UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

FACULTY OF ARTS AND HUMANITIES

WINCHESTER SCHOOL OF ART

How Can the Curatorial Create Spaces and Conditions for Activating a Micropolitical and Holistic Making of Social Empathy; an Approach on Post-Representational Curation

by

Berit Fischer

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2019
How Can the Curatorial Create Spaces and Conditions for Activating a Micropolitical and Holistic Making of Social Empathy; an Approach on Post-Representational Curation

By Berit Fischer

This practice-based PhD 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 consumption of – in particular – the visual. This thesis challenges the tri-partition of the audience, artist, curator; rethinking and questioning 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 audiences; a practice that instead strives to nurture agency and partaking protagonists.

This research activated a curation which emphasises the processual and that replaces the approach of what curator and theoretician Nora Sternfeld would call displaying ‘objects’ or ‘objective values’ with a focus on the notion of the discursive encounter. It extends what Sternfeld refers to as the ‘contact zone’ and a space for ‘asymmetric relations’ by focusing on the micropolitical and the deepening of the relational by incorporating alternative and holistic ways of knowledge production, embracing what Brazilian curator and theorist Suely Rolnik calls the ‘knowing body’. Micropolitical is 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. The concept of decolonisation is approached here phenomenologically, to delink from hegemonic and capitalistic appropriations in the process of subjectivation. The research takes guidance in, and exists as an extended interpretation 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, moving towards new levels of critical awareness. 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. REL’s approach emphasises the sensual and experiential for creating conscientization, to sharpen our senses for an ‘active micropolitics’ (Rolnik), towards exploring new forms of being together that momentarily allow one to reflect, to re-feel and undo a reactionary an-aesthesia (Greek: an-aesthēsis: without sensation). REL encompasses recovering and re-learning subaltern knowledges, practices and forms of relating, mindfulness and awareness. It keeps reciprocally intertwining and cross-fertilizing theory with practice, the individual with the collective. REL investigates the relation between micro and macro dimensions of agency, as practices of self-empowerment that decolonise and de-subjectivate the (social) body and its relationality to the other, towards building a collective, temporary ‘relational body’ (Spinoza), allowing for social empathy and existing in difference with (each/)Other; a social empathy that scholar Carolyn Pedwell would call ‘affective translation’. The research concludes with the
coinage of a new terminology as “intra-curation” and “affective transformative curation” for considering this specific curatorial approach.
# Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 5

LIST OF FIGURES 7

LIST OF ACCOMPANYING MATERIALS 11

RESEARCH THESIS: DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP 13

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 17

1.1 Overview 17
  1.1.1 Hlysnan: The Notion and Politics of Listening 19
  1.1.2 Revolution With(out) Movement 21
  1.1.3 Research Question 22
  1.1.4 Radical Empathy Lab 23
  1.1.5 Practice-Based Methodology 25

CHAPTER 2: CONTEXT AND THEORIES 29

2.2 Positioning of my Curatorial Practice 29
  2.2.1 The Question of Representation and ‘Ex-Hibere’ Versus ‘In-Hibere’ 32
  2.2.2 The Question of Audience and (Post?) Participation 36
  2.2.3 Curating – Curatorial – Agency 45
  2.2.4 Curator as Protagonist 49
  2.2.5 Possibilities of – and my Specific Approach on – Post-Representational Curation 54

2.3 Theoretical Vantage Points 57
  2.3.1 Conscientization and Thinking Through the Body 58
  2.3.2 Empathy as “Affective Translation” 65
  2.3.3 Micropolitics 69
  2.3.4 Thoughts on Affect 73

CHAPTER 3: RADICAL EMPATHY LAB 79

3.1 The Vibratile Body 79
  3.1.1 Yoga – Education Not Of, but Through the Body 87
  3.1.2 Multi-Sensorial Experiments 92
  3.1.3 Pauline Olivero’s Sonic Meditations 98
  3.1.4 Outcome 100
  3.1.5 Appendix Chapter 3.1 104

3.2 Affective Listening - A Two-Day Immersive Experience of Giving Time and Attention 107
  3.2.1 Affective Listening 108
  3.2.2 Deep Listening 109
  3.2.3 Discursive Teahouse 113
  3.2.4 Body Locomotion 117
  3.2.5 Outcome 122
  3.2.6 Appendix Chapter 3.2 125
Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to:

August Jordan Davis
Ryan Bishop
For their guidance and support.

Brandon LaBelle
For his generous support, encouragement and inspiring discussions throughout.

Andreas Bolz
My rock and bridge through troubled waters.

And to all the collaborators and protagonists of the research experiments without whom this doctoral research would not have been possible.

This doctoral research was generously funded through a scholarship by Winchester School of Art / University of Southampton.
List of Figures
In awareness that the images are merely reiterating re-presentations that this research strives to challenge, the images offered in this thesis are solely meant as annotations to make the written text more lively to read. Further elaborated in the conclusion.

**Figure A:** PhD Thinking Cloud. Photo: Berit Fischer

**Figure 1:** *The Vibratile Body* protagonists. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

**Figure 2:** Reading Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s *Cognititarian Subjectivation*, 2010. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

**Figure 3:** Reading Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s *Cognititarian Subjectivation*, 2010. Notes. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

**Figure 4:** Reading Suely Rolnik’s *The Body’s Contagious Memory Lygia Clark’s Return to the Museum*, 2007. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

**Figure 5:** Reading Suely Rolnik’s *Anthropophagic Subjectivity*, 1998. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

**Figure 6:** Reading Suely Rolnik’s *Anthropophagic Subjectivity*, 1998. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

**Figure 7:** Daily Ashtanga Yoga practice in Mysore bespoke teaching style. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

**Figure 8:** Re-enactment of Lygia Clark’s *Multi-sensorial Experiments*, 2016. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

**Figure 9:** Re-enactment of Lygia Clark’s *Multi-sensorial Experiments*, 2016. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

**Figure 10:** Re-enactment of Lygia Clark’s *Multi-sensorial Experiments*, 2016. Relational objects that activated the sense of smell. Photo: Berit Fischer

**Figure 11:** Re-enactment of Lygia Clark’s *Multi-sensorial Experiments*, 2016. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

**Figure 12:** Re-enactment of Lygia Clark’s *Multi-sensorial Experiments*, 2016. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

**Figure 13:** Automated verbalisation feedback of the multi-sensorial experiments. Photo: Berit Fischer

**Figure 14:** After a collective sonic meditation in the woods. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Maria Pecchioli
Figure 15: Collective Sonic Meditation on the last evening of *The Vibratile Body* with invited guests from Florence. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

Figure 16: Deep Listening. Focal hearing exercises. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 17: Enactment of Pauline Oliveros’ meditational exercise “Extreme Slow Walk”. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 18: A one-minute Deep Listening exercises invented by the protagonists. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 19: Set-up for the Discursive Teahouse at Errant Sound project space, 2017. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 20 and 21: Ying Le inviting us to sense tea leaves. Photos: Berit Fischer

Figure 22: Collective reading of Seigworth’s and Gregg’s *An Inventory of Shimmers*, 2010 during the discursive teahouse. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 23: Collective reading of Seigworth’s and Gregg’s *An Inventory of Shimmers*, 2010 during the discursive teahouse. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 24 and 25: Adapted version of “Body Locomotion” from the “Radical Education Workbook”, 2010. Photos: Berit Fischer

Figure 26: Suggested questions to stimulate feedback discussions after the Body Locomotion exercise. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 27: Discussion and feedback round of the Body Locomotion exercise. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 28: Protagonists’ notes for the feedback session of the Body Locomotion exercise. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 29: Protagonists’ notes for the feedback session of the Body Locomotion exercise. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 30: Guided Collective Earth Meditation. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 31: Setting up for *Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No.2*. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 32: In the process of setting up for *Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No.2*. From left to right: Nick Montgomery, Katrine Meisfjord, carla bergman, Berit Fischer. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 33: carla bergman & Nick Montgomery talk on *Joyful Militancy* within the set-up of *Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No.2*. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 34: Berit Fischer giving a conceptual introduction. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Brandon LaBelle
Figure 35: Berit Fischer leading an “awareness warm-up” session. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 36: Berit Fischer leading an “awareness warm-up” session. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 37: Half of the group of protagonists creates dishes from the offered ingredients. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 38: The other half of the group of protagonists build improvised architectures that refer to the four introduced concepts. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 39: Protagonists discuss the concept of “Empire” in its respective built improvised architecture. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 40: Building the improvised architecture for the concept of “co/re-learning”. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 41: Discussing the concept of “co/re-learning” over the created meal. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 42: Building the improvised architecture for the concept of “response-ability”. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 43: Discussing the concept of “response-ability”. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 44: Feedback notes of the group discussing the concept of “joyfulness”. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 45: Feedback notes of the group discussing the concept of “co/re-learning”. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 46: Feedback notes of the group discussing the concept of “co/re-learning”. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 47: Feedback notes of the group discussing the concept of “response-ability”. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 48: Feedback notes of the group discussing the concept of “Empire”. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 49: SPT awareness exercise 20-Minute Dance in which one listens to the body’s signals if, or how it wants to move. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Jane Sverdrupsen

Figure 50: SPT awareness exercise 20-Minute Dance in which one listens to the body’s signals if, or how it wants to move. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Jane Sverdrupsen

Figure 51: SPT group exercise The Village. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Jane Sverdrupsen
Figure 52: SPT group exercise *The Village*. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Jane Sverdrupsen

Figure 53: SPT group exercise *The Village*. Copyright permission granted. Photo: Jane Sverdrupsen

Figure 54: Biodanza session: literally creating sensual connectivity between two dancing partners while staying connected by touching fingers. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 55: Biodanza session: literally creating sensual connectivity between two dancing partners while staying connected by touching fingers. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 56: Biodanza vivencia. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 57: Biodanza vivencia. Photo: Berit Fischer
List of Accompanying Materials

Appendix chapter 3.1

1) Open call for *The Vibratile Body*

Appendix chapter 3.2

1) Written answers of the feedback interview by protagonist Bernd Eickhoff. Copyright permission granted.
2) Written answers of the feedback interview by protagonist Jee Young Sim. Copyright permission granted.

Appendix chapter 3.3

1) Course of action for “Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No. 2”. Copyright permission granted.
2) carla bergman’s and Nick Montgomery’s abstract for their talk. Copyright permission granted.
3) Written practice instructions for mindfulness-awareness meditation of the Social Presencing Exercise “The Village”. Created by Arawana Hayashi as part of the U.Lab online programme; see www.presencing.org. Copyright permission granted.
4) Susu Grunenberg’s abstract for her Biodanza Vivencia. Copyright permission granted.
5) Written Interview Feedback by protagonist Ida C. Mårdhed. Copyright permission granted.
Research Thesis: Declaration of Authorship

I, Berit Fischer

declare that this thesis, entitled *How Can the Curatorial Create Spaces and Conditions for Activating a Micropolitical and Holistic Making of Social Empathy; an Approach on Post-Representational Curation*

and the work presented in the thesis are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
7. None of this work has been published before submission

Signed: .................................................................

Date: ............................................................................
How Can the Curatorial Create Spaces and Conditions for Activating a Micropolitical and Holistic Making of Social Empathy; an Approach on Post-Representational Curation

by

Berit Fischer

Figure A: PhD Thinking Cloud. Photo: Berit Fischer
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 primarily has been four things. The first being 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 how to engage 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 in particular the visual, yet 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 coined by immaterial labour, hyper abstraction, neoliberal, cognitive and semio-capitalism marked by profitability, measurability, authoritarian and utilitarian forces in which the individual is trained to believe that obstacles ought to be resolved as the individual 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 monologous self-presentation 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 Facebook, Instagram etc.) has not only turned inter-human
relations into traded and marketed products, it similarly has opened up complex challenges for the wellbeing of human kind and for our social co-existence (that at its core nature is utterly dependent on live social interconnection).¹

In times like these it becomes essential to rethink cultural production and, like in this doctoral research, the 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 1.2.² In Sternfeld’s thinking in post-representational curation the exhibition is 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 the recent years (like for example the projects Hlysnan: The Notion and Politics of Listening and Revolution Without Movement, see next sections of this chapter), and for thinking about the curatorial practice that I am developing through this practice-based PhD. However, my specific approach to the idea of post-representational curation does radically extend Sternfeld’s concept. Whereas her approach is situated mostly within the educational field and institutional structures, the approach of this doctoral research has extended her rationale and thinking about educational contexts. My research focuses on the deepening of a relational knowledge production that, by incorporating alternative and holistic methodologies, moves away from informational towards a relational learning; a learning that embraces the “knowing body” (Suely Rolnik), and a

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 the virtual communication and social media that can even become life support and tool for survival or resistance. New information technologies equally can have the immense power to overcome the pre-digital ideological world. Artist, cultural scientist, and curator Olu Oguibe’s reminds us that the “geophysical delineations of First and Third Worlds […] cuts 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, p. xv).

² Nora Sternfeld is documenta professor at the Kunsthochschule Kassel and previously for Curating and Mediating Art, Aalto University Helsinki. She is co-director of ecm–masterprogramme for exhibition theory and practice, University of Applied Arts Vienna; part of trafo.K, office for education and critical knowledge production based in Vienna.
somatic and embodied approach of experience and theory. (Elaborated in greater depth in the following chapters and the conclusion).

This doctoral 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’s radical pedagogy during Brazil’s dictatorship as an educative tool to address and experience readings of the world, moving towards new levels of critical awareness.

Although the contemporaneity and urgencies for conscientization today are 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 urgency for the creation of 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, that 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 of the curatorial functions and 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, that 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, the representation and visual rendering of the acoustic space, but rather the acoustic medium 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 utilize 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 the aural perception, in order to achieve a heightened concentration on the targeted sense.

