for “co/re-learning” was configured as an intimate secluded paper hut with a roof and decorated entrance providing privacy and alluding to protection. The configuration for “response-ability” was a small, secluded area built with the lounge chairs and the plants in the room along with the blankets for sitting. A decoration was made with a piece of string that interconnected the individual positions of the protagonists. They formed an agreement to sit back-to-back to metaphorically support each other while “having their backs” during the conversations.



fig. 40 – 41: Building the improvised architecture and discussing the concept of “co/re-learning.”



fig. 42 – 43: Building the improvised architecture and discussing the concept of “response-ability.”

Thereafter, the protagonists in the group who had created dishes were invited to choose the concept they wanted to discuss, and to join the building groups for the improvised architectures to share the created meal while conversing about the four concepts. As a conversation protocol, the protagonists were asked to agree on one person per group to act as what I called “the caretaker,” who would take notes and feedback from their collective experience and internal discussions to share with the entire group afterwards.

We had consciously decided for the four of us “facilitators” of the evening not to be part of these meal discussion groups. We wanted to avoid any potential or subconscious idea of a division or hierarchy of “expert/aspirant” or “teacher/student” and to allow for privacy and to stimulate agency, self-empowered responsibility within the groups, to generate their own thinking, debate and exchange around the concepts that were offered.

3.3.2 The Concepts: Empire, Joyfulness, Co/Re-Learning and Response-ability

Empire

While Suely Rolnik talks about the “individual/homogenetic/identitarian/universal-capitalist” perspective (see Chapter 2.3.3), or what I earlier called “segregating politics of production of subjectivity,” bergman/Montgomery use the name “Empire” to describe the complex tangled web of forces and interlocking processes of domination and control “that has shaped our very aspirations, moods, and identities, this always entails grappling with parts of ourselves” (Montgomery and bergman, 2017, 48). They argue that Empire, the forces of the dominant order, increasingly gains an affective control that encourages a decrease of our capacity to act (being reminiscent to Spinoza’s idea of “sadness” as the reduction of our capacity to act), keeping us caught in what I call here “reactionary an-aesthesia.” bergman and Montgomery suggest that this perspective is not ideological, but an immediate and relational one, as Empire works in part by making us feel impotent, corroding our abilities to shape worlds together. Their rationale of Empire is resonant with my understanding of the causality of divisive relationships, of detached individualism and re-active micropolitics (Rolnik), which disengages us from our knowing bodies and powers of creation, from affection and empathy.

It is this Empire’s “grappling with parts of ourselves” that leads to reactionary an-aesthesia with which this practice module (and, in fact, the *Radical Empathy Lab* as such) is trying to engage. To find solutions and methods to escape, to foster and support a critical awareness and self-empowerment against Empire’s infiltration and manipulation—which leads to detachment and isolation from collectivity and the interconnectedness of our aspirations—towards being in unison with our own desires, imaginaries and powers. How can we support becoming more critically aware, resistant and resilient to Empire’s affective control? bergman and Montgomery argue not through converting, but through affirmative encouragement and awakening of our affectivity and sensibilities, our passions and desires, our natural (individual and collective) thriving. We experimented to stimulate these affective fields through the activating discursive dinner format and the social holistic practices of Social Presencing Theatre and Biodanza.

Joyfulness

In harmony with Spinoza, bergman and Montgomery define “joyfulness” as the increase of one’s power to affect and to be affected—not on the level of an individual’s emotion, but as a collective capacity—and as a means to

become capable of feeling or doing something new. They elaborate the importance and power in cultivating strong bonds and relationships that are based in trust, new and resurgent forms of intimacy, “interdependent relationships as a source of collective power” as methods to undo Empire’s ingrained patterns (Montgomery and bergman, 2017, 82). Of course, a short-term project like this two-day experiment can only be a starting point and an encouragement for the building of such relationships, but it can at least temporarily offer the immersive experience of joyfulness, of the shared power of doing, re-feeling, and thinking more and together. It can also create an awareness that being “joyful” can be seen as an activist and radical act against Empire’s tentacles to keep us in reactionary an-aesthesia. bergman/Montgomery highlight the radicalness in this:

Friendship, kinship, and communalization have also been at the heart of working across the hierarchical divides of heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, colonization, ableism, ecocide, and other systems that have taught us to enact violence on each other and internalize oppressive ways of relating. To make kin across these divisions is a precarious and radical act (Ibid., 96).

In my initial etymological argument for my word choice for the *Radical Empathy Lab (REL)* (Chapter 1.1.4), as reference to *radix* (the root), my comprehension of the notion of radical has progressed further to understanding it in bergman and Montgomery’s activist sense of a radical act. A radical act that attempts to create temporary moments of relationality and kinship in a social body, through exercising awareness and sensitivity towards our enmeshment with the Other, as a strategy against Empire’s aspiration for detached individualism.

Moreover, joy as a strategy for transformation has made me think about my curatorial work as being “affirmative transformative” (see conclusion of this thesis) in the search for new ways of a holistic post-representational curation. Post-representational also, as it attempts to activate theory in an experiential way that sensitises us to things, rather than breaking up reality into discrete pieces that can be consumed. Yet as bergman and Montgomery pointed out in their talk, there is also a paradox: because joy and transformation comes out of specific situations, it is a process and an experience. As soon as we abstract from it and try to “apply it” elsewhere, one has lost it. *REL* and this research module try to create momentary relational affirmative webs and encounters that reinforce increased sensitivity, trust in each other, active micropolitics, social relations and the values to which we aspire.

In harmony with the line of thinking of bergman and Montgomery, this research has been striving towards an activation and affirmation of other ways of being, not as a new norm, but as the exploration of new (and old) capacities. They state:

We think this increase in capacity is at the core of meaningful social and political change today: we are interested in what makes it possible to immediately transform social relations in an embodied and collective way. This might feel scary, painful, and exhilarating, but it will always be more than just the emotions one feels about it: joy is the growth of shared power to do, feel, and think *more*.¹²⁰

Co/Re-Learning

bergman/Montgomery's idea of "co-and re-learning" is a further pathway towards overcoming reactionary an-aesthesia, towards collective thriving and increasing our power to act and to respond. Co-learning centres around relationships first, as a solid starting point for achieving an awareness of the collective body, interconnectedness and the power of collective thriving that it entails. It is based on being present and engaged with one another, on listening, being in exchange and asking questions.

bergman and Montgomery reason further that rebuilding and sustaining connections are the root for decolonisation. Reminiscent of my previous approach to decolonisation (Chapter 3.1)—in the connotation of occupied, annexed, subjugated, homogenised and hegemonised—I see their concept of re-learning as the root of what I earlier called the "decolonisation of subjugated subjectification." How to be present with one another appears very simple, but through complex tangled webs of forces and histories, this ability seems to have been unlearned and needs to be co- and re-learned again in the quest for a micropolitical and holistic making of social empathy in the curatorial field and beyond. Furthermore, recovering and discovering subaltern knowledges and practices can act as aiding tools for overcoming apathy, reactive micropolitics and reactionary an-aesthesia, and they might help to encourage "collective thriving" and to sustain being different to each other.

Response-ability

This feeds into bergman and Montgomery's thinking about "response-ability," as the capacity to really pause and listen to each other deeply, to question and to look for immediate ways to engage with each other and to be in motion:

120 ——— Abstract for their talk for *The Articulating Body* project; see Appendix.

What if the capacity to be really present is revolutionary? What potentials can be unleashed by connecting with the immediate, in a world that encourages constant distraction, deferral, and numbness?¹²¹

It is this immediacy and being present with one another that we exercised through all elements in this research experiment: being in critical awareness, in response and in our difference to each other—cognitively, affectively and somatically. Together, we experimented and exercised our openness and capacities to remain responsive to changing situations, to uncertainty, experimentation and curiosity that, according to bergman and Montgomery, *Empire* has stolen from us. They further highlight:

The stance of detached judgements means remaining at a distance from what is taking place. In contrast, experimentation requires openness and vulnerability, including the risk of being caught off guard or hurt (Montgomery, bergman, 2017, 222).

In fact, some of the verbal feedback of the protagonists proved that in particular the holistic exercises on the second day indeed challenged some of the protagonists' comfort zones of staying in and open to the deep encounters, alluding to this idea of vulnerability. Having participated myself in all transformative processes of these three practical research experiments, I agree that, in this last experiment, the challenge of being deeply present and in response with oneself and with each other was the most elaborated and challenging. The SPT and Biodanza sessions intensely involve openness for such an encounter if one wants to fully experience it; this indeed can at times be slightly uncomfortable, as the space to rest at a distance and in judgement does get dissolved and requires full active involvement and openness to uncertainty and vulnerability. It was remarkable and encouraging to see how this younger generation of protagonists so responsively engaged and dwelled in this deep experience.

121 ——— (Montgomery, bergman, 2017, 238).

In their talk they elaborated their view on how *Empire* removes responsibility from situations, i.e., institutions and industrial production have taken away our capacity to be responsible for raising kids, educating ourselves, growing our food, building our dwellings, etc. They stated: "When we get more freedom and autonomy and we're trusted with it, we can feel a sense of responsibility as an increased capacity to respond to the situation: to figure out how to support and create and do it."