My interest in the notion (and politics) of listening has since been about social relations, about
interrelationality, the resonance and interconnectedness and relation 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, p. 21).

I have been interested in the reciprocal relation of the human being as a social body in
its 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, reasons:

> 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 about questions of resonance and interconnectedness, not from an aesthetic theoretical
point of view, but rather within the social body, and in the face-to face encounter between
humans. Scientifically it has been proven that the 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 how can the curatorial can create spaces and
conditions to 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, but also to
sense, create and engage in a critical awareness of this reciprocal interconnectedness to the
Other. And how can the curatorial create a space to activate our micro-political agency and
become vulnerable to being affected and to affect.

20
1.1.2 Revolution With(out) Movement

Resulting from such questions and this idea of listening\(^4\) explored in *Hlysnan: The Notion and Politics of Listening*, the body as a resonant, social and collective body, 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 the 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 interrelationality between micro and macro agency and on potential resistance against hegemonic and paternalistic structures (consensus, capitalist and industry driven markets and 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.\(^7\)

My perception of Yoga is not solely surrounding its ayurvedic healing qualities, but equally (and like many more practices of mindfulness) as a practice of self-empowerment (not to feed

---

\(^4\) As much as in 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 unarticulated and dispersed ways of resistance of ordinary people, who generate subtle spaces within the socio-political constraints in their everyday life to assert the rights they might be denied or neglected from 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 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 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.
into neoliberal capitalist demands of self-care for optimum functionality, but on the contrary, as self-empowerment to critically reflect and resist such demands). I am not interested in esoteric or solipsistic self-help approaches. In this context, I see it as an effective tool for creating an embodied critical consciousness (raising awareness for the self and its relationality to the Other) in the micropolitical, and in the relation 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, p. 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 that 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.

### 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, to 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 to 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 PhD 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 of my PhD finally matured to: *How Can the Curatorial Create Spaces and Conditions for Activating a Micropolitical and Holistic Making of Social Empathy; an Approach on Post-Representational Curation.* Here, holistic is understood not only as relating and actuating both body and mind, but as the accentuation of the inter-relational 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. (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 of the introduction.

For the practical part of my research and in order to give it a conceptual frame 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.\(^8\)

---

\(^8\) 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 of 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, p.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 2.2.1 on the question of "ex-hibere" versus "in-hibere"), for affective encounter, experimentation, examination, reflection
I understand it as an on-going research laboratory that moves through time and place as a question, a slogan, an interpolation; as situations, 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 on 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 concerning 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 experiential. The laboratory structure equally encompasses exercises of mindfulness, of radically creating self-awareness (radically, here also implied in its Latin etymological sense of: radix, the root; like beginning with the root of the self, but also associating going to the root of the cause) – by working on the level of the body and mind to activate a holistic approach on critical consciousness and for the interconnectedness to the Other (the notion of the Other is further elaborated in section 2.3.1). I am interested in embodied methodologies for creating critical awareness, dialogue, encounter and what I define as “affective listening” (further elaborated in the respective chapter 3.2).

REL investigates and hopes to unfold 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 on post-representation (further explained in chapter 2.2).

More specifically, fundamental to the Lab’s conceptual curatorial format is:

- the antiquation of on-looking audiences towards active protagonists,
- to foster the experience rather than the presentation of ideas,

and to open up alternative ways for experiential, relational and embodied thinking and knowledge production. Through ‘labouring’ through assembled transdisciplinary practices and epistemologies, it seeks to create situations for process and encouragement of new vitality, aesthesis and critical thought and is positioned far off the rationale of market driven interests.

There has been a long standing lineage of artistic research laboratories, which curator and writer Henk Slager for example 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 to 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, E., Gansterer, N., Greil, M., 2017) to name but a few. In further thinking on the notion of the laboratory, for instance Derek McCormack’s philosophical and historical account on the notion of “thinking- spaces” is instructive (see: McCormack, 2008).
• an embodied and somatic quality as a key component in the experiential approach of knowledge production, and
• deepening the relational and interconnectedness as one of the vital aspects to be explored and experienced.

The Laboratory has encompassed three experiential projects, *The Vibratile Body* (2016) and *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, p. 323)

Along these conceptual thoughts voiced by curator Maria Lind, the decision for a practice-based PhD research allows my explorations to be unleashed in practice via various experimental formats of the REL that remain in continuous dialogue and are cross-fertilizing 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, p. 197). Researchers Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge argue, in their reflections on creative practice-based PhDs, 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

---

9 See public announcements and further elaborations in the respective chapters 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 dedicated to their theoretical concepts and realisations.

10 (Ibid). In the viva of this practice based PhD, there will be no visual “enactment of thinking”, no visual display or representation of this ‘post-representational’ research, as the practical experiments are solely based on the processes, experiences and participation of the protagonists.
on the process and the experience during the practical projects of the PhD 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 thoughts 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, p. 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, “that it is part of the question’s method to resist closure and to uphold this ongoing process of producing new answers” (Krasny, 2015, p. 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 knowledges; 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 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.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, 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

---

¹¹ (Rogoff, 2013, p.45)

This highlights of course that even a practice-based format of a PhD 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 PhD all the same becomes complicit, reiterated and reproduced with what it tries to challenge.
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). This allows my research to embrace the complexities and fluidity, relationality and inter-connectedness, but also for in-between moments in which new imaginaries hopefully can unfold.
Chapter 2: Context and Theories

2.2 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. It elaborates the specific positioning of my work in “post-representational curation”, owing and extending the rationale and term defined by theoretician, curator and educator Nora Sternfeld. Key to her rationale on post-representational curation is the processual that replaces the focus on a display of “objects” or “objective values” with rather 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. Representation certainly has been challenged since the historic and avant-garde times of the 1960s (and not only in the arts). However, it could be argued that over the decades its

---

12 Of course it is to be acknowledged that the presence of somatic, relational, embodied, 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 mentioning 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).

But since this practice based doctoral 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.

13 Since 2018 Nora Sternfeld is the documenta professor at the Kunsthochschule Kassel, Germany. Before, she was a professor for Curating and Mediating Art, Aalto University Helsinki. She is the co-director of ecm-masterprogramme for exhibition theory and practice, University of Applied Arts Vienna; co-founder and part of trafó.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 lines between the artwork, exhibition and the audience, and when institutions were turned 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 a prevailing model of curatorial activity today.

Curator and writer Helena Reckitt reminds us, the post-1960s was also rise of independent curators and with it, the extension of the definition of the curator’s responsibility from conservation and scholarship towards affective
strategies have become institutionalised and canonised, making them no longer tenable today. The question then becomes what can come after representation in curatorial practice, after institutional critique and after neoliberal ‘instrumentalised’ participatory practice? Simply, the ‘exhibition’ 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 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). Agreeing with Smith that 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 is reflecting 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”. 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

labour that involves communication, liaison, and social networking. (Reckitt, 2016, p.8) It was a counter positioning to the conservatism and social conformity of the post-war era and questioning of social, political, economic, sexual and cultural hegemonic authorities. Equally it was a period of critical negotiation of the consumerist capitalist developed industrial world; contents that have become just as present and urgent in the 21st century again.


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 chapter Conscientization and Thinking Through the Body.
who are able to do and to change something”. 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” (Sternfeld and Ziaja, 2012). 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 doctoral research extends the aspect of ‘presenting art’ not only by enacting an idea, an imaginary and an aspect 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 process, for 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 the “asymmetric relations”.

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

My curatorial approach is further in accordance with Martinon’s emphasise of the curatorial as a way of organising thought in encounter with the other and/or with objects (while my specific interests lies in the curatorial as a potential space in which ‘empathic encounter’ between humans can unfold) and his approach of curatorial practice as the pursuit for “new ways of working, relating and knowing”.

While Martinon regards curatorial practice as a search for finding other ways of “instantiating the crises of our world”, and engaging with “our current woes” and contextualising it within the realities of current neoliberal capitalism, market driven spectacle and entertainment (Ibid, p. viii), art historian Terry Smith refers to neoliberal capitalism by arguing that the core of curatorial practice ought to lie 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 explorations 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 is 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 an 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 elaborates 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 doctoral research proposes to “de-inhibit the artwork” by creating micro-communal ephemeral situations for those who wish to become a protagonist; 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 the different creative formats for experiencing micropolitical social empathy, as one of such urgencies of contemporaneity that is aimed to be instantiate in the curatorial propositions of this doctoral research.17

2.2.1 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.”

17 There is a wider discourse on the notion of contemporaneity. For example the research project of the Aarhus University, Denmark called The Contemporary Condition: The Representation and Experience of Contemporaneity in and through Contemporary Arts Practice to investigate contemporaneity as a defining condition of our historical present, 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.
As the conventional understanding of artistic expression as being ‘visual’ still too often predominates the discourse, equally that the conception of the curator’s core function lies in the circulation of artwork and expanding its visibility. Both are recurring emphasises of Terry Smith in his book *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, but it is needless to mention that artistic and curatorial production have long extended this 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 telling, presentation, commentary, documentation and interpretation. The content for space as the medium can equally be beyond such forms of (re)presentation; it can be a (re-)enacted action, experience and the actual telling, 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 reread 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, p. 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 Latin ‘held out’, from 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 not, and/or if something is presented to them or if they are actively being involved in the exhibition beyond being a mere spectator and 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 Latin in- + habere, meaning ‘holding in, encompassing’, linguistically the term opens up a new and positive advance on 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 inhering in. Instead of the connotation of exteriority and display in ‘ex-hibiting’, the focus in this thinking can lie on the notion of manifestation and ‘ex-hibiting’ encompassing through inhering within ideas, questions, 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 of 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 “in-hibiting” in the context of the exhibition. She argues it not to be in opposition to the exhibition but rather as a condition or an “enabling element” in opening a relation “between heterogeneous forms of practice and theoretical thinking”; and she concludes further 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.”

I propose as well to consider ‘exhibition’ in relation to ‘exposition’. The term’s general linguistic everyday usage is applied more often in the context of trade fair type staging that demonstrate latest products, such that the term itself implies an even stronger aspect of exteriority, making or presenting in public. It’s 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 to that of public presentation with the purpose of communicating information to and even manipulating its public through display. Beck manages to differentiate 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, p. 32).

Different to Beck’s evaluation of display as the agent of activating form, I see the contemporaneity and the curatorial idea at stake as the agent to activate “form”, as well as the curator as protagonist (elaborated in section 2.2.4) 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

---

18 (Mende, 2013, p.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 in the extent of this research.
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” (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, p.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 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-Louise Déotte holds to the notion of an exhibition as a surface of (re)production (Martinon, 2013, p. 10), I understand the exhibitionary moment as the site of process and production itself that explores the possibilities of 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. Claire Bishop refers in this regard to political philosopher Jacque Rancière’s approach of “aesthesis”, understanding aesthetics as “an autonomous regime of experience that is not reducible to logic, reason or morality” (Bishop, 2012, p. 18) and as “a mode of sensible perception” (Ibid, p. 27). Relating aesthetics 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”. She argues further that art as a sphere is both at once, “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). Bishop elaborates this logic further by saying that, 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, p. 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 (like 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 an earmarked making, a scope for action that intendedly attempts to reconcile and interconnect thought with body, and the individual body with its social collective body. I imagine it further: it is as an attempt for “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 my PhD research, the approach of the Radical Empathy Lab (REL), activates this enquiry by creating forms of conscientizations 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 carriers of ideas, not a physical space but rather an “unfinishable space” (Harney and Desideri, 2013, p. 136) that is based on the sharing of social time versus the individual one-on-one experience with an object. The exhibition becomes a shared, interpersonal, inter-subjective experience, and the curatorial gets imagined as a collective action and experience.

### 2.2.2 The Question of Audience and (Post?) Participation

Pursuing the curatorial stance towards its ‘addressees’, ‘spectators’, ‘listeners’, ‘visitors’, ‘audience’ (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 then the concern for the Other and the audience comes into play (Martinon, 2013, p. 27). However, I disagree with Martinon. There have been many curated community engaging and

\(^{19}\)(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.
participatory projects that have contradicted this point. Furthermore, my own curatorial practice has developed towards reversing precisely this hierarchy of concerns. In the practical experiments of this doctoral research, it is in fact ‘the audience’ and ‘the Other’ that is not only of concern, but is the core of the projects, which would not even unfold without them. The artistic and curatorial group Raqs Media Collective 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, p. 103). Within the concerns of curatorial responsibilities lies the crucial question of “the agency of the visitor”, formulated by researcher and 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, p. 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 REL I comprehend and define my ‘audience’ not as spectators, participants, consumers nor “pro-sumers”. I see my ‘audience’ as active ‘protagonists’, as the main and leading

---

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 are 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 neighborhood as equal stakeholders and partners with artist and municipalities in the project. See: http://www.digitalartlab.org.il/skn/c6/e297/אודותנים/נתיבות_היטיא_לאגננות_ורבישת_תונמל_היטיא

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 aspect of philosophical speculation, research, and theory. As a collective of three artists (Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, 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/

23 (Blackman, 2016, p. 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.
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 into dialogue, corporeal experience and experiment.24 An active shifting of the audience away from its positioning as a consumer and spectator, whose perception is disembodied and “from the neck up” a “code-breaker deciphering what has been encoded”.25 Concurrent to this shift, is the activation of the ‘audience’. Thus, this doctoral research seeks to shift ‘the audience’ to not only towards becoming the player, participant, 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, observer, by-standing and the outside view is what today’s society is abundantly saturated with; for example, the spectatorship of ever so sensational news reports, the general media consumption and in particular the over-stimulus since 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 to alienate subjects from their own social and expressive efforts which even can lead to anxiety—a trademark of late capitalism as also the militant research collective Institute of Precarious Consciousness points out.26 It is active engagement, immersion, experience and taking position that often is lacking in today’s

24 I am not drawn to a distinct audience, but more interesting to me are the individuals themselves that partake and the diverse backgrounds, practices, and knowledges they bring and add to the collective experience. 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. In regard to the audience for example, a limit has been that my protagonists in these doctoral practice modules mostly have been cultural practitioners (owed to the pragmatics (finance, resources etc.) of the open calls that were placed within the field of cultural production). I see this as one of the limitations of my curatorial endeavours, although it does also reiterate the idea of art offering this space for experimentation and as laboratories for society. But obviously it implies a mayor danger of exclusion (even of elitism) and a failure to reach ‘the general public’. I hope for this specific practice of mine to develop in the future also towards collaborating with organisations that can access wider publics and reaching beyond the field of art.

25 (Blackman, 2016, p. 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.

26 Similar to my practical approach of my research, The Institute of Precarious Consciousness believe 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, p. 23). Their approach though lies in the specificity of precarity-oriented consciousness raising to overcome and see anxiety as symptomatic of wider social structure.
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, inhering 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 as a methodology that aims to organise and to add sense to a world in flux, which she calls “a sensible stage” (Crone, 2013, p. 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, p. 210). I argue that it is exactly this exhibitionary structure understood as “a stage” (which implies a set hierarchy 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 does reiterate identitarian ascriptions and “brings about even greater exclusion (of those outside the scope of the target group)” as Nora Sternfeld argues. By referring to Irit Rogoff she suggests to reconsider 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, pp. 5/6). Sternfeld, however, argues that participatory projects often are 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 fulfill the function to

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 that the audience can see through the wall and the actors act as if they cannot.
“close the gaps in the (educational) responsibilities that the institutions have failed to fulfill…” (Ibid, p. 2).

Similarly, writer Claire Bishop points out the governmental instrumentalisation of ‘participation’ in art 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, p. 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, p. 3). But my specific focus lies on the individual and the experiencing of the possibly emancipatory practice and the aspect of “taking and having a part” itself.

Instead of discussing the systemic structures, rules and conditions of participation and transformative institutional strategies, the focus of this doctoral research and proceedings lies 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. This of course also adds to the discussion of institutional critique, but extends beyond the relational within institution, the artworld and the predicted identitarian attributions of the object-, spectator-, artist- and curator-quadrangle that comes with it. This way it can become a methodology beyond institution that deepens relations to urgencies of contemporaneity in society at stake.

---

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.

29 Another angle of critique of systemic structure is e.g. that of curator and writer Helena Reckitt who emphasizes the precarity and dependency on funding structures as effects on audience driven curatorial practice. In the era of affective and immaterial labour of late neoliberal capitalism that demands to solve problems 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, p. 7) Namely, instead of complying with neoliberal capitalist demands, which means instrumentalising and feeding off on “affective resources” like personal relationships and an energies for a project to happen, for Reckitt the curatorial care should broach the structural issue of conditions of precarity under which cultural production occurs, act upon it, raising public awareness about it and thus resist and counter the neoliberal capitalist demands. She situates her demand on the backdrop of 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 the curatorial care to be re-conceptualized by prioritizing “the field’s overall sustenance over its most visible, prestigious or lucrative aspects” (Ibid, p. 26). Her call fully resonates with me, but implies a different research, that in its complexity could be a PhD research subject on its own. Hence it does exceed 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 in my practice, but which I regard rather as a side effect in it and which cannot be emphasized further in the scope of this research). My curatorial practice in this research rather lies on arts’
I am aware that my recent curatorial practice easily can fall not only into the pitfall of the critique of experience economy, but also regarding the logics of the market to gain value from immaterial labour, or reaffirmation of and feeding right into neoliberal capitalist requirements. The practice easily can be misunderstood and accused of such “individual problem solving” instead of critically reflecting 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 protagonists) with yogic techniques, listening practices and meditations or sensorial experiments in which the perceptions are heightened, for creating 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 systemic complexity) 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 aesthetic”. 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, p. 6).

Although parts of the experiences of the REL are in some stages more “interactive” (one-to-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 before, the curatorial practice in this doctoral research is not about visual aesthetic refusal, it rather wishes to re-emphasise aesthetics in the sense of ‘aesthesis’, a sensual experience (and with Bishop, connecting its notion back to politics – in Jacques Rancière’s understanding— “an autonomous regime of experience that is not reducible to logic, reason or morality” (Ibid, p.18)). It is in this sense that the practice aims to

relations with the contemporaneity of the outside of the artworld, the embodied experience of art's capacities of forms of potential resistance within the overall social arena.
create an aesthetic social experience.\textsuperscript{32} My curated experiences ‘as exhibitions’ (and not as the “paracuratorial” in Hoffmann’s sense\textsuperscript{33}) then turn the experience and its dialogue into dematerialized work and into a social process. It is a safeguarding of ‘sensing’ that fosters what semiotician and literary theorist Walter D. Mignolo calls “disobedient conservatism”.\textsuperscript{34} 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

\textsuperscript{32} Regarding “relational aesthetics” – a term coined by curator and theorist Nicholas Bourriaud in the 1990s in his book \textit{Relational Aesthetics}, (Bourriaud, 2002) – my practice relates in as much, 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. Moreover, in that the position of the artist, or as I would claim also the curator, shifts further towards the position of a facilitator or initiator, catalyst 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 in regards to relational aesthetics will come up further down this text.

\textsuperscript{33} Jens Hoffmann 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).

\textsuperscript{34} Walter D. Mignolo describes “disobedient conservatism” as: “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, p. 42).
angles social change36, reminding us of Roland Barthes' idea that “[w]hat matters are the ideas, experiences and possibilities that result from these interactions”.36

With an advance towards social change, Claire Bishop warns us about what Peter Dew calls the “ethical turn”; if a project gets judged and evaluated by the ethics of its interpersonal interaction, the striving towards consensual dialogue and by sensitivity to difference, it risks becoming a new kind of repressive form (Bishop, 2012, p. 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 is neither striving towards consensual dialogue, ethical reasoning nor resolving, rather it hopes to create post-identitarian, intersubjective relations and to allow for unfolding of controversy and debate within the micropolitical experience, within the self and within the

36 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 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. But art historian Grant Kester for instance gives an overview and traces community and socially engaged art back in art history to conceptual and feminist art of the 1960s and in critical theory. See for instance Kestn (2004) Conversation Pieces: Community and 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 to 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) proofs to be a source for further thinking on the question of collectivity, which also scholar Irit Rogoff draws upon in her investigation on 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 art work.

By referring to 1970s, sociologist Howard Becker, who put forward the concept of “art as collective action”, scholar and choreographer Sandra Chatterjee gives further overview on literature on the concept. See: Chatterjee (2015).

The term ‘community’ is not used throughout this research in the idea of community as in site-specific public art, nor in relation to an audience of visiting an exhibition (Rogoff), but rather in 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 offered; 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, B. (2005).

36 (Bishop, 2012, p. 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 precise measurement, but it can be said that probably 90% described what I had hoped for, 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 Marchat’s note on that earlier on). A brief moment of crisis did happen halfway in both experiments, by one protagonist, who (probably triggered by overstimulation and intensity of exercises) went into a short moment of disruption and resistance.
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”, to undo and move beyond subjugation and imposed homogenising norms and values.\(^{37}\) 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 rather it offers a space of potential collective transformation through exercises and experiments, in which categories of individual/social, conscious/unconscious, active and passive are tested and might temporarily even become 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 of the protagonists. It does not reject “the exhibition space” but rather aims to pertain 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, p. 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 cognitive capitalism. I aim for a “sensuous immediacy as a potential locus of disalienation” as Bishop refers to participatory practice (Ibid, p. 276). This “sensuous immediacy as a potential locus of disalienation” allows for 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.

\(^{37}\) In his writings of *Dissensus* (2010) Rancière elaborates 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.
The next section of the text looks at the difference between ‘curating’ and ‘the curatorial’ and curatorial agency and how it has been defined by various authorities in the field in order to attempt to re-frame and re-define these notions within this doctoral research.

2.2.3 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, p. 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).

I find it useful in rethinking curating today, to draw upon thinker and curator Sarat Maharaj. Maharaj is not only an authority in thinking on 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 art works 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 driven 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 advance and distinction between the two terms strongly underlines my conceptual approach and helps me to rethink ‘the curatorial’ as a potential to activate a speculative capturing force and experience, a new imaginary. It also helps in keeping an awareness about the activation and relation between theory and practice.

The curatorial I understand accordingly as the conceptual backbone including methodology, and theoretical, philosophical speculations, which are put into flesh or 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 wishes to extend how it traditionally is understood. She asks:

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* Magazin 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, approaches and her expanded understanding of curation that can extend the exhibition format,\(^\text{38}\) and my work certainly also is indebted to art’s “sensibility”; but 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

---

\(^{38}\) E.g. she states: “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, p. 262)
urgency or an aspect of contemporaneity, and questions of how individuals may relate to each other. Particularly in my recent PhD research projects, the starting point has been the idea and the theories which then have become activated and unfolded, with the focus on the processual and with 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 of the political dimension of the curatorial, that parallels with Chantal Mouffe’s propagation of ‘the political’ 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).

Jean-Paul Martinon equally differentiates between the practice of curating (as a constitutive activity of staging and setting up exhibitions and other modes of display) and the curatorial that 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 to understand the curatorial (and here I would equally add artistic and holistic practices) as agency, or that he compares to a “warrior of the imaginary”. The imaginary to him can “never be drawn with any certainty” 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, p. 29).

Along the lines of Martinon and Lind, I argue that, similarly to artistic practice the curatorial imaginary does carry potential for agency and change (even if on micropolitical level), as potentially transformative, as an incubator and ignition plug for creating critical consciousness, activating and inspiring new ways of positioning oneself and being implicated in the world and which extends the form of pure description. Through my practice-based
research I have sought to manifest these potentialities (see respective chapter 3 of 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, p. 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. I agree with her, that equally 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, p. 69).

Although Suzana Milevska’s practice is specifically situated within postcolonial discourse of visuality and cultural policies related to 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 towards the potential enhancement of society. Of course, critical questions like to what degree can the curatorial make social transformation, what are the limits to the curatorial and how might acts of curating shift specific conditions of agency remain.
2.2.4 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 practice myself. Resonating with feminist scholarship, revaluing caring activities, I extend the notion of the 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 ones, that I am trained in beyond my curatorial expertise (which is Yoga and meditation) as additional and reflective tools for a holistic making and care taking not only of the protagonists’ embodied experience, 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 that through collective bodily experiences talks about the social organisation of living together. Upon close research, I also re-enacted multisensorial experiences by Brazilian artist Lygia Clark from the 1960s and activated instructions of sonic meditations by experimental composer and Deep Listening founder Pauline Oliveros.

This method was e.g. part of “Soma”, an anarchist therapy and social laboratory created by Brazilian psychiatrist, psychoanalytic 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, I for example 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 body balance to the other protagonists, reflection and discussion, empathic listening within the group and reporting back to the other groups as a collective body. This was inspired by the “Radical education workbook” 2012, by the Radical Education Forum (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).

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 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 close to their description as possible. The sense of smell, touch were enhanced, entwined by awareness exercises of breathing and interconnectedness with the other protagonists.

Pauline Oliveros’ instructions for sonic meditations are easy accessible through her books. In The Vibratile Body project I enacted sonic meditations in particular from Oliveros’ book called Sonic Meditations, Smith Publications 1974.

My practice certainly is indebted to the line of thinking of the art of the 1960s and 70s (beyond the Brazilian context, occurring worldwide, like Fluxus, Conceptual art, 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 1996. He defines as follows:
I am mindful that such methods might be vulnerable to the critique of the curator as the creator, instrumentalising artists (or as in this case posthumous artists’ practices) as the medium and overshadowing the artist or their artworks. But 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 artist and independent curated projects, as equally my curatorial work is made through “dialogue and/or inquisition” and “subject as hypothesis, understanding (or not) through process.” But Ranchetti and Doubtfire summarise, that also the independent curator “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

“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, p. 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 e.g. conversations about the exhibition (Ibid, p. 15).

In my doctoral research practice, I aim to not only tighten the space of relations between the protagonists (nor a visitor and a relational aesthetic object to be perceived), but to create the 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 to oneself, the difference to relational aesthetic practice is that it does not imply the necessity of an aesthetic or relational object (like e.g. in Tiravanija’s cooking sessions, the aesthetic relational object consist of the soup). I am in accordance with Bourriaud’s definition of relational aesthetics as having the social exchanges and interactivity at the essence, but as he further states “within the aesthetic experience being offered”, I understand aesthetics in my practice not in its conventional connotation to the appreciation of beauty, but rather to its etymological connotation of aisthethai ‘perceive’, sensing (elaborated earlier on in this chapter), the experience itself.
their position as one of power, but it feels hyperbolic to generalize and compare curators with 

tyanny and as “supervisors of the workers” (the artists):

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 even could be cross-fertilising. In addition, aren’t both, artistic and curatorial 
practice 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 
Rooij’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 fulfill and elaborate Sternfeld’s notion of “post-representation”, 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 on 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”. I would argue that even a 

42 (Filipovic, 2013, p. 157)

This of course brings again 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, the innovations and challenges that came with 
them. For example, the paradigm shifting figure of Harald Szeemann on 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, p. 108). Terry 
Smith calls Szeman’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.

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 gained 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 
tyle 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 
eessment 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
conventional monographic classical exhibition of a single 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 in an interconnection and in dialogue not only with its producers (the curator in dialogue with the artist; or if posthumous the curator’s reflections and conceptual curatorial approach on the artwork to be exhibited) but also with its publics and the moment when the artwork and exhibition is perceived and experienced. As Marcel Duchamp states in ‘Le processus creative’, 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 relation 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 emphasizes 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.43 She points out the importance of the question of what becomes ‘available’ for both conscious and non-conscious reflection and experience in exhibitions, foregrounds the importance of developing new concepts for exploring these relations (Blackman, 2016, p. 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, p. 43). Transposing issues from other practices (like yogic techniques, meditation, Deep Listening, multisensorial 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, p. 36).