3.3.3 Feedback Session from the Discursive Meal

After having had the time and space during the shared meal to discuss these introduced concepts, the protagonists were invited to give feedback on their own views and what they talked about within their respective groups within their configured improvised architectures.¹²² It proved that the protagonists were quite engaged in this element of the experiment; they resonated and extended the reflections on these concepts further.

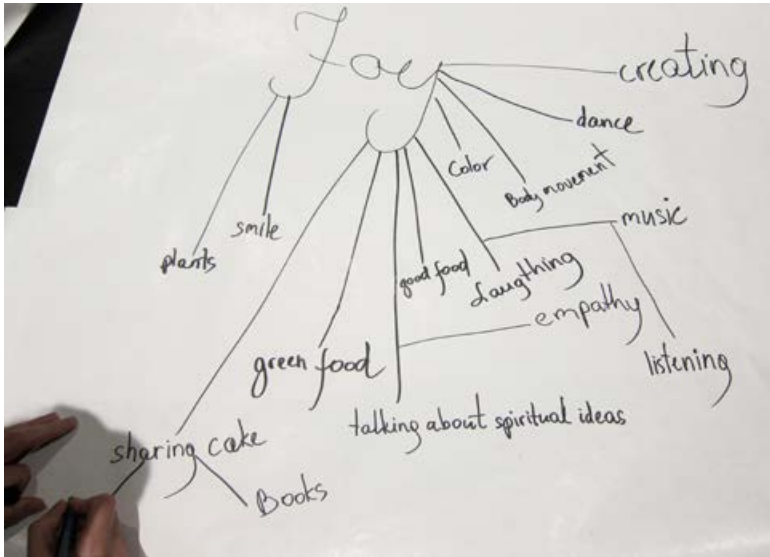
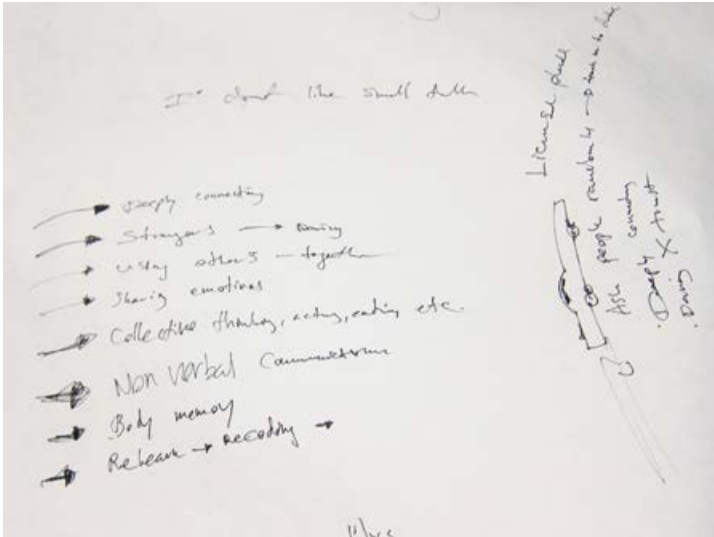


fig. 44: Feedback notes of the group discussing the concept of “joyfulness.”

122 ——— We had prepared the following questions to activate the discussions:

- 1) Joy is a process through which we become more capable and alive, and undoing sedimented patterns.
How can we activate joy in collective experiences or spaces? What makes it possible?
- 2) Response-ability names the increase in our capacity to respond to situations, see the possibilities there, and respond to them.
In your experience, what enables response-ability, and what gets in the way?
- 3) Empire names systems of oppression and control that shape our relationships with each other, keeping us stuck in harmful patterns, closed off, and isolated as individuals.
How do you see this operating in the world around you, and what helps disrupt Empire’s hold on your life and those you care about?
- 4) What skills, sensibilities, and ways of being together do you want to co-learn with others?

The “joyfulness” group discussed how one can experience joy and mentioned collectiveness, connectivity with others, creativity and creating together, sharing of thoughts and body movement—which allows for stimulating and expressing feelings and the connectivity to others—were the key points of how to experience joy and to escape Empire.



figs. 45–46: Feedback notes of the group discussing the concept of “co/re-learning”

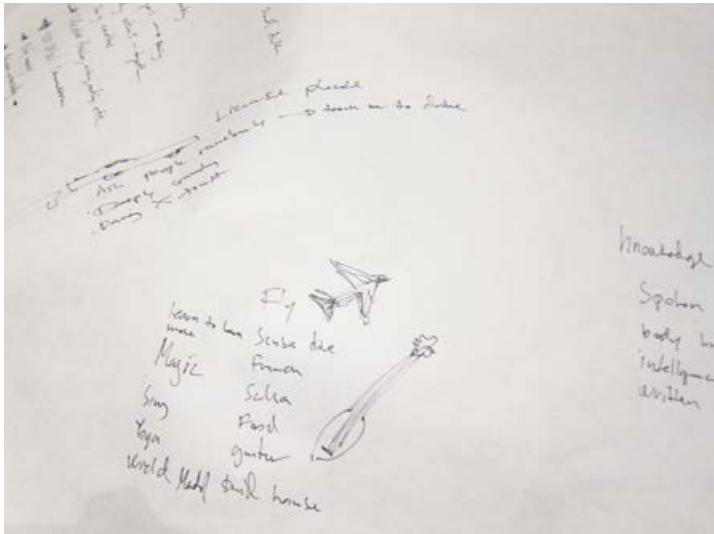


fig. 46

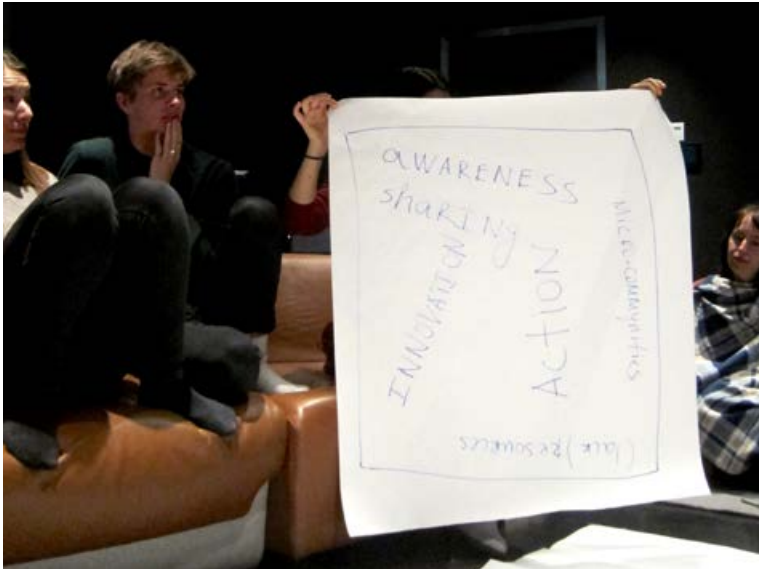


fig. 48: Feedback notes of the group discussing the concept of “Empire.”

The group conversing on “Empire” decided to discuss methods that could disrupt Empire. They agreed that awareness was one such method, as one needs to be aware in order to be able to disrupt. Sharing, forming communities and creating new innovations (e.g., finding new ways for energy production) were considered resourceful to disrupt and shift the established ways of Empire. They also referred to the psychological aspect of it, the importance of how one thinks and acts with other people. The key word and conclusion that resulted from this group was that action is key for disruption, and that all such ideas are useless unless they are put into action and out into the world.

3.3.4 Social Presencing Theatre

bergman and Montgomery state, “The way to participate in joyful transformation is through immersion in it, which is impossible if one is always standing back, evaluating, or attempting to control things” (2017, 65). On the second day, and in the second encounter of the project, we experimented with removing verbal exchanges and information, standing back from evaluation to immerse ourselves into the action of embodied non-verbal experience. In my preparative research, I discovered the social holistic technique of Social Presencing Theatre that I decided would be a fruitful experiential tool for what I was trying to achieve in this experiment.



figs. 49–50: SPT awareness exercise *20-Minute Dance* in which one listens to the body's signals if, or how, it wants to move.

I invited a Social Presencing Theatre (SPT) trainer, Manuela Bosch,¹²³ to guide us through a session of processes of co-learning response-ability, presence and interrelationality within the group. Bosch describes SPT as meditation in action that explores interconnectedness and relational and social possibilities. It was developed by choreographer, performer and educator Arawana Hayashi¹²⁴ and scholar Otto Scharmer as an art form and social method that synthesises embodied presence, dialogue, stillness and group intelligence.

SPT sharpens self-inquiry and can bring about and challenge systemic views of social change. As opposed to the traditional perception of theatre, it offers a personal 'stage' for simple body movements which seek to suspend constraining understandings, foster intuition, and elucidate aspects of present existence as well as hidden topics to generate transformation and coming potentials. The word "presencing" is an artistic coinage, as it combines and plays with the idea of "presence" and "sensing" (or "pre-sensing") of the body and everything that surrounds us (other people, space, energies, etc.). SPT is one methodology of the Presencing Institute,¹²⁵ which

¹²³ ——— Bosch designs, guides and supervises processes of change for and between people and their visions and works with various unconventional techniques that include body, consciousness and nature. See <http://manuelabosch.de>.

¹²⁴ ——— Arawana's work is deeply rooted in collaborative improvisation and based on a background in social justice, the arts and in the Buddhist Shambhala meditation that rests upon the principle that every human being has a fundamental nature of basic goodness. For further information, see <https://arawanahayashi.com> or <https://www.presencing.org/aboutus/spt>.