---

43 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 lead 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, p. 32).
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 lies 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, p. 100). They distinguish and elaborate between artistic and curatorial practice, deliberately so in a binary pair and as a hypothesis for 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 doctoral research practice and own involvement as a protagonist in it, that curation is just as much engaged, passionate and very much so a subjective production of meaning and of affect like artistic practice. As elaborated before, I also argue against curation to be 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, curator even further and seek to question the paradigm in which the curator (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 rethinking the exhibition, the modernist thought of arts autonomy and putative universal appeal is usurped. She reasons that not the role and categorical differentiation and definition of artists and curators are of importance, but instead to widen the focus and to stress 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, p. 13).
Hence, I understand my role as a curator not as the “stager” nor “displayer” of the curatorial idea, but rather to actively enact some aspects myself, becoming an equally active protagonist myself.44

2.2.5 Possibilities of –and my Specific Approach on– Post-Representational Curation

My own specific approach to the idea of post-representational curation 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, firsthand 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 my understanding and practice of post-representational curation in the processual “contact zones” is to activate the critical consciousness first within the smallest entity, the self, which I understand as an essential starting point, then to expand it towards the becoming aware and being part of a collective (social) body. In order to achieve such embodied experiences of critical consciousness, I experiment with transdisciplinary practices and in particular with holistic and somatic approaches since the ‘corpo-real’ experience is a powerful and alternative tool for generating and understanding 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 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 firsthand experiential approaches allows for the stimulation of an ‘alternative imaginary’ and a hybrid and a polymorphic making of the curatorial. This research wishes 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 foremost in opposition to the conceptual and philosophical understanding and impetus that it implies. Representation predominantly is motivated by exteriority and

44 As mentioned before 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.
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. the macropolitical social realm and collective social body.

In contemplating representation further, it is informative to look at posthuman feminist theorist Astrida Neimanis 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 as “real” and that which is considered as “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 emphasizes 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, p. 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”. It helps to rethink the binary structures of concepts of authorship, artist/curator/spectator, interior/exterior, body/mind, subject/object, reason/aesthetic etc. allowing for hybrid entanglements.

But more important in the analogy to Barad’s advance 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, p. 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.
2.3 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, p. 102)

After a general introduction of the conceptual genesis of this PhD research in chapter 1.1, and a positioning of this research into the contemporary discourse of curating as an extended idea to Nora Sternfeld’s rationale of post-representational curation in chapter 1.2, this chapter 1.3 unfolds key topics that relate to my specific approach of post-representational curation. Completing the introductory concepts of this research, this chapter elaborates the idea of “conscientization”, the creation of critical consciousness with an emphasis of extending 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 elaborated 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 lead 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 reading of political philosopher and literary theorist Michael Hardt and philosopher Gilles Deleuze. Affect is foremost 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 meaning) the notion of a separated self. They aim to extend beyond representational modes, that allow for embodied immersion and experience of affectivity and relationality. On a parallel track 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, this research engages with corporeal and processual ontologies as an

45 Irit Rogoff reasons in regards to curatorial practice 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, P.5).
epistemological method through which knowledge is activated instead of referring to a product or representation.

2.3.1 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. Conscientization stands as an emancipatory and collective approach 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 in its context and in relation to others.

---

46 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. Death penalty was introduced, all cultural production succumbed by censorship and numerous critical thinkers, politicians, artists and professors were under surveillance, arrested, tortured or sent to exile. After imprisonment, Freire emigrated to Chile. Already before the dictatorship in 1960s, Freire’s pedagogical work emphasised on 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 equally as a method for creating critical consciousness. At that time illiterates were not allowed to vote, hence, Freire’s Alphabetisation programme (and his lifework in general that promoted critically conscious, active, non-apathic 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 and 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 the 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 circumstance and the shifting from subaltern object to subject) are nonetheless of high relevance today and have a strong influence in feminist, anti-racist, anarchist and 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 doctoral research and the reason why I chose his reference over e.g. feminist or more contemporary thinkers.
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.⁴⁷

Conscientization is a process of creating a critical consciousness, an awareness for forms of oppression, for formative and demanding representations that reside within us. The practice embraces both critical reflection (here I include creating self-awareness) and taking action for changing one’s own reality. Freire calls this critical reflection “reading of the world” that strives towards not only being in the world but being with the world (Freire, 1974/2013, p. 41) – reminding us of Donna Haraway’s idea of “sym-poiesis” and “worlding with” mentioned in chapter 1.2.

Conscientization strives towards, what Freire calls, “critical transitive consciousness” that fosters the ability get 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, pp. 14/15).

Informed by Freire’s line of thought of conscientization, this doctoral research stresses the notion of creating a (critical) awareness that in particular emphasizes the ‘in-corpo-ration’ of the embodied knowledge and consciousness of the knowing body, the “corpo consiente”.⁴⁸ 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 liberating and emancipatory learning and for acts of knowing. Scholar and activist Antonia Darder⁴⁹, 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 in regards to the 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, p. 1).

---

⁴⁷ E.g. socio-economic conditions, deficit and debilitating assumptions and preconceptions regarding race, 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.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 67. An overview of the cultural history of the body and the notion of the self would unfortunately exceed the frame of this research.

⁴⁹ 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.
I agree with Darder that the human is a multidimensional being, and that 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. The view of the body being governed by cognizance and subjugated to physiological processes of the nervous system has deeply engrained Western cultural perspective.

Holistic approaches can assist to challenge the dualistic, hierarchical and naturalistic conception of conscious and 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-embodify’ such advances.

In a similar line of the Freirean thought of the ‘corpo consiente’, the afore mentioned 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.

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

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

50 As this text reiterates.

51 This Cartesian dualism between body and mind has been challenged throughout history and cannot be elaborated thoroughly in this study. But just to name a few examples, already René Descates’ 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 Critique of pure Reason against that the ‘cogito’ is based on an internal experience of time, and for the subject to be defined within time, it does need external, spatial experience. Martin Heidegger critiqued that Descartes investigated in the notion of ‘cogito’ but not in that of the ‘sum’, the being. G.W.F. Hegel critiqued that Descartes didn’t make the distinction between mind and reason. Or 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 and along with neurosciences the conception of the mind-body-split and the view of the body being governed by cognisance and subjugated to physiological processes of the nervous system have been heavily opposed. And of course the issue has gained new relevance in contemporary digitalised complexities.

52 (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.
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.53

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; 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, p. 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, p. 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 and what Brazilian curator and theorist Suely Rolnik for example refers to as the “knowing body” or “vibratile body”, and which I seek to activate in the practical part of this doctoral research which will be discussed further in the respective chapters of the Radical Empathy Lab.

Such approaches not only allow us to see the body as “the central metaphor of political and social order” (Ibid, p. 17), it again stresses the notion of the affective and sensing body, that is permeable and porous to the outside (also e.g. to the power structures and affects of neoliberal cognitive capitalism) and that the self is constructed though the relationality and encounter with the Other.54

53 (Freire, 1974/2013, p.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 which 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 towards Martin Heidegger’s understanding of it which does not merely refer to a spatial idea, but more in the sense of ‘belonging’ which underlines Freire’s conception of interconnectedness and relationality. See for example https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger/#ModEnc, accessed: 5 October 2018.

54 Introducing the ‘Other’ written in upper case, offers an additional subtext and layer of reflection that embraces the notion of Otherness and Othering. 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, anthropological and social discourse. Equally, post-colonial critical theory with most important thinkers like Stuart Hall, Edward Said, Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak discuss the question of the Other, Otherness and Othering.
The notion of "Otherness" is also subject in feminist studies. It roots back to 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 against.

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’. Please find additional short thoughts on this particular aspect further along in a footnote in this chapter.

And at last to mention New Materialism/Post-Humanism 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 PhD 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), http://criticalposthumanism.net/genealogy/new-materialisms/, accessed: 2 October 2018.

Philosophically, I situate my understanding of "Otherness" within a more general comprehensive sociological, ontological and phenomenological approach which of course does encompass postcolonial critique of processes of Othering, feminist and gender related thinking. My interest lies on a critical focus 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 recognizes difference? Simon 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?

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

Within my practical projects of this doctoral 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 with each other, bearing in mind that oneself is always also an Other and part of that relationship.
The practical projects of this doctoral research aspire to create an experiential awareness about this interconnectedness in encounters with the self and the Other, 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. The body is a permeable foundation that is fundamentally affected by social relations. It is a key means for reflecting on social change, inequalities, and looking at opportunities as he argues.

Blackman refers to Shilling’s book *The Body and Social Theory*, stating that

\[
[...] \text{the body is not simply a body defined by a fixed human nature, but, rather, bodies can, will and do change and transform given the particular set of historical circumstances within which they are socialized. Thus, the talk of the body is always talk of the social context, social practices and ideological processes that produce bodily matters.}\]

Agency – the ability to resist, 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, the *nanopolitics group*\(^57\), I assume the body as political and “as event”. Comprehending the body as event,

---

\(^{55}\) (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 which way we are intentionally positioned within the environment. He insinuates how today our bodies have become our passwords to access, to cross borders (iris scan, fingerprint etc.) and how in neoliberal capitalism we as biological citizens have become responsible for our own health. And of course not to forget the whole beauty body industry and the commodification of bodies like prostitution, organ selling, and human trafficking etc.. The body is a valuable vehicle for display, gendered, robotic, governmental, commodified dimensions. The journal *Body & Society* e.g. gives further insight to the field of body studies.

\(^{56}\) (Blackman, 2008, p. 17)

The importance of the body as our interface within 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, that gender and identity is socially constructed through often hegemonic linguistic structures, norms (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.

\(^{57}\) The collective thinks politics through and as embodied experiences and practices. It offers proposals for producing new collective subjectivations. 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.
soaked through with social and political tensions, opens pathways for thinking about the relation of micro- and macropolitics and to reconsider questions of strength, stability, set boundaries and habits (Plotegher, Zechner, and Rübner, 2013, p. 13).

The body perceived as event implies processuality of a becoming body and helps to overcome binary notions of generalized singularity, separation, identity, selfhood and allows 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. It encourages us to think towards 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 encourages an embodied paradigm shift that emphasises the impulse of “doing and enactment” instead of “having or being” (Blackman, 2008, p. 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 conception of the “becoming body” can be discussed from various additional points. As mentioned before, Judith Butler’s approach on performativity and constructed identity, a performatative 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 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 intersubjectivity. 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 e.g. extends this understanding of difference as an ontological category and encourages to think 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 on Charles Darwin’s non-essentialist and non-reductive accounts of nature and material bodies.

I would have liked to delve more deeply into these examinations but the frame of this specific research has precluded such extended contemplations. I also decided to keep the subject on the idea of ‘becoming’ multiversal and open so that it might allow to encompass all of these and even more specificities.
the mind and activate the awareness for 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 writing 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.

2.3.2 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, psychology, but less within the curatorial field. This research aims to examine in particular the holistic making of ‘social empathy’ and to create a new set of knowledge and questions around it. 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. 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 an other’s emotion. Economic and social theorist Jeremy Rifkin who gave a new direction in the debates on globalization with terms like “global empathy” and the “race to global consciousness” (Rifkin,

59 Empathy as a concept has been part of philosophical and interdisciplinary debates on how to access or understand the Other already since 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 frame. But historian Karl F. Morrison e.g. outlines the long tradition of thought in Western culture on the notion of “I am you”, as a bonding element of empathy but which goes back even to Vedic theology (God/Atman is in all things and the human soul is identical with God). He lays out how empirics and sciences, that 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).

The neurons have been discussed to be the reason for our sophisticated social abilities, to understand and share 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 the human kind. The human species (and some of our animal fellow beings) seems 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 particular, in a contemporary hyper capitalistic, profit striving globalized world of extreme individualism, the question of empathy appears vital in thinking about intersubjectivity and Otherness.
in regards to universal urgencies such as climate change, the negotiation of cultural differences, global leveling, 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 sensibility with 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 entropy of civilization and of the planet. (And again, bringing a parallel to Donna Haraway’s idea of “sym-poiesis” and “worlding with” and Freire’s idea of “being with the world” to mind.)

Of course, there are also downsides and limits to the capacity of empathy: Capitalism with its purchase behaviour, mood tracking and algorithmic governmentalities has long instrumentalised empathy as a key to successful business and maximising profits. Politics exhaust people’s empathy 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 a distance of emotions and hence allows for clearer decision making and ability to help.60 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 is existing and might be reproduced; who is the empathizer and who is the one to be empathized with?61 Moreover, if empathy projects one’s lived experience

60 According to Bloom, compassion does allow for a 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).

61 In this context it is interesting to e.g. look at filmmaker Harun Farocki’s approach on 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, emotions etc.). He connotes it with “forceful sympathy” and a form of alignment (Farocki, 2008, pp. 21-22).

In his 1969 film Nicht löscharables Feuer he 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 anesthesia 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 totalizing 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
undifferentiated 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 advance to the discussion. She challenges the Euro-American notion, the neoliberal rhetoric of the ‘empathy economy’, the political genealogies and emotional politics of empathy as to ‘put oneself in the other’s shoes’, and the universalist discourses of empathy. She argues for decolonizing emotion and to reflect how visions and practices of empathy can be reinterpreted. Importantly, she asserts that:

[...] empathy, frequently 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, p. 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, p. 27). Pedwell proposes to rethink empathy as what she terms “alternative empathies” and “affective translation” and asks:

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, p. 20)

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.

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

---

subjection to the Other, an ethical responsibility and allowing the Other to be absolutely the Other in her differences while also recognizing one’s own particularity and Otherness. See e.g. Levinas, Emmanuel, Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority, 1961.