¹²⁵ ——— "The Presencing Institute was founded in 2006 by MIT Sloan School of Management Senior Lecturer Otto Scharmer and colleagues in order to create an action research platform at the intersection of science, consciousness, and profound social and organizational change" (The Presencing Institute, 2019).



figs. 51–53: SPT group exercise *The Village*.

explains, “When mind and body are synchronized, awareness is naturally present [...], we move from feeling our individual body to experiencing ourselves as part of a social body. Awareness in the social field gives birth to creativity and respectful interest.”¹²⁶

Through a meditation in movement within the group and in space, we practised and learned what influence the experience of closeness/distance, leading/following, movement/stillness, in-/exclusion and the dynamics of interruption, control or manipulation have on us as individuals and within a collective body. By surrendering to a moment-by-moment space of not knowing—or what we might refer to as the notion of uncertainty and vulnerability that was discussed on the first day—and by deep connecting and sensing, we intuitively co-created the next movements within the group.

Through stillness and listening carefully to our senses, through feeling the body and by removing verbal language, SPT evoked an unspoken and intangible space of in-betweenness. How we related and communicated allowed movements and spatial relationships to happen naturally within the collective body. We were invited to a (co-and re-) learning experience by relying on our eyes, ears and senses to feel into the situation with our unbiased and full attention.

Synchronizing the body with the mind aids in accessing our inherent holistic intelligence, or what Rolnik might call the “knowing body,” the use of our unconscious embodied knowledge. In SPT, it leads the body naturally to what wants to happen rather than thinking about what should happen. Hence, the exercises brought together the knowing-body with group

¹²⁶ ——— The Presencing Institute, 2019. See, in the Appendix, the official instructions by the Presencing Institute for the exercise called “Village” that we practised.

intelligence and our creative expression. Through sensing, movement, observation and gestures, SPT offered a holistic method to stimulate what Rolnik calls an “active micropolitics” and the potential to resolve restrictive patterns and communicate more directly. It shaped constructive, creative and non-hierarchical collective processes for empathic encounters.

SPT was a process of co-learning and co-creating awareness and spatial relationships in which we intensely exercised response-ability, on the individual level of responding to the impulses of sensing our own, and in relation to the others’ body in the social field. By focusing on our moment-by-moment presence, we co-created spatial and social structures (at times even, figuratively speaking, bodily social sculptures) that emerged from a place of letting go, not-knowing and uncertainty. It proved to be a worthy tool for engaging in flexibility, reacting spontaneously and following our holistic intelligence in the temporary social body. It invited us to be more open in our togetherness during the exercises and thus embodied similar questions of the previous day of how to empower curiosity, collective thriving and the Spinozan concept of joyfulness, the amplified capacity to be affected and affect.



fig. 53

3.3.5 Biodanza

The second holistic social method we experienced during our second encounter—training our listening and articulating bodies to overcome reactionary an-aesthesia—was Biodanza, the “dance of life” (*bios* (Greek: life) and *danza* (Spanish: dance)). As an integrative and holistic dancing process and system, it works as a practice for poetic humwan encounters and non-verbal communication. It was developed by Chilean psychologist, anthropologist and artist Rolando Toro in the 1970s and is based on bodily homeostasis (the relative equilibrium between interdependent elements), or what he called the “biocentric principle” that insinuates life affirmation through the expression of its innate evolutionary powers. Biodanza has ontological quality and is described as an “integration process [that] is carried out through the stimulation of primordial functions connected to life that allows every single person to be integrated with himself, with species and universe” (International Biocentric Foundation, 2008).

Toro called the process of Biodanza a “re-cultivation,” the transformation of hostile into positive inner cultural values and perceiving one’s own natural rhythm to feel (rather than think) being alive. Biodanza is described as “a human integration system of organic renewal, of affective re-education, and of re-learning of the life original functions. Its application consists in leading *vivencias* through music, singing, movements and group encounter situations” (Ibid.).

A session, a *vivencia* (Spanish: experiencing) positively influences our mind, consciousness, intuition and organic neuro-vegetative and affective functions and deeply connects us to fellow practitioners; with practice, it can have a similar effect in everyday life. While we learnt in Chapter 2.2.3 about Rolnik’s approach to the “colonial capitalistic unconscious”—subjectivating the politics of desire and of thought that dominate our subjectivity—Rolando Toro suggest the concept of a “vital unconscious” that appears as the antidote and to activate (what bergman and Montgomery call) our “thriving resistance in toxic times.” Toro’s rationale refers to the cellular psychism, and he elaborates the following:

There is a form of psychism concerning organs, tissues and cells that follows a global sense of self-conservation. The vital unconscious creates phenomenon of cells solidarity, creation of tissues, immunity and in all successfully manifestation of the living system. The care act will be conceived as a movement to recover this vital syntony with the universe (Ibid.).

What Toro describes on the cellular physiological level not only appears as a metaphor but also works on the social level for the aims of this research experiment. I invited artist and Biodanza trainer Susu Grunen-



figs. 54–55: Biodanza session: literally creating sensual connectivity between two dancing partners while staying connected by touching fingers.

berg to guide us through such a session of vital syntony, solidarity and deep connection with the self and others through guided playful exercises in dance that built trust and deep connecting.¹²⁷

One exercise, for example, was choosing a dancing partner, having two fingers touching and staying connected while dancing, or another one was looking into each other's eyes over the length of a music track. A profoundly genuine presence and awareness of the other occurred, which was quite intense and even challenging to hold that space of deep connection for that long. An intense experience of "aesthesia" ("with sensation," to play with the word in the title) and of "truly seeing" the Other in her or his difference and foreignness. Words cannot express this entirely experiential practice, but there were moments of sincere respect and profound connection between us. Rolando Toro described these phenomena as the core to being an open system:

It implicates forms of connectedness with the external world that are characterized by tolerance and respect to diversity; including humanity as such, without discrimination of race, sex, age, state of health, cultural background or economic wealth.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ ——— In her work, Grunenberg creates moments of encounter and communicative experiences that are based on movement, dance and dialogue through the system of Biodanza. See <http://www.biodanzaberlin.com>.

¹²⁸ ——— (Toro, 2007, 40, translation by the author).

In balance of activity and repose, the exercises momentarily created strong moments of self-empowerment and self-transformation; they fostered a remarkable vitality, fire and passion, as well as a fertile ground for trust, the courage to express oneself, creativity and affectivity, to truly encounter and recognise the other.



figs. 56–57: Biodanza vivencia.



fig. 57

Grunenberg describes the Biodanza process this way:

Encounter[s] arise, connection to ourselves and encounter with other people. [...] Because we are part of a living organism that can only grow in relation to each other, we let the poetry of the human encounters become part of the moment.¹²⁹

It was very striking to see that—despite the short time frame of only two days—a temporary transformation in the protagonists and as a group had happened. Some of them who had been cautiously reserved initially really opened up and passionately expressed themselves through the dance exercises; one could feel that over the course of the two days, we had successfully created an embodied co-learning space of trust and caring and allowing for self-expression as a solid base to openly and deeply encounter, to be affected and respond to each other.

3.3.6 Outcome

The proposition that I made after the previous research experiment—to develop a more encouraging format to stimulate more agency and debate for the protagonists—turned out to be quite satisfying in this last iteration. It felt that my initial endeavours and experiments in trying to find inspiring and alternative curatorial formats for holistic making of social empathy was the most successful of the three case study experiments that I undertook.

Through the setting of the discursive participatory dinner structure on the first day, I had the protagonists not only absorb the concepts that bergman and Montgomery shared, but actively engage with the concepts collectively by co-developing and co-creating a meal, an atmosphere and the setting with the improvised architectures in which the discussions took place. Most importantly, the curated format did encourage and activate the protagonists' agency to self-responsibly set their own conditions and agreements within a group and as a micro-community. The curatorial format in this last practical iteration of this research managed to create caring and nurturing conditions of encounter (spatially, structurally) and ontologically through different holistic and somatic ways of communicating with each other, cognitively and discursively and beyond verbal exchange, through what I called the “awareness warm-up” and the social practices for encounter (SPT and Biodanza).

It was absolutely stunning and very rewarding to see how well appreciated the experiential embodiment of the theoretical ideas of the first day

¹²⁹ ——— See Grunenberg's abstract in the Appendix.

turned out on the second day. In particular, for the closing Biodanza session, an almost famished atmosphere of anticipation could be sensed: the protagonists arrived way before it started, and without even having been asked, they had already started to repeat some of the “awareness warm-up” exercises of the first day. They were already in movement throughout the room before the Biodanza session had even started. When the first musical tunes, the dancing and singing along with the chorus line took place, the room was filled with an explosive outburst of energy, joy and exuberance, as if, finally, all the previously offered concepts and awareness exercises could, and in fact were, put into an ultimate joyful, connective, empathic feeling and experiential togetherness. This was confirmed through various conversations and by the few interview feedbacks that I received that all state that the second day (and in particular Biodanza) brought the already existing layers of joyfulness that had been established through the verbal and more subtle non-verbal interconnecting exercises to the foreground. Protagonist Ida C. Mårdhed, an audio-visual artist, for example, answers the question about whether she experienced joyfulness throughout the two days:

Yes, definitely; during the first day/evening it was more of a “low key” kind of safe-and-friendly-environment kind of joyfulness, the second day was a full-blown presence-and-letting-go kind of joyfulness with laughter and physical joy as well as social.¹³⁰

Overall, this research experiment was the most successful to me with regard to what it aimed to achieve: to overcome formats of representational curation and to—by means of experientially and holistically activate the ideas at stake rather than displaying them—create the conditions for social empathy to unfold. In this experiment, the wording leaned on the particular focus of activating “articulating bodies” to create conscientization and a critical awareness of one’s existence and to overcome reactionary an-aesthesia. The emphasis on both days to let the body articulate itself was successfully and activated in a multi-layered way.

As in the previous two case studies, I also wanted to give voice to the protagonists through a video interview after the experiment, and to learn from their feedback about their experience and if, in their eyes, the aims of the project appeared successful (see Appendix).¹³¹ The protagonists

130 ——— See her written interview feedback in the Appendix.

131 ——— Unfortunately, despite the good amount of participation on both days, this time only three of the protagonists agreed to be video interviewed. I also received one written feedback; please see the Appendix. The interview questions were the following:

stated in their feedback that they could sense a different configuration in their body throughout the experiment and that an active vitality was experienced that with practice might have the potential to turn into resilience. Some could still feel it the day after, but all of them questioned for how long this sensation might last; all protagonists concluded that it would need practice and consistency to keep this awareness and sense of togetherness alive. The question about whether they felt more connected to the others showed that moments of deep challenge and of boundaries were experienced, moments overcoming personal resistances to open up, anxieties and uncertainty relative to staying open and curious. They also state, though, that eventually this boundary was overcome and that thereafter a sense of togetherness and inter-connectedness and feeling part of the social body was felt (that for some was even an unknown sensation).

The course of this specific practice-based investigation in particular has made me understand and experience (more than in all my previous years of practice) that the curatorial making for social empathy does not only apply to creating such conditions for the protagonists that attend the experiment, but very much also applies to the co-working conditions and social relations with my co-practitioners that I invite along to help me activate my concepts at stake. In fact, it is noteworthy to mention that the whole affirmative process of transformation towards the micropolitical and holistic making of social empathy (as the objective within my post-representational curation) notably also occurred within the collective working process of the development and preparations with the fellow practi-

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- 1) Did you experience joyfulness during the two days?
 - 2) Do you feel more aware and in tune with your body?
 - 3) Do you feel that your senses have become more activated through the two days?
 - 4) Do you feel more connected with others through these two days?
 - 5) Do feel that your empathic ability for the Other has been heightened?
 - 6) Do you feel more vital and resilient?

I realize that my skill to develop interview questions that inspire the interviewee not to answer with a mere yes/no but to talk about their experience needs improvement. Again, some of the questions as I formulated them did not work very well. Moreover, throughout the three case study experiments, the question about whether the ability to be empathic had been heightened through the course of the experiment has appeared to be a difficult one, as most protagonists perceive themselves already as quite empathic. This leads me to assume that the methodology to reach out for potential protagonists through social networks within the cultural field already attracts and naturally pre-selects protagonists with similar interests and concerns, which does not diminish the agency of such projects, as the protagonists still live through the experience. However, it would indeed be interesting to do such experiments with protagonists from outside the creative field.

tioners that I had invited. It turned into an incredible collaboration, in particular with Katrine Meisfjord, whose working method is very open and collaborative and with whom I meticulously developed and discussed the course of action and the specific elements for the discursive participatory dinner over the course of the preparatory months. We thoroughly debated the concepts that I envisioned to be activated and how to best engage and actuate them; we discussed formats, styles, food ingredients and time processes that would help the format to best evolve. It was rewarding to see that I had created a curatorial working environment in which agency, difference and empathy had become the ground for collaboration, co-learning, response-ability and collective thriving.

Also, the preparatory conversations with carla bergman and Nick Montgomery were based on notable caring mutual aid, respect and support for each other. For example (and in agreement with Katrine Meisfjord), I included them in the conceptual discussions for the dinner format and invited them to develop the questions to be discussed in the groups. It was amazing to see such openness and cross-pollinating amongst us and our committed mutual aid to bring this experiment to its state of joyfulness and thriving. Yet, most amazing to me was the care, respect and social empathy that happened between us, an affectivity in which we fully respected and appreciated the other's difference. Having participated fully in my own four-year experiment and gone through all the transformative processes myself, I can confirm that, with practice and consistency, the concepts and holistic methods that have been experimented with in this research can indeed have a transformative affect and effect to create the conditions for a holistic making of social empathy within the curatorial field—and beyond.

Going back once again to Michael Hardt's approach to the Spinozan thought of affect that "can be either active (that is, caused internally) or passive (caused externally)," he explains:

The great advantage of the active over the passive affection is that it is no longer dependent on the vagaries of external forces. Since the body causes itself to be affected, chance is removed and it is able to control the duration and repetition of encounters. The issue, then, is not only understanding and expanding your power to be affected but also augmenting proportion of that power that is filled with active rather than passive affections (Hardt, 2015, 22).

All three practical research experiments sought to transform passive affects into active affects, an-aesthesia into aesthesia, reactive micropolitics into active micropolitics, dis-connectivity into interconnectedness, social apathy into social empathy, holistically and embracing the body as

the relational constituent that, through affective encounters and new relations, composes us as a new body.

Deleuze argues that, “We can only know [...] ourselves and we can only know external bodies by the affections that the external bodies produce on our own” (Deleuze, 1978). Through the holistic methodologies applied in this practice-based research, we strived to strengthen our awareness and observation of the self, one’s bodily capacities to listen carefully in order not to leave affective encounters to chance (or to the manipulation of dominant structures), but to be in tune and expand our consciousness about the capacity of one’s body that is composed of relations and by its capability and power to be affected.

3.3.7 Appendix Chapter 3.3

1) Course of Action

for “Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No. 2”

elaborated together with artist Katrine Meisjord:

A rough spatial structure/framework will be built by us beforehand.

Place banners with questions on joyfulness, response-ability, co/re-learning.

Set up table, food ingredients, building materials, etc.

Hours of the event 17.30-21.00

17.30	BERIT FISCHER
10 minutes:	Short conceptual intro and of the contributors.
17.40	
20 minutes:	Awareness warm-up (e.g., intro of participants by sound, collective breathing exercise for the individual self and the interconnectedness to the others. Invitation to place their bodies comfortably within the space and to become the collective body and to dissolve a conventional sitting arrangement)
18.00	CARLA BERGMAN, NICK MONTGOMERY
	on Joyful Militancy
45 minutes:	carla and Nick’s theoretical input (with emphasis on conceptions of joyfulness, response-ability, co/re-learning, Empire)
18.45h	10-minute toilet break

18.55 – 21.00

KATRINE MEISFJORD

Food for thought, Room for Conversation No. 2

Katrine gives short intro to project what is going to happen.

She invites to divide the group into two groups (even in numbers) and to tune into their sensing, to use openness, feelings, emotions, intuition, vulnerability, play, curiosity and uncertainty when they build, cook and share in conversations in the next process, so that the whole concept of joy and creativity seeps through everything we do in the experiment. We don't only talk about it, we practise it.

Berit, carla and Nick will join the groups.

19.00

40 minutes

Building and cooking to getting to know each other better, to cooperate, to use our knowledge and senses, and let the theoretical input sink.

1st group:

Creating dishes from the offered ingredients, assistant to be the main responsible in the food group. There will be no recipes—participants use what they already know to mix ingredients and make dishes.

2nd group:

One configuring spatial structures/improvised architectures that house/host the dinner conversations; according to the 4 key conceptions that will be debated (joyfulness, response-ability, co/re-learning, Empire – terms announced on banners/posters) Already at this point the builders will choose which theme they want to work with, and spread accordingly to build spatial structures.

19.40 – 20.25

5 minutes:

People get food on their plates, and four groups will form one for each architectural/conceptual configuration (Katrine to give instructions how to mingle so that there are new encounters possible and still allows one to choose the subject one is drawn to and group sizes are equal). The builders stay put in their already chosen group.

(At this point, carla, Nick, Katrine and Berit will not join the groups in order to enhance group dynamics, to develop their own shared understanding of the concept and agency. We will prepare the remaining food in the meantime that will be brought back into the round circle feedback session later).

40 minutes: Eating, agreeing on who will be the “care-taker” in the respective configuration, who overlooks the time frames and who after the exercise will narrate back to the big collective body.

For the “care-taker” to collect the individual thoughts of the configuration and prepare the summary of it to narrate back to the larger collective body in first person plural: “we”.

Each individual in that configuration will give her perspective on the respective subject (3 minutes each person). Empathise, active listening, curiosity, intimacy, uncertainty:

First round of questions:

Each person gives a three-minute response to the respective question of the discussed terms.

Second round of questions:

What of the other’s perspectives that were told resonated the most (this will echo the overlap and consonance of the individual perspectives and experiences).

20.25 – 20.35 Break to go to toilet.

Meanwhile, carla, Nick, Berit and Katrine bring rest of food and drinks into the circle that we arrange (we want to sit in a circle, facing each other).

20.40 The “care-takers” narrate the summary of their groups back to the larger collective body in first person plural: “we” (which new perspectives emerged from what we shared with each other).

This represents a picture of what emerged from the joint effort of sharing perspectives with exactly these people at this time.

Feedback of the care-takers (3–5 minute each).