62 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.

63 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 might differ from mainstream liberal and neoliberal mobilisations, as well as how it might disrupt or refigure their affective logics” (Pedwell, 2016, p. 15).
Since this has been a key component of what my practice has developed throughout this research, Pedwell's approach on empathy as “affective translation”, proves a guiding means 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 to the idea of post-representational curation as a space for debate and negotiation (Sternfeld), Pedwell’s advance is supporting 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, p. 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 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 doctoral 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 into the rhythm of the music – and when danced with a partner, into a temporary ‘dialogical attunement’ with the dancing Other.64

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 opener for new

---

64 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, p. 108).
discoveries is engaging\textsuperscript{65}; and 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 vice versa – serves as a stimulating tool to think though the idea of affective translation in which difference and Otherness are cross-fertilizing.\textsuperscript{66}

Instead of achieving an “accurate account” (Pedwell) of the Other (which entails having control), the research projects strive towards creating a curatorial environment to stimulate an empathic attunement, that involves a 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 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 the contemporary reality call for a new synthesis of the perspectives and it is this “growing from the inside self”, an awareness for intersubjectivity and interconnectedness that I like to think of as creating an embodied critical consciousness which may enable us to build a more inclusive world and form of living together.

2.3.3 Micropolitics

In thinking about the concept of micropolitics, curator, psychoanalyst, writer, art and cultural critic Suely Rolnik’s approach has strongly nurtured this PhD 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

\textsuperscript{65}Voegelin talked about her understanding of doubt as an activating tool during the book launch of her recent book \textit{The Political Possibility of Sound}, 2018 at Errant Sound, Berlin on 28 October 2018.

\textsuperscript{66}This brings to mind Chantal Mouffe’s concept of agonistic pluralism in regards 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: Mouffe, Chantal, \textit{The Democratic Paradox}, London, New York. Verso Books, 2000 or \textit{Agnostics: Thinking the World Politically}, London, New York. Verso Books, 2013.
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 turn 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.* In its introduction Rolnik points out the change in capitalist logic and order during the early 1980s, that it shifted towards the replacement of the physical labour towards “turning the forces of desire, creation, and action into a major source for the extraction of surplus value” (Guattari and Rolnik, 2007, p. 10). Guattari called it the Integrated World Capitalism. This capitalist logic has ever been so dominant and developing since (e.g. into today’s neurocapitalism and serialized subjectivity). Guattari elaborates on micropolitics that

> [t]he 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, p. 179).

I correspond, that this delamination between micro and macropolitics remains a problem today, which keeps the question and urgency of micropolitics as important today than back then; no matter in which cultural or geographical context.

Although the book gives light to a specific time in history marked by political change and hope towards the end of the totalitarian regime, it has not only been a crucial reference for Brazil’s following political movements, but it equally means 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. The theoretical engagement with two Brazilian

---

67 It was originally published in Brazil in 1986 as *Micropolíticas: Cartografias do desejo.* The concept of micropolitics dates already back to the 1970s to Guattari’s work with Gilles Deleuze, the *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, their first volume on capitalism and schizophrenia and key text regarding micropolitics of desire, socioeconomic “complexes” and claiming that through its forces and relations, desire does produce social production and reality; and in 1980 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 that Rolnik is referring to.

68 It is a rather striking concurrence to be referencing to this writing in a time in which a plurality of countries worldwide have politically gone reverse in time, towards right wing, nationalist and populist politics. It is in particular alarming that only thirty years after Brazil’s reborn democracy a nationalist conservative retired military
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 instructiv
e 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. 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 1.2, my curatorial work finds its starting point with contemporaneity
and urgencies at stake; so does this practice based doctoral research. 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 gaining more control and power, decreasing the
sensibilities and empathy –or with Pedwell “affective translations”– between opponent views.
It is this climate and contemporaneity that this research and practice is being fuelled for
searching for new forms of curatorial practice in which new ways for relating to each other is
central. Concepts like ‘micropolitics’ have not only become 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.

More contemporary, in a lecture at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in 2015, Rolnik
elucidates her rationale of micropolitics further 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

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

The era of US American President Donald Trump, the increase of right wing politics throughout Latin Americas
and in 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. But just as well, the long lasting uprisings of heterogeneous people’s movement of “the yellow vests”
in France that started in 2018; a polytopia of a micropolitics that brings together a strata of people that induct a
thought and practice that expresses and instantiates a desire to undo the prevailing political power.
perceiving the world; and the second level of experience is one of “strangeness”. This affect 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”. “Re-active micropolitics” she considers 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, “active micropolitics”, she considers an “anthropophagic perspective” (relational/heterogenic/singularizing, see further elaborations in chapter 2.1.), 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 strangeness 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 reproducing 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 for 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 capitalistic 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 a thinking that is in resonance with and “re-feeling” its knowing and vibratile body.

Active micropolitics equally means to be vibratile and resonant with the macropolitical, making new connections of the world; a “worlding with” (see Freire and Haraway in chapter 2.3.1) 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 a 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).

### 2.3.4 Thoughts on Affect

In this practical PhD research experiment, the notion of affect is less used 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”.70 Their emphasis on the embodied quality underpin the practices applied in this case

---

70 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
study, that endeavour to create an awareness for, 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 passage) 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, p. 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 Seighworth’s rationale of being a relational “passage”.

Having focused on the contemporary approach on 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.71 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”, that 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).72 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:

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, p. x).

introductory chapter An Inventory of Shimmers brings the different approaches together and was thus chosen to be read collectively in the project.


71 Written 1664/65, first published posthumously 1677. Deleuze, e.g., also highlights affect as a non-representational 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).

72 The body and mind dualism has long before the “affective turn” been challenged in the humanities and sciences by feminist and queer perspectives and their work on emotion.
Hardt’s idea that increased affect leads to increased autonomy of the subject (and hence I argue the process of de-subjectification) resonates not only 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 advance 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.\(^73\) Hardt understands Spinoza’s approach of being in flux with 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, p. 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 parlance notion of ‘joy’ and away from neoliberal imperatives towards engineered and coerced ‘positivity’.

Moreover, Michael Hardt underlines Spinoza’s fundamental principle, that all is inter-related, that individual sovereignty is not existent, and sovereign decision-making is minimal, as we are affected by the world outside of us. A second central Spinozian belief that is most significant to this research is, that the body is not a closed off entity, but that it is composed

---

\(^73\) 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, p. 219)

Feminist scholar and author Sara Ahmed examines the notion, cultural history, implications and cultural politics of emotions in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. By exemplary 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 on performativity, and elaborates its paradoxical temporality: “On the one hand, the performative is futural; it generates effects in 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, p. 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 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 the popular and marginalised bodies. Emotions are hence performative, relational and social in nature.

> “[…]Emotions 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, p. 10).

Her analysis of emotion as sociality is helpful to contemplate 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.
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 or acting or being acted upon, we need to look to not the one but the consistent relation among the many (Hardt, 2015, p. 216).

Furthermore, in Spinozian 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 doctoral 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, p. 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.74 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 to philosophical and practical goals, e.g., of practices of mindfulness, but equally to Hardt’s argument, that by actively making the affect of joy last (and thus also reminding us of “active micropolitics” as in Rolnik), it becomes a political project. It extends from the micro- to the macropolitical.75 That means for this practice based PhD 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, does not only help us to fight reactionary an-aesthesia (see last research project, chapter 3.3.), the loss of our sensing ability. It suggests that, from within the micropolitical, a potential strategy for resistance and resilience against dominant separating structures (that

---

74 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).

75 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, p. 222).
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 on in the final research experiment of this PhD research, *The Articulating Body, Experiments on De-configuring Reactionary Anaesthesia*.

The next three chapters on the practical part of this doctoral 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, p. 17)

After having learnt in the introductory chapter about the general positioning and key concepts that I embed in this doctoral research, 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 an assessing conclusion. 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 PhD 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.76

Figure 1: The Vibratile Body protagonists. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

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

---

76 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/, last accessed 28 January 2019. Also see www.cornioloartplatform.net.
on the relation between the micro and macro dimensions of agency, looking to test whether changes in the individual self can trigger other collective manifestations.\footnote{See the open call in the appendix.}

The framework for the experiment was one week of communal living in a 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 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, the re-enactment of artist Lygia Clark’s multisensorial experiments). These key methods will be elaborated and described in the following respective sections of this chapter.

On a theoretical and discursive level we exercised 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 work. Furthermore, we visited local holistic practitioners, did nature hikes that encompassed awareness exercises and had some visiting guests from the cultural field to contribute and participate discursively.\footnote{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). It might appear rather exclusive but was due to the invitation process of the organisation. The experiments work like micro test laboratories for creating new imaginaries, it would be very intriguing to open the experiment to a wider audience in the future; one that might encompass protagonists with more diverse levels of backgrounds.}

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 exploring 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 on-looking audience towards momentarily becoming critically more aware protagonists.

\footnote{Morena Selva a local botanist who gave us a walk on local healing herbs, curators Maria Rosa Sossai (Ala Group) and Gaia Tedone.}
The experiment deepened the theory that I engaged in my research by taking a stand to what Franco “Bifo” Berardi calls “cognitarian subjectivation” (the inscription of determinist...
automatisms into cognitive activity, that leads to the inscription of determinist chains into the social sphere (Berardi, 2010, p. 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 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 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, p. 5).

In particular the theoretical thought of curator, psychoanalyst, writer, art and cultural critic Suely Rolnik was of strong guidance in this research. What Berardi calls “the cognitarian subjectivation”, she approaches as the “colonial capitalistic unconscious” and reasons that our subjectivity is dominated by the subjectivating politics of desire and of thought. Her semiotic choice of “colonial” does not refer to the geographical, nationalistic notion of colonizing, 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.79

79 In reference to chapter 2.3.1 that elaborates on the notion of the body, it is to mention that the shift from agriculture to industrialization 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.
Reading on 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 construction for this project and of the PhD research, I also recognised sympathies within her theoretical thinking to my own practice. Rolnik’s advance 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 engaged 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 capitalistic 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, p.13).

Affects of the world are experienced and perceived within and through the vibratile, resonant and affective body and produce another way of seeing, 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 psycho-cognitive apparatus – i.e. being more in synch with our sensing, vibratile body, listening and trusting what it is communicating– can lead to, what I –thinking with Franco Berardi (2014)– would call ‘neuro-emancipation’ and to think 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.80

80 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 doctoral 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 practiced. 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 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, p. 10) as a 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, p. 11).

Her approach on 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.81

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 for 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:

[…] 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

81 Rolnik describes: “…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, p. 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 in particular meant 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. 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 transeptarian and more universalistic approach.
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 on these propositions. They seem to engage the kinds of issues that I am committed to examine in this practice-based doctoral research. 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 advance 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 doctoral research and curatorial practice, in that it anthropophagically incorporates 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 on 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 advances 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. The practice was accompanied further by collective meditations and Pranayama (breathing exercises) throughout the days.

---

82 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,
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 to gain access to the knowing body and to activate its ‘vibratility’; and if practiced 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 the 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. 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 in quantifiable measurement of value in such 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 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 the 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, p. 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, p. 64).

Which, in fact, it did, as some of the protagonists told me long after the project.
for example via archival documentation like in this doctoral research. While the yogic practices are often conducted in a private and isolatory 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 for our inter-relationality. 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 1.2 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. The physical postures, the Asanas that we practiced, indeed are one component of the yogic process that work as a tool to prepare and keep the mind and body fit for concentration, awareness and meditation. 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).

84 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 playform, 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. But 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 Singelton for example gives 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 hybridized practice of colonial India’s dialogical encounter with the worldwide physical culture movement and owes 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, 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 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 also finds often roots in the legacies of the spiritual materialism of the Sixties, the cultural experiment mostly symbolized 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.

85 Although in the original Yoga Sutras and original teachings, Yoga is centred around its philosophical aspect and the healing of the body.
Which in Rolnik’s rationale, describes an active micropolitics and an empathic way of tuning into the world around us.

The most ancient Sanskrit text the “Yoga Sutra” 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 the ethical conduct and self-discipline.\textsuperscript{86} Samadhi is the ultimate stage of the eight limbs of Ashtanga Yoga. Continual practice transcends caring for the self and encourages an ethical conduct and awareness of one’s interconnectedness with all living things.\textsuperscript{87}

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

\textsuperscript{86} 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 Patanjali’s Ashtanga Yoga encompass the postural aspect, the Asanas, and concentrate on refining our personalities, and developing an energetic awareness of ourselves. (Yama, which deals with one's ethical standards and sense of integrity, focusing on our behaviour and how we conduct ourselves in life. Practicing 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 recognizing the connection between the breath, the mind, and the emotions.

All of which 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 the external stimuli and focus on the inward gaze. This practice helps to step back and take a look at ourselves, allowing us to observe our habits that might interfere with our inner growth and which supports 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:

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, p. 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, p. 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.

\textsuperscript{87} 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 as 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 to be one’s own truth and being solely accountable for one self without any ethical implication towards others.
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 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 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, p. 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, p. 68).

Foucault posits that caring of 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), that might encompass the potential to be thought on a larger social level.
After two decades of experience as a Yoga practitioner and teacher, I came to understand that Yoga indeed is a social practice, ultimately a relational trans- and inter-individual process (reminding us again of to the idea of empathy as “affective translation”) that is appreciative to uniqueness and hence to 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 1.2 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 about a solely 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 proves to be a guidance in this research module. In this later body of work, Clark emphasized the sensory perception, the 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;

---

88 Critically acknowledging my privileged, white, middle-class, educated background.

89 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 as 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 ought 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.
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.90

Clark’s unorthodox style of treatment, on the edges of both psychoanalysis and art, was never recognized 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 neuropsychoanalysis (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, but 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).