- 20.55 carla and Nick to engage with and formulate new questions on which the discursive dinner will end.
Berit: Thank you and mentioning of the next day.

Total 3 hours 30 minutes

2) carla bergman and Nick Montgomery's Abstract for their Talk:

This talk will draw on our work in *Joyful Militancy*, where we focus on the importance and power that lies in cultivating relationships based in trust and strong bonds. We centre Baruch Spinoza's concepts of joy and sadness, which aren't individual emotions, but collective capacities. Joy means an increase in a body's capacity to affect and be affected. It means becoming capable of feeling or doing something new. We think this increase in capacity is at the core of meaningful social and political change today: we are interested in what makes it possible to immediately transform social relations in an embodied and collective way. This might feel scary, painful, and exhilarating, but it will always be more than just the emotions one feels about it: joy is the growth of shared power to do, feel, and think more.

We also focus on some of the barriers to collective joy. What Spinoza calls sadness is the reduction of our capacity to act, and we suggest that the dominant order works to keep us stuck in sadness. Empire is the name we use for this tangled web of forces that keep us caught in patterns of abuse, anxiety, depression, paranoia and isolation. These forces detach us from our own powers of creation and affection.

This perspective suggests that the primary battleground is not an ideological one about what we believe and what is the correct way forward. Instead, it is more immediate and relational: it consists of co-learning how to combat Empire while nurturing relationships that expand our capacities to feel, act, and do more in the here and now. Much of the book emerged and morphed out of many conversations, so it covers a lot of ground, and the conversations continue in communities and collectives. We don't have answers about how to do this, and we even think that giving people concrete answers, or a how-to list is part of the problem. With that in mind, what we have to offer are some concepts and questions that might help us explore these ideas collectively during the discursive dinner.

3) Written practice instructions for mindfulness-awareness meditation of the Social Presencing Exercise “The Village,” created by Arawana Hayashi:

PRESENCING INSTITUTE TOOLKIT

Social Presencing Theater

VILLAGE



OVERVIEW

In the shift from “Ego to Eco”, there is a development of awareness that attends to the wellbeing of all beings in a system.

When mind and body are synchronized, awareness is naturally present. In the Village, we move from feeling our individual body to experiencing ourselves as part of a social body. Awareness in the social field gives birth to creativity and respectful interest.

The Village exercise arose from the question: before changing a larger system, how might we bring out the best in a group of people? While participating in the village itself, how and where is attention and action required to enable the potential of the group to emerge?

PURPOSE

The invitation is to redirect our attention from ourselves and what we think, to engaging all of our sense perceptions in the process of extending our attention out to others. By extending our sensing ‘antennae’ into the space we can learn and practice to make choices in an uncontrived and natural way.

When we notice our relationships with others and with the whole group we can engage in the process of group co-creation. The Village is an opportunity to attend to the underlying principles of curiosity, respectfulness, and caring that can bring about the creation of a sane social system. By removing verbal language and goals, we notice how much can be communicated by embodiment and the spatial relationships that we choose. We can make “true moves”.

PRINCIPLES

- Non-verbal communication happens in every situation.
- Investigate communication in groups by exploring topics such as spatial distance, leading, initiating, following, supporting, enhancing, magnetizing, including, excluding, interrupting, controlling, manipulating, etc
- Notice how and where to pay attention to care for the whole
- Develop and engage in moment-by-moment sensing and emergent co-creating

USES & OUTCOMES

- Learn flexibility in leading, initiating, following, supporting, and joining
- Gain understanding about inclusion and exclusion
- Learn and experience adapting to change.
- Balance “inner-self” experience with “outer-group” engagement
- Build capacity to work with whatever comes without being thrown off balance.
- Expand the ability and responsibility to suspend downloading (VoJ, VoC, VoF)
- Engage in curious, respectful play

AN EXAMPLE

Everyday application: Notice how frequently we are part of a social body – in our homes, at work, shopping, attending meetings, etc. Notice where we are sitting or standing in relationship to the others. Notice how our presence affects others and how others affect us. Notice not only how we are, but also where we are in the space. Balance being grounded with openness.



4) Susu Grunenberg's Abstract for her Biodanza Vivencia:

BIODANZA dance of life process

Dance as an organic movement arising from the innermost centre of the human being, is a powerful source of renewal. Dance is movement of life, is biological rhythm, the rhythm of the heart, of the breath, of individual expression, of bodily homeostasis. Dance provides us with the opportunity to be in the here and now and to expand our physical, emotional and spiritual awareness. The joy of life, our ability to feel pleasure and express all kind of emotions make our dance vibrate and make us more aware how deep we are connected to life.

This Biodanza workshop will expand and open the participants space of experience. In the flow of the very own organic movement, we will dance to specifically selected music. We will find new forms of being in the world, connected with life itself. In play, in joy, gestures of connection. Encounter[s] arise, connection to ourselves and encounter with other people. Following the pulse of the group and in its protected field we dance the guided session. In doing so, we will strike a delicate balance between activation and harmonization, generating a trajectory of experience which creates the basis for neurovegetative and affective regulation. Expressive dance and creative dance will expand the spectrum of our liveliness, dissolves our patterns and strengthen our physical presence. They will be followed by eutony exercises as well as exercises focusing on flow and our breath to support harmonization and slowing down. This creates a space of liberty, peace and trust. Seeing ourselves mirrored in the other enables our own unfoldment and helps us to know ourselves. Because we are part of a living organism that can only grow in relation to each other we let the poetry of the human encounters become part of the moment.

Biodanza was developed by the psychologist and artist Rolando Toro in the 1970s. It is a holistic system for strengthening and integrating vital, affective, creative and potentials.

(Experience in dance is not needed.)

5) Written Interview Feedback by Protagonist Ida C. Mårdhed:

1) Did you experience joyfulness during the two days?

Yes, definitely; during the first day/evening, it was more of a "low key" kind of safe-and-friendly environment kind of joyfulness; the second day was a full-blown presence-and-letting-go kind of joyfulness with laughter and physical joy as well as social.

2) Do you feel more aware and in tune with your body, what it is communicating to you?

Yes, at that moment and immediately afterwards. Maybe some of that feeling is left, but I think it needs to be somewhat re-occurring to stay in the body.

3) Do you feel that your senses have become more activated through the two days?

Yes. Though, same as above.

4) Do you feel more connected with others through these two days?

Yes. Feel like I might have gotten over a sort of social threshold which I feel I've had since I moved to Bergen six months ago... Before Bergen, I was in one of these "collective, joyfully militant" situations/collaborations, and I've grieved and wondered a lot how and why I left that. So, this WS gave me some sort of "guards down" that I think I might have needed...

5) Do feel that your empathic ability for the Other has been heightened?

With the risk of sounding like a self-righteous asshole, but my empathic ability is and was already very high... though it is as written above: I think I've had a guard up due to loss of my situation and collaborations home in Sweden, and I think the WS might have helped me be more open to new people than I have been these last six-eight months...

6) Do you feel more vital and resilient?

Hard to tell. Maybe. At least more in tune with what the body wants and need—and I believe that can lead to more vitality and resilience.

7) What resonated the most with you that might stay with you a bit longer?

The remembrance/reminder of how it feels to be present and in the moment in both body and mind (the physical moments and movements both on your own and together with one/more).

P.S. I wish the discussion with/about joyful militancy would come back after day two and/or be longer and more deep-going. Loving the subject – and relate to it a lot!

3.4 Coda: Curatorial Practicalities

The spatial and durational curatorial set-ups varied in each practice project of the research and brought different challenges with them. In the *Vibratile Body*, the general spatial framework was the communal living situation, sharing a remote, private Italian villa as an intimate space of encounter and for the duration of one whole week, which allowed for a good amount of deepening and unfolding the ideas and practices at stake. Curatorially, the use of the villa was assigned into various areas, of privacy for the protagonists, a shared communal space in which we collectively also set up our shared meals, and an indoor space to activate some of the holistic practices for the days it was too hot outside (this space was the most difficult in terms of size and trying to create a contemplative atmosphere within the room's furnishings). The private garden was chosen to serve our daily early morning yoga practice and for sonic meditations and personal leisure time.

In the subsequent two research projects, the spaces were carefully curated towards creating a calm, neutral environment and private space that allowed the ideas to be affectively activated. In the second project, it was a small gallery space with shopwindows, which we altered with frosted foil for privacy, and in the last project the setting was a black University auditorium without any windows; here, a careful curation of the lights was particularly needed. Curatorial attention also needed to be given to very practical elements like cleanliness of the floor, providing and positioning mats, carpets and the like for a comfortable non-hierarchical exchange, offering comfortable body positions (lying, sitting) and allowing for the best communication with one another. Furthermore, curatorial attention was given to atmospheric lighting and the positioning of further props, like in particular in *The Articulating Body* project: the table for the preparation of the food, lounge chairs, but also the positioning of the banners that depicted the key concepts that were discussed and activated; some non-human beings, some plants enriched the space with a more organic touch. The physical spaces in all three experiments needed to be carefully prepared and curated so that they would foster a sense of privacy, intimacy and a feeling of safety to share and allow affectivity and potential transformative awareness to happen—an atmosphere that would also encourage expressing oneself and to see (perceive) and be seen by the fellow protagonists.

The dramaturgy of all three research practice experiments was curated so that the semiotic cognitive elements (readings and discussions) were sensibly and timely sequenced between the experiential holistic practices, so that they either would sensitise and prepare the knowing body for the theoretical and cognitive input, or respectively, mobilise this theoretical philosophical input through the experience of the aesthetic holistic practice applied (e.g., the element of joyfulness in *The Articulating Body* that was literally mobilised through Biodanza). Except for the second research module (in which the transition between the cognitive and holistic elements turned out to temporarily disrupt the organic flow of the project), the dramaturgical flow and intertwining between the cognitive and holistically activating practices worked rather successfully. In the *Vibratile Body*, the curated transitions between the diverse practices were quite unperturbed, as the duration of a whole week was very suitable for the sequenced programme and allowed for reflective transitions in between. The two-day durations of the subsequent two projects offered just enough time to unfold the respective core concepts and their activations to create the desired temporary affective effect.

Furthermore, in all three experiments, the sequencing of the exercises was carefully curated to slowly build up over time in the intensity of engaging with the fellow protagonists, first making it possible to create individual self-awareness and immersion in the situation, then getting to know the other protagonists better and making it possible to open up and trust each other more. This of course was ideal in the communal living situation and having had a whole week duration for the experience to unfold in space and time. The intensity towards heightening the awareness and experience of interrelatedness and being part of a collective body increased not only within each project, but also throughout the overall development of all three research experiments.¹³²

Moreover, there was a curatorial choice made to combine collective, collaborative and commissioned practices within the research experiments. This choice was made depending on which practice could best activate and add to the respective theoretical emphasis and sensual experience of the experiment. In the second and third research experiments, some holistic practices were specifically activated by commissioned specialised practitioners (for the tea ceremony, Deep Listening, Biodanza and Social Pre-

132 ——— Of course, any participant-engaging project that has a longer duration has the effect of creating a sense of a community, but the curated conditions, concepts and the holistic activation in this research did specifically focus and appear to have a deeper affective transformative effect on the community, which was affirmed by the protagonists' feedback and resulted in continued exchange with the curator after the project had ended.

sencing Theatre), but mostly all other holistic practices were activated by the curator herself (bringing to mind the reflection on the role of the curator, see Chapter 2.2.), either by enacting given instructions (e.g., Body Locomotion or Oliveros' sonic meditations) or by practising as close as possible to their respective traditions (e.g., yoga and meditations). The re-enactment of Lygia Clark's Multi-Sensorial Experiments did not offer a set of instructions and was solely based on carefully researched descriptions of some of her former students. The sensorial experiments were brought to life as close as possible to these descriptions, but they obviously relied on the curator's subjective interpretation. Apart from that, very few of the applied practices were altered or modified. If they were altered (e.g., the merging of the first-person plural perspective into feedback sessions that were inspired by artist Cassie Thornton), they added to and emphasised a temporary, collectively experienced notion of "we" during the exercise. As mentioned, the curatorial effort in all three practice experiments aimed at creating a subtle increase from the individual towards an affective collective experience. But equally, the protagonists' engagement in collaborative efforts was curatorially increased in the overall structure of the research experiments (e.g., the trust-building Body Locomotion exercise in *Affective Listening*, or the discursive participatory dinner structure in *The Articulating Body*).

Equally, the fusion, assemblage, hybridisation and remixing of different traditions and lineages of the applied holistic practices (ranging from the ancient Eastern philosophical practices of yoga and meditation, to the more contemporary experimental sonic meditations of American experimental composer Oliveros, to radical pedagogies and social practices of 1960s from South America) did not cause any friction between the different approaches. Rather, the carefully selected and curated bricolage of practices and theoretical approaches complemented the exercises and added to and enriched the experience. Through their individual specificity, they enhanced the experience of the making of an affective critical consciousness, social empathy and being part of a collective social body.

Reminding us of Rolnik's cultural theory and anthropophagic logic elaborated in the second research experiment, the hybrid approach of this research and curatorial practice "anthropophagically" incorporates the most seemingly fruitful transdisciplinary ideas and practices for emphasising interconnectedness and interrelationality, moving the curatorial towards an experiential activation, incorporation and embodiment of ideas. The curatorial choice to borrow, sample, fuse and remix the different holistic practices and theoretical concerns from different cultural backgrounds and traditions not only temporarily echoed the complexity of a globally intertwined and culturally amalgamated world, but it also allowed for the making of a new composition and an idiosyncratic approach to

post-representational curation. A curation with the specificity of creating spaces and conditions for experiencing affective inter-connectivity and a holistic and micropolitical making of social empathy.

While acknowledging my privileged viewpoint as a white, middle-class, educated, European cis-woman, I turn to foundational non-gendered feminist pedagogies, epistemologies and practices that strive to connect theory to lived experience. Approaches that question heteronormative ways of knowing that are based on disembodied objectivity and that are anchored predominantly in a Cartesian, rationalist, metrics-driven objectivity and neutrality. I am grateful to intellectual thinkers whose teachings recognise the urgency for multiple ways of knowing and being. They provide vital inspiration in the pursuit of a post-representational practice and experiential knowledge production that questions dominant representations and that challenges capitalist logics, heteronormativity, racism, populism and colonialism.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

In this practice-based research, I have experimented with and radically extended curator and theoretician Nora Sternfeld's rationale of post-representational curation in an original direction away from traditional expectations of the curatorial functions and domain. This activated a curation that emphasises the processual and that replaces the approach of displaying "objects" or "objective values" with a focus on the notion of the discursive encounter, and what Sternfeld refers to as the "contact zone" and a space for "asymmetric relations." Whereas her approach is situated mostly within the educational field and institutional structures, the approach of this research has extended her rationale and focus on educational contexts by focusing on the deepening of the relational, and by incorporating alternative and holistic ways of knowledge production that moves informational knowledge towards a relational learning and that embrace the "knowing body" (Suely Rolnik), and a somatic and embodied approach of experience and theory. This research has investigated how to activate theory in an experiential way that holistically and unmediatedly sensitises us, instead of breaking up reality into mediated detached pieces for consumption.

Taking inspiration from Sternfeld and Rolnik, together with the nexus of thinkers and educators adumbrated below, this practice created research experiments that tested my original proposition that curating intersubjective encounters of a particular theoretical and practical nature could affect self-empowering affective transformations of subjectivity and interconnectedness to the Other, with potential micropolitical impacts as a result, such as what-thinking with Franco Berardi (2014)—I dub "neuro-emancipation" and a decolonisation of the body and mind. I have come to call this original curatorial practice "affective transformative curation," which I define as a kind of "intra-curation" (again, a neologism of my devising, more on this below). By putting the post-representational emphasis onto *aisthethai* ("perceive"), the experiential processes of conscientization (creating critical consciousness) on a micropolitical level con(-)figured momentary social fields of affective and empathic encounters of differences and added a new perspective to the curatorial field.

Through the practical research framework of the *Radical Empathy Lab (REL)*, a curation that creates the conditions for a holistic relational—versus an informational—learning was explored. A curation that embraced recovering and re-learning subaltern knowledges, practices and forms of relating. The research took guidance from radical pedagogies, practices and thinking of Latin America's 1960s and 1970s through rethinking Brazilian Paulo Freire's idea of creating critical consciousness (conscientization), through activating our sensing abilities by the means of re-enactment of Brazilian artist Lygia Clark's Multi-Sensorial Experiments, through Brazilian psychiatrist, psychoanalyst and author Roberto Freire's logic and exercises of

“soma” and Chilean psychologist, anthropologist and artist Rolando Toro’s re-cultivation of inner values through his social holistic system of Bio-danza.

Contemporary Brazilian curator and theorist Suely Rolnik’s reasoning on the knowing and vibratile body, her reflections (along with those of Marxist theorist and activist Franco “Bifo” Berardi) on cognitive capitalist subjugation and subjectification and her understanding of active micropolitics (as a form of resistance against the complex tangled webs of forces of dominant structures) have strongly shaped the trajectory of this research. Through contemplating aspects of present-day affect theory and putting them into action in practical experiential experiments,¹³³ this research not only theoretically reflected on, but actively implemented, a post-representational curatorial practice that conveyed the possibility of relational experiences by means of conditions that I curated for them.

Furthermore, the *Radical Empathy Lab* incorporated social practices of mindfulness and awareness such as Deep Listening, Social Presencing Theatre and Eastern philosophical practices of yoga and meditation. *REL* continuously kept reciprocally intertwining and cross-fertilizing theory with practice, the individual with the collective, towards an understanding, experiencing and building of a collective body that—in reference to Baruch Spinoza’s rationale—might be called “the relational body.” Through the experiential, *REL* led us to the non-representational and to an empathic interrelating temporary social body that allowed for affective translation (Pedwell) and existing in difference with (each) Other. Feedback interviews with the protagonists validate that through curating conditions for enriching intersubjective encounters towards a joyful, collectively thriving and conscientization for being part of an interrelated body—one that is capable of being affected and to affect (bergman and Montgomery)—we experienced temporary self-empowering affective transformations of subjectivity.