Christine Macel notes that “[w]here 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

---

90 These were various objects, such as stones placed on different parts of the body, fabrics, cushions filled with objects that varied in weight, 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.
part of creating conscientization, a critical awareness for 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. In this multisensorial 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.

Figure 8: Re-enactment of Lygia Clark’s Multi-sensorial Experiments, 2016. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

91 The series of 66 video interviews were part of Rolnik’s project “Lygia Clark, from Object to Event” (that 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 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 Université 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 though the breathing. Obscuring the sight with a blindfold 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).

Figure 9: Re-enactment of Lygia Clark’s Multi-sensorial Experiments, 2016. Photo: Maria Pecchioli

92 This is a proposition that Clark had called earlier in her career *Pedra e Ar* (Stone and Air), 1966.
Figure 10: Re-enactment of Lygia Clark’s *Multi-sensorial Experiments*, 2016. Relational objects that activated the sense of smell. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 11: Re-enactment of Lygia Clark’s *Multi-sensorial Experiments*, 2016. Photo: Maria Pecchioli
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, nurtured an awareness for the co-experiencing and interconnectedness with the fellow protagonists.⁹³

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.⁹⁴

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.

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?

⁹³ For further visual impressions, please refer to images on the website www.beritfischer.org.

⁹⁴ I asked the following questions to initiate the automated word flow:
3.1.3 Pauline Olivero’s 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.\textsuperscript{95} Listening towards 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 so 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.

\textsuperscript{95} Oliveros (1932-2016) was a leading figure in post-war experimental electronic art music and writer on new music theories and sonic awareness (the conscious attention on environmental and musical sound) and practices of listening and responding to environmental conditions. See for example: Oliveros, Pauline, \textit{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.
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 immediate response and embrace of our lively surroundings. Striking of simplicity, these meditations do 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 lead me to the decision to dedicate more time and space for listening meditations and exercises in my second practical research project, that I called “Affective Listening” and which will be elaborated further in chapter 2.2.

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, 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 experiment, a short crisis and form of resistance by two of the North American protagonists occurred. They expressed their displeasure about the process of the collective readings not to be 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 paragraphs 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 in 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 conceptually is conceived and organized by one or several individuals? Having been the sole conceiver and executer of the chosen exercises and conceptual backbone that was activated in this project, I decided to spread 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 of the American protagonists resisted to follow the specifically announced, traditionally carefully elaborated series of Asanas of the Ashtanga Yoga system, by 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.\cite{96} 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.\cite{97} I came to reflect that my implementation of the conceptual ideas 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 doctoral 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 the only two non-European, North American 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

\footnote{96 My traditional Yogic training and experience demands to precisely follow 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.}

\footnote{97 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.}
flows, and heightened awareness, which stimulated more empathy and sensitivity within the group.

Since this is a practice-based PhD research within the Fine Arts and with a methodological focus on experiencing and extending beyond the semiotic level, there are limitations in describing the experience and in particular to result in 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 weeks programme and the exercises and if the protagonists could detect changes in the individual self that might manifest in a different awareness for a collective interrelationality, that the experiment had hoped to create and sought to test. All protagonists clearly stated that the exercises of the week, and in particular the daily Yoga practice, did alter their state of sensitivity, 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 participants showed me, that, with continuity and discipline of 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 for more debate and potential dissent.

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 to move 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

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, vulnerabilities that they might experience during the week. This helped to train their critical awareness and also prepared them for their reflection at the end of the project.

My closing interview questions were:
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 of 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?

Interestingly, in particular the two participants who had expressed their disagreement half way through the project, have since been in contact with me several times and expressed their gratitude for the experience and the efficacy of the practices that were applied.
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? Being a hopeless idealist, I argue that it does. Even if only on a miniscule level or by triggering just the inspiration to take other actions into the everyday life of the protagonists. And just like with Yoga, the more you practice, the better you become in creating this sensitivity and trust in the vibratile body as your own agency.
3.1.5 Appendix Chapter 3.1

1) Open call for *The Vibratile Body*

**D_Camp 2016 - The Vibratile Body**

[www.radicalintention.wordpress.com](http://www.radicalintention.wordpress.com)
[www.cornioloartplatform.net](http://www.cornioloartplatform.net)

**Corniolo 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
Corniolo 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). Theses 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-otherwise’.

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-otherwise' 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 Fletcher 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), Hysnans: 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 B22 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), Hysnans: The Notion and Politics of Listening (Casino Luxembourg Forum d’Art Contemporain, Luxembourg), Part of the Game, (tGgK, Berlin), Other Possible Worlds – Proposals on this Side of Utopia (tGgK, Berlin), Brooklyn Waterfront Outdoor Sculpture Exhibition (New York), Dumbo Arts Festival (New York), Intrude 366 (Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai), and City Beasts (BlankART, Yokohama).

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 inter-relational capacities; a post-representational curatorial experiment for a holistic creating of social empathy and critical consciousness.

It was invited by artist, writer and theorist Brandon LaBelle, founder of the Errant Sound working group, to take place at its project space in Berlin, Germany in May 2017.\(^{100}\) I have worked with Brandon LaBelle in the past, as our interests cross regarding his approach on aesthetics and politics of invisibility, questions of social life, politics of listening, cultural agency, and micro-actions. He generously has been thoroughly following and accompanying my doctoral research with many insightful discussions.

I approached this iteration of the doctoral research experiment slightly more traditionally, in that I not solely conducted 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 the nine protagonists to immerse 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, building trust and relations combined with a discursive collective reading element, and explored what I name “Affective Listening”, that gave the project its title.

The immersive weekend investigated and experimented if, through these particular methods, a greater awareness for 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.

\(^{100}\) 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, 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.
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 al-/and effectiveness of listening further in this experiment, as a methodology for consciousness raising and stimulation of the awareness for interconnectivity to 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 about 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 on the human as being “in” the boundary between its body and its 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 that

[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, pp. 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\(^\text{101}\), as

\(^{101}\text{Empathic understood in the sense of Carolyn Pedwell’s rationale (see chapter 2.3.2) as “affective translation” in which differences can coexist and are not tried to be homogenized.}\)
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). 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 for 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 every day sounds caused by the environment or the other participants. This can be a meditative process that heightens our awareness for 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.

---

102 Most prominent theorists in affect theory, Erin Manning and Brian Massumi, define a reciprocal intertwinement between creative practice and thought as “research-creation”, that 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 a practice based doctoral research and curatorial practice intends to do.) Although similar to their approach in their project “Dancing the Virtual” (2006), to rethink the body as “a processual entity that transforms and is transformed by the relational sensing matrices”, my practice and research differs to 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 doctoral 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 practice being together through the holistic methods that are invited. Through this (e)mergence and inter-relationality between theory and practice the research experiences strive to test and create a new affective perception, experience, thinking and potentially even acting.

103 As an experimental and improvising composer, Oliveros developed this work grounded on her observation of lac in musicians who are merely ‘hearing’, rather than listening with intent, including listening to the environment and the audience.
Furthermore, we trained focal hearing\textsuperscript{104}, or listening awareness through walking in the room as silently as possible, which was accompanied by vocalisations that created an awareness for 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.\textsuperscript{105} 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 practiced in order to be understood, and that it

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{104} 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.

\textsuperscript{105} 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 e.g. 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.
\end{footnotesize}
[...] 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, p. 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).

Listening proves as a powerful method for a holistic making of social empathy in the context of thinking about post-representational curation. Oliveros’ advance on consciousness, appears inspirational for this doctoral 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, p. 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.106

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 relation between sonic affect and intensified emotional and somatic awareness for sound, that can foster transcendental and transformative experience.

---

106 For example in Oliveros’ meditational exercise “Extreme Slow Walk”, we strove to listen with the whole body and to create awareness for 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 with 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.
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.107

Another example was a group work in which the protagonists were asked to become creative and to develop a one-minute Deep Listening exercise 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 by a sound made by the next person, and so on. Everyone repeated their own sound in the circle, so that the composition of 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 for 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 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 to learn to listen to one’s awareness, detect the tiniest shift or movement of one’s neighbor, 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 for our interconnectedness.
3.2.3 Discursive Teahouse

I named the framework for the second day of the research experiment a *Discursive Teahouse*. It metaphorically and playfully alludes to the 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.
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 the framework for mindfulness, and to stimulate awareness and exchange on a theoretical cognitive, as well as on the sensual, experiential level. Tea ceremonies are embedded in Asian cultures, like also in Japan and beyond.

In the Japanese classical writing 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, p. 12).

Gong Fu (or often also called Kung Fu, and in mainstream referring 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 on 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, that everything one does affects everything else around. Based on the ground of believe that one’s state of mind or attitude can be passed easily to others,

Figure 20 and 21: Ying Le inviting us to sense tea leaves. Photo: Berit Fischer
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 the relation to nature, the rituals, 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 sensitivity and awareness for 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 (theory reading and discussing) and the non-semiotic, the sensual experience and exchange through the tea ceremony and collective trust-building exercises that I guided (see section 3.2.4).

Figure 22: Collective reading of Seigworth’s and Gregg’s *An Inventory of Shimmers*, 2010 during the discursive teahouse. Photo: Berit Fischer

After several rounds of tea and fuelled vivid exchange, I prepared us for the cognitive discursive element of the teahouse (the collective theory reading) 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 of the, in section 2.3.4 mentioned, introductory chapter *An Inventory of Shimmers* of Seigworth’s and Gregg’s *Affect Theory Reader* to inspire critical thinking and exchange about the notion of affect.
Due to the time constraint, to avoid 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, that 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, and as often 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 for. 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 of the protagonists towards this apparent interruption of flow. This was also on the 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.\textsuperscript{108} 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.

\textsuperscript{108} It was interesting though to see, that the public announcement and open call appeared to have attracted more people that were eager to practice than to engage in theory of affective listening.
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 to holistically stimulate a critical awareness to elevate social empathy—through unconventionally and intra-disciplinarily merging of embodied, sensual practice with cognitive, theoretical academic discourse—substantiated the curatorial challenge and the novelty of this doctoral 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 PhD practice module, that will be elaborated in chapter 2.3.

3.2.4 Body Locomotion

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

This practical research module, I concluded 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. Practiced in silence, the exercise aims to build trust and to enlarge personal freedom by taking collective risk; it fosters self-organisation for responsibility of risk taking and safety.

---

109 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 that meets 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 education methodology that originated from “Soma”, an anarchist therapy by Brazilian anarchist, medical psychiatrist and writer Roberto Freire in Brazil in the 1970s. (Not related to Paulo Freire but together with him and Augusto Boal, Roberto Freire took part in the radical pedagogy, 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, 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)
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 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 not only to organise themselves without speaking, but also needed to sharpen their perception and interconnectedness with the person in the centre, carefully observing and anticipating the moves of the person entrusting 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 first person plural.\footnote{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 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 her own words, how she heard and apprehended it, but without any interpretation and judgement. This repeating helps the third person, who is in charge to ask 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.} 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.

Figure 28: Protagonists’ notes for the feedback session of the Body Locomotion exercise. Photo: Berit Fischer
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, that offers to feel strongly somatically interconnected and as an intersected entity through the breath.\footnote{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.}
3.2.5 Outcome

The first doctoral 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 2.2) to the test. It strove to rethink and experiment how literally an ‘ex-hibition’ can be ‘embodied’ and how it can ‘in-habit’ (a wordplay alluding the meaning of inhabit)^112^, encompass and embody ideas, rather than to display and merely represent them, as one aspect of my approach on the rationale of post-representational curation.

In all three praxis modules, this doctoral research does not seek to produce a work of art or an exhibition in the conventional sense, but it rather endeavours inventing 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’.

---

^112^ *In-hiting* approaching it from Latin *in-* + habere, approaching the meaning with ‘holding in, encompassing’; see chapter 2.2.1.
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 advance puts the theoretical approach into action. The notion of an ‘on-looking audience’ was fully dissolved (solely active participants, and not any observing audience were accepted to the experience) and the protagonists’ agency was actuated towards an 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. to have the protagonists themselves become part of the programming of the project’s progression on an equal, horizontal level. This would mean practically though, to permit 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 possibility, but nonetheless it made me think about how to create enough space for such a more organic “stake holding” to unfold for the next case study.

I argue, that the question of 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, that 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 to inspire and allow 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 doctoral experiment The Articulating Body - A two-day Experiment on De-configuring Reactionary Anaesthesia, which will be elaborated in the next chapter.

Since the feedback video interviews proved to be really helpful in The Vibratile Body project, I interviewed the protagonists also this time. The interviews reveal a common tenor that the

---

113 My interview questions were:
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 two written feedbacks in the appendix of this chapter.
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 for interconnectedness to the environment, one’s immediate surroundings, and how oneself is affecting and interacting with it. The feedback interviews showed further, that the experiment fostered an experience of peaceful co-existence of differences and appreciation, not only of the other protagonists, but equally in everyday encounters. The protagonists felt, that the structured holistic programme provided a nurturing setting 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. Protagonist Bernd Eickhoff e.g. states:

Instead of creating art as something to exist detached from ourselves, we created moments of deep awareness for ourselves and the people around us. The art that was created became the experience of very special moments. (See appendix).

This confirms what I mentioned above, what this curatorial doctoral research as an approach on post-representational curation strives to bring alive, that the “art-work” becomes the experience itself; a shared temporality and sensitivity of being together. The feedbacks equally indicate, that the aim of the experiment, to foster 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 chapter 3.3.

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?