Moreover, through the curation, coalitions of the various holistic practices and exercises, along with the reciprocal activation of the theoretical guidance of this research, the curatorial practical research modules “in-habited” —rather than “ex-hibited” or “re-presented”—the ideas at stake, an important distinction and further decisive component of my innovative practice and original contribution to the field. Through these holistic methodologies, the research experiments offered a temporary new imaginary and experience, a processual production of a becoming subjectivity that aspires the

133 ——— This occurred through exercises of Deep Listening, contemporary radical pedagogies and forms of convivial and relational formats such as communal living, the discursive tea ceremony and a protagonist-activating discursive dinner.

undoing of a captured subject towards an emergent figuring power—one that is not directed by normative codes or e.g., by neoliberal and capitalist subjectification.

Even though this research has practically and theoretically experimented with moving the notion of the curatorial from its history of an object- and visual-centred ontology, from the dichotomy of the visual and the non-visual, towards an “affective transformative curation” and a more holistic thinking about representation as an activation or the “in-habiting” of ideas rather than re-presenting them, the holistic methodologies applied were nonetheless captured and limited by forms of representation, that of verbal, language-based instructions. Sociologist, cultural theorist and political activist Stuart Hall points out in his elaborations on visual representation that *re*-presentation implies that something is presented which is already there, that it *re*-presents a meaning that is already there and that, thus, that which is represented stands in for something and produces meaning. Hall refers to it as a potential distorted gap of meaning between the “true event” and how that is presented (Hall, 1997). Even if the practical methodologies in this research were instructed and activated by means of language-based representation, it is this potential “distorting gap of meaning” in re-presentation that the practice experiments of this research strove to short-circuit, towards the “non-re-presented,” towards creating a holistic and intimate experience of the “true event,” the unmediated experience itself. A gap of non- or post-representation that can pause from the creation of meaning, that can pause and take a breath from representation and that makes it possible to be in the present moment and to experience the self and the delicate interdependencies around it. It is an approach similar to the processes of meditation in which one aspires and practices to create the moment of a gap in which the flow of thoughts are circumvented or stopped, making it possible to create an awareness of and being in presence. Similarly, the curated affective and potentially transformative experiments sought to create a gap, a momentary state of not-creating-meaning, an awareness and a state of being in presence: a being in the body, the collective body, undoing one’s own representation and allowing a sphere for one’s own unmediated “true event” and for curiosity and connectivity to primary sources, the pre-symbolic and the elusive unnameable that escapes language and representation.

The practice modules actuated the protagonists as temporary “intersubjective agents,” as I called them, and dissolved the conventional positioning of an on-looking and passively consuming audience.¹³⁴ The research

134 ——— In thinking about representation, there remains a fundamental and general question: how to include other voices and concepts (and the participants themselves) in curatorial and artistic practice without colonising or instrumentalising them? It ought to be a central ques-

worked towards curating different ecologies for the emergence of new subjectivities and agency. Without the differing voices and the commitment, contribution and feedback of the various different protagonists from diverse cultural and age backgrounds, the research experiments would not have been possible nor would have made any sense.¹³⁵ Fusing aesthetics

tion in critical creative practices, and there is no easy answer to it. Trying to respond to these problems has been a relevant aspect of my experiments, in that I strove to dissolve the notion of the audience as situated outside my practice, towards an active protagonist who engages together with me (as an initiator and likewise protagonist) in the experiences. Over the course of the four years, my research and experiments developed progressively towards creating and improving the conditions for giving the protagonists a greater voice to speak and express themselves. The most successful experiment in that respect was *The Articulating Body* project.

135 ————— Having worked through these different chapters, I would have liked to reflect this more creatively within the writing, e.g., integrated more of the protagonists' voices within it. More space to communicate the ambiance, the sensualities of the places and the people involved in the projects, as well as personal affective accounts, would have supported the reading of this work and creating an affective ethnography of my practice. Unfortunately, it was not possible and exceeded my capacity, leaving the writing on this occasion as a bare reflection rather than a creative tool within the limits of language-based representation and as a limited articulation of the sensual experience in the actual affective laboratories. Partially, this was owed to the very practical and technical challenges of this research that operated within the limiting parameters (resources, timeframes, wordcounts) to thoroughly engage and prepare for more elaborate forms of documentation and recording of the individual affective experiences of all protagonists and that could exceed the conducted feedback video interviews. In general, the aspect of recording and articulating ephemeral, processual and solely experience-based events holds a complex array of dilemmas and challenges, which in the scope of this research unfortunately can only be briefly touched upon. One dilemma of any form of documentation and recording is that it is always a subjective choice and linked to the problematics of power structures in the production of knowledge and history—bringing to mind Foucault (1972)—and the question of who is speaking and from which position. In today's era of digital technology and social media-based communication, a more democratic choice in the attempt of recording the event could have been made, for example, by including the protagonists in the development and actual design of the sharing of the gained experiential affective knowledge; this could have been done, for instance, through a blog or dialogical web presence for each project. But having specifically decided to remain in the analogue realm of the first-hand, face-to-face experiential and affective encounter, it did not seem suitable, particularly in light of the short durations of the second and third research experiments. As indicated previously, it could have been beneficial to

include more transcribed protagonists' voices in the written thesis, but which again would have exceeded the given parameter of the mandatory word limitation.

Clearly, there is a whole discourse to be acknowledged around this issue, and particularly the discourse by performance and theatre scholars around the questions of sharing non-representational events is rather inspiring. Although referring to performance (which implies an on-viewing audience, which this research seeks to disestablish), one of the fundamental critical and historic standpoints in this conversation is that of feminist scholar Peggy Phelan (1993): "Performance's life is only in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance." (Sant, 2017, 4).

Writer of live art and digital performance Toni Sant gives voice in his book, *Documenting Performance The Context and Process of Digital Curation and Archiving* (2017), to diverse writers and offers a good overview of the subject. For instance, scholars and researchers Bucknall and Sedgman point out that "live performance has become especially vulnerable to what we term 'experiential fossilization': a process of petrification led by makers that seeks to asset authorial control over this essential liveliness" (2017, 116), i.e., that the live moment is extinguished at the moment of its making and that it fossilises in the moment it ends. They refer to authors in the respective field of research: for instance, performance and theatre scholar and writer Patrice Pavis warns that the act of converting phenomenological reactions into words results in "fixing" the memory of that experience forever. Theatre producer and writer Eugenio Barba argues that once the memory of an experience is translated into sentences that last, it risks becoming congealed into pages that cannot be permeated. But more interesting for this context, the authors equally mention that the actual affective experience does continue to evolve within the protagonists after the event. It is to be stressed that the protagonists themselves carry their own individual memories and make up their own mind, which might (or might not) continue to evolve long after the experiment. Within the parameters of this research, and in thinking about micropolitics and the potential of art (or an aesthetic affective experience) as an incubator or as a capacity for social change, the production of such affective experiences and the potential activation of the protagonists' own agency has been privileged over its reception. Theatre and performance scholar Matthew Reason, for example, offers the approach of "post-performance contemplation" as an experience in its own right to counter the reduction of complex phenomenological reactions down to "simplified markers of experience" and to oppose the "need to extract and externalise this knowledge, particularly in the form of documentations that can endure." (2006, 3) Further alternative examples by interaction designers Laia Turmo Vidal and Elena Márquez Segura offer the aspect of mediating technology for designing the documentation of elusive and ephemeral event experiences, e.g., via representational design tools, props and even enactments of bodily

with holistic transdisciplinary, non-representational and solely first-hand experiential approaches allowed for stimulating a momentary alternative imaginary, a hybrid and polymorphic making of the curatorial: a hybridization of practices and the becoming of another theory that embraces the significance of senses in the making of a holistic and micropolitical ontology and epistemology in curatorial practice. Bringing the body/soma and the curatorial together, this practice expands not only Sternfeld's cognitive idea of the "contact zone," but it also turns the sensed embodied experience into the "artwork."

experiences to create intermediated knowledge to help better access, understand and articulate the key aspects of the experience. They elaborate a whole array of examples: annotated portfolios, workbooks, photo essays, comic formats, diagrammatic and schematic representations, archives of artefacts and contextual elements, as well as intangible artefacts like 3D drawings and presentations, interaction or video analysis of spatial arrangements, participants positions and gestures, Response Cards (sheets of paper with different questions that the participants fill up after each workshop) or Experienced Body Sheets (allowing the participants to capture subjective bodily sensations by drawing on a body silhouette on paper, mapping sensations and feelings to the associated body part).

But indeed, while documenting an ephemeral event is something other than its lived experience, it certainly is of value and at times a necessity; it can also be a professional discipline on its own right. The present-moment experience of viewing documentation material does itself become a present-moment experience in itself, turning the indexical into an aesthetic experience. Hence, methodologies of documentation and sharing of ephemeral experience-based events ideally ought to be—and increasingly are in particular by performance scholars—explored and considered and put into practice carefully where possible. The emphasis in this research has been on the making of the actual affective relational experiences with the focus on the immediacy of them. Being conscious about the dilemma of not being able to comprehensively share such experiences, a decision was made to keep a bare minimum of recording of the events for archival and documentation purposes, avoiding the attempt to communicate the experience as close as possible to the real-life experience. A document or recording of an event simply cannot transport the aesthetic, lived experience and can merely re-present it. As with any documentation, it is subjective and open to (re-)interpretation and is inextricably linked to questions of representation. Since this whole research strives to challenge the idea of re-presentation—and that particular moment in re-presentation in which new meaning happens, as Stuart Hall talks about—, an emphasis on documentary representation for the purpose of sharing the experience was not a priority.

Through my own active contribution as a curator and practitioner of holistic experiences, I offer yet another original contribution to the field by rethinking the role of the curator. As an approach to post-representational curation, I have not only challenged the tri-partition of the audience, artist and curator, but I have sought to question the paradigm in which the curator (if not an artist-curator) ought to operate. In conclusion, questions still arise if there ought to be a distinction between the role of the curator and that of an artist in a post-representational approach to curation such as in this research. Can the curator become a protagonist herself in her project, or remain a sole conceiver and producer of representation of the curatorial concept? Through my own active participation as a practitioner in my curated projects, I strove towards a holistic paradigm shift in curatorial practice, in which the curatorial mind does not become detached from its body, the physicality and materiality of the event. Through hybridizing the conventionally set roles of artist/curator, I furthermore broke with representation within my own curatorial function. Moreover, as the curator, I not only acted as an agent and became an active protagonist within the curated experiences, but I became equally affected and transformed by them.¹³⁶ In my theoretical reflections and practical experimentations with the holistic and micropolitical making of social empathy and the production of an interconnected and social body, the question arose of what is that curatorial “me” that was a co-inhabitant in these experiments?

Affected by my own practice, my curatorial role seems to have arrived at a different identity in which the distinction between the curator and the artist becomes blurred. It appears to me that in today’s hybrid times, a binary distinction between such two “roles” might—in particular in the context of critical shared practices—have become unnecessary and redundant.¹³⁷ In this research and through my own contribution and participation, the categorical distinction between curator/artist was trespassed, disrupted

136 ——— For example, I have come to emphasise care and empathy even more in collaborations with partners and with project protagonists than I did before this research.

De facto, I was the only protagonist who had the chance to experience the sustainable effects of and throughout all three research experiments. In fact, it would have been ideal to have worked with the same protagonists over the whole duration of the research, to see if more affective and more sustainable changes would have been experienced. This, unfortunately, was practically and logistically not possible within the scope of this research but could be envisioned for a longer-term project with sustainable partners in the future.

137 ——— Curator and writer Dieter Roelstraete, for example, proposes fully dissolving categories such as artist and curator in favour of “the art worker” (Stürzl, 2013).

and arrived at a different identity—a “third,” an intersection, a middle field emerged, a role and a practice that nurtures sensing, “emotioning” and what I called “affective listening.” A practice that—in anthropocentric, violent times of technocratic, neoliberal, exploitative capitalism and power politics—embraces the resurgence of the encounter, care and healing in the curatorial realm.

I have proposed the notion of curation as poiesis in this research. Curation as a making and a scope for action that intends to reconcile and interconnect thought with the body, and the individual with its social collective body, as an attempt for “sym-poiesis” (Haraway), highlighting the relationality and interconnectedness of a making or a “worlding with.” Moreover, the holistic approach raises possibilities of questions about how to engage with the political, how we are as affective bodies, as alliances, as community. How might this practice operate to open up another understanding of what a political and social change might look like? A practice towards a new dynamic of agency and a social change that endeavours inclusiveness, awareness of the interrelational, the delicate interdependencies and an empathic being together in difference. A curatorial holism that seeks to bring aesthetics (Greek: *aesthēsis*: with sensation), knowledge and the political together. Holism thought as the accentuation of the interrelational and inter-connectedness of systems as wholes in general instead of divided component parts (see Chapter 1.1.3).

Lacking an existing term for such a practice of post-representational curation, I have come to contemplate it as “affective transformative curation.” Such a curation creates the conditions for conscientization and encounter, to be affected and to affect, one that embraces fluidity and change in existent static forms of representation and transforms them into a state of active micropolitical empathic interconnectedness with the world around us. Being reminiscent of Karen Barad’s idea of “flat ontologies”—i.e., the flat hierarchy, the same ontological and independent status between what is considered “real” and that which is considered “representation,” and by accepting the responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities that come with it (see Chapter 2.1.5)—I have arrived at terming this form of curation also as “intra-curation.” It resonates with the term’s etymological Latin roots of *curare*, of care-taking, curing, and—in the analogy to Barad’s position—with its responsibility and accountability for the becoming, creation and consequences of new sets of relations of “intra-acting” within and as part of the world. Today’s uneasy socio-political atmospheres and capitalist driven existence call for new and resurging modes of response-ability that turn empathy, as affective translation, care and nurturing, into forms of micropolitical agency within the creative field and beyond.

I have come to understand the idea of “post-representational” curation as a critical probing, a counteracting curation of “presence-ing” and “pre-sensing” that invites us to reflect upon the unseen, the subaltern, the experiential, and that frees the curatorial from the visual, the represented and the displayed as its sole reference.

Having worked through and experimented with Freire’s, Rolnik’s and Bifo’s thinking (and the nexus of thinkers and educators that inspired this “re-research”), and with the feedback interviews of the protagonists of the *Radical Empathy Lab*, I am indeed hopeful and believe that, with practice and devotion, the re-activation of our psycho-cognitive apparatus—i.e., critical awareness and being more in tune with listening and trusting our sensing, vibratile body—can lead to what (thinking with Franco “Bifo” Berardi) I have called “neuro-emancipation,” a decolonisation of the body and mind. These ambitious claims were tested through curated temporary alliances of holistic practices that reciprocally intertwined with theory and, through practices of affecting and transforming (instead of describing and depicting), moved towards the making of new imaginaries and new ways of thinking and of knowing.

Through this affirmative and hopeful research, I argue that the embodied activation of the critical consciousness and the conquering of intimacy of the one’s own awareness do not only produce new singularities and differentiation and changes in the self, but they offer the authority and autonomy of one’s own sensory experience—a sensory resistance against oppressive codes that we have taken on as the norm, with the potential to transmit to the collective consciousness, to the interconnectedness and recalibration of the self in flux and in conversation with the world around us.

Joyfulness—as a passion and ability of being able to affect and be affected—might nurture the deeper ecology of empathy, care and recognition, of being perceived and heard. It brings to mind the necessity of appearing before each other (Butler). Through conscientization, affective listening, response-ability and co/re-learning, we extend ourselves from (self-) representation and towards an empathic relationality with the Other in which difference is embraced and celebrated.

This curatorial examination offered a variety of affirmative affective ontological processes that strove towards a holistic decolonisation of the self, towards rebuilding and sustaining inter-relationality and connectivity as possible alternative epistemological vehicles in curation, and as a substitute for product-oriented representation. It worked towards the becoming of epistemological and ontological adventures that transmit tacit affective somatic knowledge through empathic interrelational encounters that allow for being different with each other: a post-representational curatorial practice that activated a micropolitical and holistic making of social empathy.

This exploration has opened horizons on the thinking and holistic making of micropolitical empathy within the curatorial. The emphasis lay on the social and relational facets of humankind. In thinking further through these trajectories, and in times of ecocide and species extinction, it will be intriguing to rethink the notion of social empathy, in that it moves beyond the dualism of culture and nature and away from universalist approaches centred around “anthropos.” It will be important instead to shift towards a cosmological, pluriversal perspective, one that redefines subjectivity, the Other, our human intelligence and our relationship to the world we live in, towards what feminist scholar Rosi Braidotti calls “post-anthropocentrism” (Braidotti, 2018).

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2 – carla bergman and Nick Montgomery's abstract for their talk. Copyright permission granted.

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4 – Susu Grunenberg's abstract for her Biodanza Vivencia. Copyright permission granted.

5 – Written interview feedback by protagonist Ida C. Mårdhed. Copyright permission granted.

This practice-based research contributes a new perspective to the field of contemporary post-representational curation with the specific angle of examining how the curatorial can activate spaces and conditions for a micropolitical and holistic making of social empathy. The research reconsiders and experiments with what an “ex-hibition” can be, how else ideas can be “ex-hibited” or rather “in-habited” and made to be experienced beyond curatorial forms of display, representation and beyond the mere consumption of the visual. It explores how the curatorial can achieve a more self-determined aesthetic and discursive form of practice, that actively engages and dissolves the on-looking audiences; a practice that instead strives to nurture agency and partaking protagonists. The explorations extend Nora Sternfeld’s notions of the “contact zone” and “asymmetric relations”. It takes guidance in Paulo Freire’s learning approach of “critical consciousness”, and Suely Rolnik’s “micropolitics” and “knowing body” as approaches for the decolonisation and de-subjectivation of the (social) body and its relationality to what is considered as Other, towards a delinking from hegemonic and capitalistic appropriations in the process of subjectivation. Through the practical research of the *Radical Empathy Lab (REL)*, a curation that creates the conditions for holistic and relational–versus informational–learning is explored. *REL*’s approach emphasises the sensual and experiential in creating conscientization, to sharpen our senses for an “active micropolitics” towards exploring new forms of being together that momentarily allow one to reflect, to re-feel and undo a reactionary an-aesthesia. The examination concludes with the coinage of new terminology such as “intra-curation” and “affective transformative curation” for considering this specific curatorial approach.

Berit Fischer (PhD) is a transdisciplinary cultural practitioner. She is a curator, scholar, artist, writer, and an editor with focus on experiential and socio-ecological knowledge formation, critical spatial and transformative emancipatory practices, that are often inspired by feminist- and radical pedagogies. 2016 she founded the *Radical Empathy Lab*, an ongoing nomadic socio-ecological and research laboratory for experiential knowledge formation. She is the founder and curator of the *(Re-)Gaining Ecological Futures* festival at the *Floating University*, Berlin.

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