114 One protagonist reports, that (at temporarily) she could see more human beauty in fellow beings and that she showed more interest in a total stranger’s (a shop owner’s) personal daily experience.
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 overanalyzing 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 Charlottes 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 for ourselves and the people around us. The art that was created became the experience of very special moments.
2) **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 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 Bergen University), he invited me once again to realise this project; this time at the university and to work 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 to experiment with and share my specific approach on post-representational curation with students, and on an institutional level of the university, thus at the cradle of the creative industry.115

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 for the ‘vibratility’ and ‘affectivity’ of the body. We found out about various different holistic approaches such as Yoga, meditation, multisensorial 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 social exchange and relationality through the sensing immersion into the potencies of tealeaves, which took place within the setting of an exhibition space in the second experiment. We reflected the necessity of active micropolitics (Rolnik) and 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 experimented with further as tools to overcome, what in this instance I call, ‘reactionary an-aesthesia’ (Greek: an-

115 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; but 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 ages groups, some of whom also participated on the second day, which diversified the group and made it cross-generational.
aesthēsis: without sensation). An-aesthēsia in the present political and environmental dystopian climate, and in capitalistic and dominant systems that colonise and govern our subjectivity on the micropolitical levels of desire and imagination. They hold the potential to disconnect us from our sensing and knowing bodies, from our passions and deep aspirations; and ultimately what 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 the idea of a non-representational curation through a micropolitical and holistic making of social empathy.

In line with the Spinozian thought on joyfulness and affect as collective transformative powers, I invited authors carla bergman’s and Nick Montgomery who co-authored the book *Joyful Militancy. Building Thriving Resistance in Toxic Times* (2017), that strongly resonated and guided this last research project. 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 the developed approach and process of this doctoral 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 specifically unfold their concepts of “co/re-learning”, “response-ability” and “joyfulness” as strategies to cultivate 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”. 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.

---

116 Thinking about the rise of neo-authoritarian regimes, rising nationalism, populism, and reactionary neoliberal capitalism, corrupted market interests, climate change, the sensationalist media coverage, hyper digitalism with constant mediated reality and self-representation, to name but a few and what was touched upon previously.

117 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 various 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.

118 With “Empire” they refer to the complex of colonialism, capitalism, bureaucracy, racism, ecocide, heteropatriarchy, and other interlocking processes of domination and control.
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, to 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, that I had researched and tested beforehand and that 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 potential of the discursive format in particular in the previous *Affective Listening* experiment, for giving 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. […]”

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. 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 developed the structure of her previous project *Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No.1* further 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

---

119 See also chapter 1.2. (Marchart, 2011, p. 45)
different types of seating spread out throughout the room (lounge chairs, chairs, blankets to sit or lie on the floor) for the protagonists to choose and move around with, and we positioned four banners with the four key concepts that I had invited bergman and Montgomery to elaborate on within the setting of this first encounter.\textsuperscript{120}

\textbf{Figure 31:} Setting up for Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No.2. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

\textsuperscript{120} The four concepts that I wanted to focus on in the discussions and as the backbone for the two days were Empire, joyfulness, co/re-learning and response-ability (see the next section of the chapter).
Figure 32: In the process of setting up for Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No.2. From left to right: Nick Montgomery, Katrine Meisfjord, carla bergman, Berit Fischer. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 33: carla bergman & Nick Montgomery talk on Joyful Militancy within the set-up of Food for Thought, Room for Conversation No.2. Photo: Brandon LaBelle
Figure 34: Berit Fischer giving a conceptual introduction. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 35: Berit Fischer leading an “awareness warm-up” session. Photo: Brandon LaBelle
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 – that applies also 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 practiced in the previous Affective Listening experiment (chapter 3.2) that proved to be very successful.\textsuperscript{121} The process aimed to stimulate awareness for 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.

\textsuperscript{121} I.e., I used the same introduction method from the Deep Listening exercises, to introduce oneself via a sound and how one would like one’s name to be pronounced. I adopted the listening awareness exercise “Extreme Slow Walk” that consisted of walking in the room as silently as possible, which was accompanied by vocalizations to create an awareness for sharing a space and time, and for one’s positioning, movement and relation to the others.
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 conventional 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 “feed” with information – and to create a communal convivial discursive structure instead.\footnote{Reminding us of Paolo Freire’s pedagogical dialogical approach on education in the 1960s and 70s (in chapter 1.3), or authors such as philosopher Ivan Illich’s \textit{Deschooling Society} (1971), Jacques Rancière’ \textit{The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation} (1987) or further alternative and radical discourses and pedagogies that are again or still reminiscent today, but that unfortunately cannot be elaborated further in this context.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure37.jpg}
\caption{Half of the group of protagonists creates dishes from the offered ingredients. Photo: Brandon LaBelle}
\end{figure}

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 visually be 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.
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 to 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.

The result were four very creatively improvised architectures, that did suggest 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 setup was decorated with hanging paper cut spirals.123

The protagonists in this group refused to discuss the offered concepts but instead 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 placing the banner reversed bellow 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

---

123 The protagonists in this group refused to discuss the offered concepts but instead 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 placing the banner reversed bellow 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
Figure 39: Protagonists discuss the concept of “Empire” in its respective built improvised architecture. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

individual positions of the protagonists. They formed an agreement to sit back to back to metaphorically support each other and “having their backs” during the conversations.
Figure 40: Building the improvised architecture for the concept of “co/re-learning”. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 41: Discussing the concept of “co/re-learning” over the created meal. Photo: Brandon LaBelle
Figure 42: Building the improvised architecture for the concept of “response-ability”. Photo: Brandon LaBelle

Figure 43: Discussing the concept of “response-ability”. Photo: Brandon LaBelle
Thereafter protagonists in the group who had created dishes were invited to choose the concept they wanted to discuss, and to join the building groups into the improvised architectures to share the created meal and while conversing on the four concepts. They were invited 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 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’, ‘teacher/student’ and to allow for privacy and 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, p. 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), and keeping us caught in what I call here “reactionary an-aesthesis”. bergman and Montgomery suggest that this perspective is not an 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), that 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-aesthesis what this practice module (and in fact the *Radical Empathy Lab* as such) is trying to engage with. To find solutions and methods to escape, to foster and support a critical awareness and self-empowerment from Empire’s infiltration and manipulation –that 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/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, p. 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 to do, re-feel, and think more and together. It can also create the awareness that being “joyful” can be seen as an activist and radical act against Empire’s tentacles to keep us in reactionary an-aesthesis.

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, p. 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’s and Montgomery’s activist sense of a radical act. A radical act that attempts to create temporary moments of relatedness 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 sensitizes us to things, rather than breaking up reality into
discrete pieces that can be consumed. But 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 we aspire to.
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.¹²４

Co/Re-Learning

bergman/Montgomery’s idea of “co-and re-learning” is a further pathway to overcome
reactionary an-aesthiesa, 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 for the collective body, the interconnectedness, and the power of collective
thriving that it entails. It is based on being present and engaged with each other, on listening,
being in exchange, and asking questions.

bergman/Montgomery reason further, that rebuilding and sustaining connections are the root
for decolonisation. Reminiscent of my previous approach on decolonisation (chapter 3.1) —in
the connotation of occupied, annexed, subjugated, homogenised and hegemonised— I see
their concept of re-learning as the root for what I called earlier the “decolonisation of
subjugated subjectification”. How to be present with each other appears very simple, but
through complex tangled webs of forces and histories, it seems to have been unlearnt and in
the need to be made aware of, to be co- as much as re-learnt 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 to overcome apathy, re-active micropolitics and reactionary an-aesthesia, and
they might help to encourage “collective thriving” and to sustain being different to each other.

¹²４ Abstract for their talk for The Articulating Body project; see appendix.
Response-ability

This feeds into bergman/Montgomery’s thinking about “response-ability”, as the capacity to really take 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:

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?\(^{125}\)

It is this immediacy and being present with each other, 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/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, p. 222).

In fact, some verbal feedback of the protagonists proved, that indeed in particular the holistic exercises on the second day 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 doctoral 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 encounter if one wants to fully experience it; this indeed can at times be slightly uncomfortable, as the space to rest at 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 the protagonists so responsively engaged and dwelled in this deep experience.

\(^{125}\) (Montgomery, bergman, 2017, p. 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 feedback on their own views and what they talked about within their respective groups within their configured improvised architectures. It proved that the protagonists were quite engaged in this element of the experiment; they resonated and extended the reflections on these concepts further.

![Feedback notes of the group discussing the concept of “joyfulness”. Photo: Berit Fischer](image)

**Figure 44:** Feedback notes of the group discussing the concept of “joyfulness”. Photo: Berit Fischer

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— that allows for stimulating and expressing feelings and the connectivity to others— were the key points of how to experience joy and to escape Empire.

---

126 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?
Figure 45: Feedback notes of the group discussing the concept of “co/re-learning”. Photo: Berit Fischer
The group that considered “co/re-learning” equally emphasised the importance of connecting with others and togetherness in the process of learning together, of re-learning how to do it, and of overcoming habits that might distract from it. They highlighted the need to re-learn and reassess emotions and how to share them. Conviviality, sharing of collective thinking and eating together, as well as non-verbal communication (they referred to the “awareness warm-up” that I practiced with them earlier) were considered good methods for co-and re-learning, which they felt they were actively doing in this experiment.

The protagonists reviewing the notion of “response-ability” decided to focus on the ability to act. That trust and careful listening are fundamental to make people feel included in a community, and that their voice is heard and relevant. They agreed that fear can be an obstacle that can shut response-ability down, e.g. the fear of doing something wrong in a community or that your voice is not heard. They argued that curiosity and openness to processes and engagement are tools to counter such fear. Also, staying flexible and having a goal or a vision as a community fosters mobility and to stay in the flow. The protagonists added the idea of “co-response-ability”, seeking to mutually be response-able. Also, the spiral effect of positive actions and experiences that encourage further positive actions and experiences was mentioned, and that it will be brought to a stop, if rules are set to it.
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 (like 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 (2017, p. 65) state “[t]he 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”. On the second day, and in the second encounter of the project, we experimented to remove verbal exchange and information, standing back evaluation and 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 to be a fruitful experiential tool for what I was trying to achieve in this experiment. I
invited a Social Presencing Theatre (SPT) trainer, Manuela Bosch\textsuperscript{127} to guide us through a session of processes of co-learning response-ability, presence and interrelationality within the group. Bosch describes SPT as a meditation in action, that explores interconnectedness, relational and social possibilities. It was developed by choreographer, performer and educator Arawana Hayashi\textsuperscript{128} and scholar Otto Scharmer as an art form and social method that synthesises embodied presence, dialogue, stillness and group intelligence.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{sptexercise.png}
\caption{SPT awareness exercise \textit{20-Minute Dance} in which one listens to the body's signals if, or how it wants to move. Photo: Jane Sverdrupsen}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{127} She 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

\textsuperscript{128} 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
Figure 50: SPT awareness exercise *20-Minute Dance* in which one listens to the body’s signals if, or how it wants to move. Photo: Jane Sverdrupsen

It sharpens self-inquiry and can bring about and challenge systemic views of social change. It is not ‘theatre’ in the conventional sense, instead it offers a blank stage for simple body postures and movements to dissolve limiting concepts, to access intuition, and to make visible both current reality, and the deeper –often invisible– points for creating profound change and future possibilities. 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\(^\text{129}\) which 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.\(^\text{130}\)

---

\(^{\text{129}}\) “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).

\(^{\text{130}}\) The Presencing Institute, 2019. See in the appendix the official instruction by the Presencing Institute for the exercise called “Village” that we practiced.
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 making the next movements within the group.
Through stillness, listening carefully to our senses, through feeling the body and by removing verbal language, SPT evoked an unspoken and the 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 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 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, 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 the 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 as a worthy tool to engage in flexibility, spontaneity to react and follow our holistic intelligence in the temporary social body. It invited us to more openness in our togetherness during the exercises and thus embodied similar questions of the previous day, of how to empower curiosity, collective thriving and the Spinozian concept of joyfulness, the amplified capacity to be affected and affect.
3.3.5 Biodanza

The second holistic social method we experienced during our second encounter –to train our listening and articulating bodies to overcome reactionary an-aesthetics— 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 practise for poetic human encounter and non-verbal communication. It was developed by Chilean psychologist, anthropologist and artist Rolando Toro in the 1970s and is based on a 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 to perceive 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; and with practice it can have a similar effect in everyday life. While we learnt in chapter 2.3.3 about Rolnik’s approach on the “colonial capitalistic unconscious” – subjectivating 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:

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 Grunenberg to guide us through such a session of vital syntony,
solidarity and deep connection to the self and others through guided playful exercises in
dance, that built trust and deep connecting.\(^{131}\)

Figure 54: Biodanza session: literally creating sensual connectivity between two dancing partners while staying connected by touching fingers. Photo: Berit Fischer

Figure 55: Biodanza session: literally creating sensual connectivity between two dancing partners while staying connected by touching fingers. Photo: Berit Fischer

\(^{131}\) 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.biodanzabernin.com.
One exercise for example was to choose a dancing partner, have two fingers touching and stay connected while dancing or another one, by looking into each other’s eyes over a length of a music track. A profoundly genuine presence and awareness for 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 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 this 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.\(^{132}\)

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

---

\(^{132}\) (Toro, 2007, p. 40, translated by me).
Grunenberg describes the Biodanza process as:

> Encounter 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.¹³³

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.

¹³³ See Grunenberg’s abstract in the appendix.
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 for the discussions to take place in. 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 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 in time before it started, and without even having them asked to, 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 were established through the verbal and more subtle non-verbal interconnecting exercises, to the foreground. Protagonist Ida C. Mårdhed, an audiovisual artist, for example, answers to the question if 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.¹³⁴

Overall this research experiment was the most successful to me in regards 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

¹³⁴ See her written interview feedback in the appendix.
for social empathy to unfold. In this experiment the wording laid on the particular focus of activating “articulating bodies” to create conscientization, a critical awareness for the existence of and to overcome reactionary an-aesthesia. The emphasis on both days to let the body articulate itself was successfully and multi-layeredly activated.

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). The protagonists 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 if they felt more connected to the others showed that moments of deep challenge and of boundaries were experienced, moments to overcome personal resistances to open up, anxieties and the uncertainty, to stay open and in curiosity. 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).

Particularly the course of this specific practice based doctoral research has made me understand and experience (more than in all my previous years of practice) is, that the curatorial making for social empathy does not only apply to create such conditions for the protagonists that attend the experiment, but very much also applies to the co-working.

135 Unfortunately, despite the good number 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 in the appendix of this chapter. The interview questions were:

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 if 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. Which leads me to assume that the methodology to reach out for potential protagonists through the 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. But it indeed would be interesting to do such experiments with protagonists from outside the creative field.
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 practitioners 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, respon-sibility and collective thriving.

Also, the preparing conversations with Carla Bergman and Nick Montomery 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. But most amazing to me was the care and respect, the 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 doctoral research, indeed can 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 on the Spinozian 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, p. 22).
All three practical PhD experiments sought to transform passive into active affections, anaesthesis 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 (Deleuze, 1978) 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.” Through the holistic methodologies applied in this practice based doctoral 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 (and e.g. 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 Meisfjord:

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 17.30-21.00h

17.30h **BERIT FISCHER**
10 minutes: short conceptual intro and of the contributors

17.40h
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)

18.00h **CARLA BERGMAN, NICK MONTGOMERY** on **Joyful Militancy**
45 minutes: carla’s and Nick’s theoretical input (with emphasis on conceptions of joyfulness, response-ability, co/re-learning, Empire)

18.45h 10 minutes toilet break

18.55 – 21h **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 practice it
Berit, carla and Nick will join the groups

19h
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.
1. 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.

2. 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 – 20.25h

5 minutes: people get food on their plates and 4 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 , Berit will not join the groups in oder 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 question:

Each responds 3 minutes to the respective question of the discussed terms

Second round of question:

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).

20.25-20.35h Break to go to toilet
Meanwhile Carla, Nick, Berit, Katrine bring rest of food and drinks in to the circle that we arrange (we want to sit in a circle, facing each other)

20.40h 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)

20.55h 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’s 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 center 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:**

**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 'antenna' 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 charge.
- 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 (YoJ, YoC, 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.
SETUP

People & Place
- Room with a clean wooden or carpeted floor
- Sufficient space so that everyone has room to move around and stand without feeling crowded
- Good to have at least 5 people, and can be practiced by large groups.

Time
The Village practice may vary between 10 to 20 minutes.

RESOURCES
www.arawanahayashi.com

PROCESS

Always maintain mindfulness of the body and awareness of the space.

Give attention to three things:

1. Level
2. Special proximity
3. Direction (which way you’re facing)

Each person uses seven ordinary activities to make the dance. It is good to limit the activity to just these seven, so that the attention of the group is on spatial relationships and timing – not on individual, personal gestures (particularly arm gestures).

The seven gestures are:

1. Stand
2. Sit
3. Lie down
4. Walk
5. Run
6. Turn
7. Greet

Part 1 - Begin
By yourself, mindfully practice the first four gestures: sit, stand, walk, and turn. Sometimes, you may also add a fifth gesture: lie down. Let your awareness expand out from the body 360 degrees – front, sides, and back. Feel present, connected to the earth and aware of the space around you.

You can practice this with your eyes closed. You can coordinate with the breath – inhaling when still and exhaling with movement – in order to support embodiment and a sense of being grounded.

After some time, shift to natural breathing and let the eyes open, without losing a sense of grounded presence.

Part 2 – Groups of 5
Next practice these five gestures in groups of five, extending awareness out to feel part of the social body. Notice your choices of spatial proximity, level and direction. We are doing each movement as fully and completely as possible with an awareness of the group social body. Stop and reflect on the experience. What did you notice? What did you learn?

Part 3 – Begin The Village Dance
With the whole group, practice running through the whole space (make sure people do not wear slippery soaks so they do not fall down). Keep your attention on the whole space. Use peripheral vision. Then add walking, so people can run or walk. Notice where your attention goes when you turn from one direction to another. Then add standing. Now you are working with running, walking, standing and turning. Continue to extend your awareness out to the whole space.

Notice two basic ways people self-organize to communicate non-verbally: clustering and imitation. People create sub-groups (frios, small “neighborhoods”) but moving closer to others. Notice where the space is dense and where it is open. Notice where people are standing still in small groups. We also communicate by imitating others who might be across the room Notice those who are walking at the same as you or running when others begin to run. Notice also that something that appears early in the practice time might be repeated later, so that a theme emerges.

Notice the patterns. Notice that the group is self-organizing and making coherence with each person’s choices. Notice what the group is co-creating in the whole space. Stop and reflect on this.
Part 4 – Noticing Others

Then add the seventh gesture, the greeting, which is a nod or a bow. It can be done standing or sitting. Offer this to a person who is directly in front of you in the Village as an acknowledgment of the shared space between two people. The greeting has three parts: acknowledge each other with eye contact, offer your greeting in the shared space, return to standing or sitting.

Part 5 – The Village Dance Practice

Now use all seven gestures. Sense yourself as part of a collective body. We shift from a group of separate individuals to a group operating as a whole. Besides paying attention to doing the movements clearly and completely, notice spatial arrangement, direction, focus, rhythm, tempo. Notice that without thinking, the dance is arising from the field.

Experienced practitioners can add complexity (movement/words) as long as the view of 360 degree awareness is maintained.

Reflection

Ask people to reflect on their experience. Speak from body. Speak from space. Keep the same sense of spacious attention in the verbal conversation that was present in the Village.

First round: open-ended questions

• What did you notice or learn in this Village?
• Share events that occurred (seeing) and feelings (sensing).

Additional questions for individual journaling or in extended group dialogue:

• What did you notice or learn regarding intimacy, distance, connection, disconnection

• How did thinking, pre-planning, judgment, and cynicism get in the way of fresh engagement and interaction

• In some cases, was there an agenda-less connection? If yes, what did this experience feel like?

• What does it mean to experience a sense of freedom? How did this affect the whole?
4) **Susu Grunenberg's abstract for her Biodanza Vivencia:**

**BIODANZA dance of life process**

Dance as an organic movement arising from the innermost center 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 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. *(Experiences in dance are 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-accuring 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 as 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).

   PS: 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 curatorial spatial and durational setups varied in each practice project of the research and brought different challenges with them. In the *Vibratile Body* the general spatial frame 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 to deepen and to unfold 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 furnishing). The private garden was chosen to serve our daily early morning Yoga practice, for sonic meditations and for personal leisure time.

In the subsequent two research projects, the spaces were curated carefully 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 shop- windows 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 needed to be given also to very practical elements like cleanliness of the floor, providing and positioning mats, carpets and alike for a comfortable non-hierarchical exchange offering comfortable body positions (lying, sitting) and to allow for best communication with each other. 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 carefully be 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 (perceived) 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 be disrupting the organic flow of the project), the dramaturgical flow and intertwinement 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 built up over time in the intensity of engaging with the fellow protagonists; allowing first to create individual self-awareness and immersion into the situation, to then getting to know the other protagonists better, and allowing 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.¹³⁶

Furthermore 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 Presencing 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 they were practiced as close as possible to their respective traditions (e.g. Yoga and meditations). The re-enactment of Lygia Clark’s multisensorial 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 obviously relied on the curator’s subjective interpretation. Apart from that, very few of the applied practices were

¹³⁶ 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 protagonist feedbacks and resulted in continued exchange with the protagonist after the project had ended.
altered or modified. If they were altered (e.g. the merging of the first person plural perspective into feedback sessions that was 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 e.g. from ancient Eastern Philosophical practices of Yoga and meditation, to 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 frictions between the different approaches. Rather the carefully selected and curated bricolage of practices and theoretical approaches, did complement the exercises, added and enriched the experience. Through their individual specificity they enhanced the experience of the making of an affective critical consciousness, social empathy and for 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 doctoral research and curatorial practice ‘anthropophagically’ incorporates most fruitful appearing transdisciplinary ideas and practices to emphasise 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, it allowed the making of a new composition and an idiosyncratic approach on 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.
Chapter 4: Conclusion

In this practice based doctoral 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 which 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 doctoral research has extended her rationale and thinking about educational contexts, by focusing on the deepening of the relational, and by incorporating alternative and holistic ways of knowledge production that move informational 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 unmediated 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 doctoral practice created research experiments, which 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 potentially micropolitical impacts as a result, such as what –thinking with Franco Berardi (2014)– I dub as “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 which below). By putting the post-representational emphasis onto aisthesthai (‘perceive’), the experiential and 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 in radical pedagogies, practices and thinking of Latin America’s 1960s and 1970s through rethinking Brazilian Paolo 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, psychoanalytic 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 Biodanza.

Contemporary Brazilian curator and theorist Suely Rolnik’s reasoning on the knowing and vibratile body, her reflections (along with Marxist theorist and activist Franco “Bifo” Berardi’s) 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), has strongly shaped the trajectory of this research. Through contemplating aspects of present-day affect theory and putting them into action in practical experiential experiments, this doctoral research not only theoretically reflected on, but actively implemented a post-representational curatorial practice, that conveyed the possibility of relational experiences by the 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 a collective body, that—in reference to Baruch Spinoza’s rationale—might be called “the relational body”. Through the experiential, REL lead us to the non-representational, 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—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 originative contribution to the field. Through these holistic methodologies the research

---

137 Through exercises of Deep Listening, contemporary radical pedagogies, and forms of convivial and relational formats such as communal living, discursive tea ceremony and a protagonist activating discursive dinner.
experiments offered a temporary new imaginary and experience; a processual production of a becoming subjectivity that aspires the 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 PhD research has practically and theoretically experimented with moving the notion of the curatorial from its history of an object and visual centered 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 the means of language based representation, it is this potential ‘distorting gap of meaning’ in representation, 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 allows 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; allowing to create an awareness of and for 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; allowing a sphere for one’s own unmediated ‘true event’ and for a curiosity and connectivity to primary sources, the pre-symbolic, the elusive unnamable 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
The research worked towards curating different ecologies for the emergence of new subjectivities and agency. Without the differing voices, 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. Fusing aesthesis with holistic transdisciplinary, non-representational and solely

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 question 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 more voice to discuss and express themselves. The most successful experiment in that respect was The Articulating Body project.

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 in creating an affective ethnography of my practice. But unfortunately it was not possible and exceeded my capacity, leaving the writing on this occasion as a bare reflective rather than a creative tool within the limits of language based representation and as a limited articulation of the sensual experience to 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 problematic 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 into the development and actual design of the sharing of the gained experiential affective knowledge, this e.g. could have been done 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 in particular on account of the short durations of the second and third research experiments. As indicated before 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 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’s (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, p.4).

Writer of live art and digital performance Toni Sant gives in his book Documenting Performance The Context and Process of Digital Curation and Archiving (2017) voice to diverse writers and offers a good overview on the subject. For instance scholars and researchers Bucknell and Sedgman (2017, p.116) point out “[...] live performance has become especially vulnerable to what we term ‘experiential fossilization’: a process of petrification led by makers that seeks to asset aoritorial control over this essential liveliness”, 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
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 doctoral practice expands not only Sternfeld’s cognitive idea of the “contact zone”, it turns the sensed embodied experience into the ‘artwork’.

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

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 e.g. offers the approach of “post-performance contemplation” as an experience on 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, p.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 tool, props and even enactments of bodily 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, archive 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, 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 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 the event for archival and documentation purpose, avoiding the attempt of communicating 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, they are subjective and open to (re-)interpretation and are inextricably linked to questions of representation. Since this whole doctoral research strives to challenge the idea of re-presentation—and that particular moment in re-presentation in which new meaning happens that Stuart Hall talks about—, an emphasis on documentary representation for the purpose of sharing the experience was not a priority.
approach on post-representational curation, I have not only challenged the tri-partition of the audience, artist, curator, but 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 of curation like in this doctoral research. Can the curator become a protagonist herself in her project, or remain a sole concever 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 conventional 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. 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 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. In this research and through my own contribution and participation, the categorical distinction between curator/artist was trespassed, disrupted, 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 encounter, care and healing into 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 body, and the

140 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 PhD research. De facto, I was the only protagonist who had the chance to experience the sustainable affects of and throughout all three research experiments. It in fact 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.

141 Curator and writer Dieter Roelstraete for example proposes to fully dissolve categories such as artist and curator in favour of “the art worker” (Stürzl, 2013).
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 to questions 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 for the interrelational, the delicate interdependencies and an empathic being together in difference. A curatorial holism that seeks to brings aesthesia (Greek: aesthēsis: with sensation), knowledge and the political together. Holism thought as the accentuation of the inter-relational and inter-connectedness of systems as wholes in general instead of divided component parts (see chapter 1.1.3).

Lacking of an existing term for such 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 transforming 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 as “real” and that which is considered as “representation”, and by accepting the responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities that come with it (see chapter 2.2.5)– 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 advance– 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 un-homey 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 counter acting curation of “presence-ing” and “pre-sensing”, that invites us to reflect upon the unseen, the subaltern, the experiential, and which 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, Bifo’s thinking (and the nexus of thinkers and educators that inspired this ‘re-search’), and with the feedback interviews of the protagonists of the Radical Empathy Lab, I indeed am 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 doctoral research, I argue, that the embodied activation of the critical consciousness, the conquering of intimacy of the one’s own awareness, does not only produce new singularities and differentiation, changes in the self, but it offers 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 doctoral curatorial examination offered a variety of affirmative affective ontological processes, that strove towards 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 inter-relational 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 doctoral exploration has opened horizons on the thinking and holistic making of micropolitical empathy within the curatorial. The emphasis lay on the social and relational of the human kind. 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 centered 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).
Bibliography


