

# HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU KNOW?

tools for spectatorship and reflection

Natalia Amelia Saied



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Tools for spectatorship and reflection

Graduation project

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My graduation project questions how an *ignorant host's pedagogy* can facilitate an *emancipated* visitor in the context of museums and dance performances. Inspired by movement improvisation principles and Jacques Rancière work, my research aims to push the boundaries of traditional art encounters and provide tools for spectatorship and reflection. I act as an independent host in both contexts guiding participants toward self-reflective inquiry and encouraging them to suspend judgment. The goal is to create a space for collective learning through threefold workshops that include attuning the senses; the art experience itself; and lastly, a reflection session using art-based tools exploring what I call the poetic labor of translation. The universal teaching principle asks "What do you think?" and by doing so heightens the norms, and expectations imposed by institutions and participants themselves, without attempting to dissolve or resolve the friction. Alternatively, the collective setting and tools, enable participants to hear diverse perspectives, share creative strategies, and embrace complexities.

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# I DANCE

Since I was little, I have been a dancer. Not necessarily a super-trained and highly gifted one. It could be said I copied Isadora Duncan unaware while being three years old in the living room of my house in Buenos Aires. Covered by fabrics I danced to whatever was sounding – an interview of a football player, The Beatles, Folklore, or silence. I kept dancing most of my life, trying to bridge what dance is supposed to be like, meaning techniques of different kinds, and my wish to connect with others and express joy. In performances, parties, and later movement improvisation jam sessions, all I enjoyed was moving energy around, affecting how a room moves/feels, and being contagious to others while simultaneously being affected by them. To me, dance was, and is, about sharing the pleasure in kinesthetics. This strong tendency led me to follow dance teaching studies, a decision that shaped so many aspects of my life; I stayed 10,000 km away from my country of origin, made a living out of performing arts, and much more.

My home base in dance is improvisation. Perhaps it is due to my poor memory to retain movement sequences, my confusion to follow counts in music, my playfulness, and humor, my fear to make mistakes, the tendency to compare myself and to feel inadequate, or my highly theatrical and sensitive nature that all together enabled me to feel strongly and express immediately. I was lucky to find a beloved teacher, Arye Bursztyn – the Contact Improvisation (I) “father” in Israel - who recognized my strengths and encouraged me to follow them. I became a dance and movement teacher to invite others to play with me. I taught what I wanted to learn, to embrace my uniqueness in movement.

Improvisation, as an open-source technique, has as many shapes and forms as people who practice it. Movement improvisation is body research (inquiry) in solo, pairs, or in group. Improvisation differs from other forms of movement techniques in its openness to interpret the exercise. Rather than asking to imitate the person who leads the session, the prompts give direction and allow as much freedom as the individual can take. To facilitate it is a delicate balance between directedness and openness. An invitation to dare physically, mentally, and emotionally while creating a welcoming commonplace for all.

Each participant has their own way to listen, translate and act. Their repertoire of movements, their audacity to stretch comfort zones, their abilities, preferences; their uniqueness. To be in improvisation is to be in discovery, and to see a dance unfolds. It is like watching a child, like watching myself and others as children, celebrating choices and laughing on falls, seeing simple things with new eyes while discovering anew the most immediate surroundings and being caught by surprise. To play with musicality, movement, or metaphor. Above all is a certain quality of attention inward and outward.

(1) Contact improvisation is a form initiated in 1972 by a group of artists in New York who through movement awareness, mutual touch, and shared weight researched joint possibilities in dance. Various founder members of the initial collective, among them Nancy Stark Smith and Steve Paxton who will be cited forward in this project, developed somatic techniques that influenced the last 50 years of prolific and diverse scene. Ray Chung, one of the pioneers, defines Contact Improvisation as "an open-ended exploration of the kinesthetic possibilities of bodies moving through contact. Sometimes wild and athletic, sometimes quiet and meditative, it is a form open to all bodies and enquiring minds." (Contact Improvisation - About, n.d.). To put a mark in time, this group is a direct consequence of Judson Dance Theater a decade before, another collective of artists from various disciplines that defined what is postmodern dance.



## put your eyes on the skin

On my first visit to an art museum in my teenagerhood, I went alone to an exhibition and found that standing statically tires me. Drains me. I moved around in the space to find comfort and stumble upon my own game; to dance while avoiding the guardian's sight. Since then, I developed the capacity to switch into a state of mind of choreographing daily life. I shift intentionality and the dance unfolds. This bodily attention finds its way into museums, but also into airports, waiting rooms, buses, theaters, cinemas, and other public spaces. I play with time by slowing down gestures or speeding up a walk across the street. I add some ornaments to a functional action with intention, I release tension by choosing the energy invested in a movement, and I consciously craft a spatial relationship with others or objects. (2)

For some years I fantasized to create a project that brings awareness to the body into museums. This fantasy is what brought me to MEiA. Through the education prism, I wanted to share a take on art. Following that image, I called my research *Hidden Dance*. Back then I described my main focus as a practice of solitude in public spaces. Throughout the first year, I found myself explaining that it isn't about dance but about kinesthetic pleasure. After that, for some time it was named *Bodily Poetics*, following how I sense more than reality, in between lines and translate. After several months, including plenty of conversations and a few try-outs, crystalized that my practice isn't about how I feel but rather my willingness to facilitate spaces to be attentive and witness how we meet the outside world inside of us, catching the very first affective glimpse and seeing how it ripples.

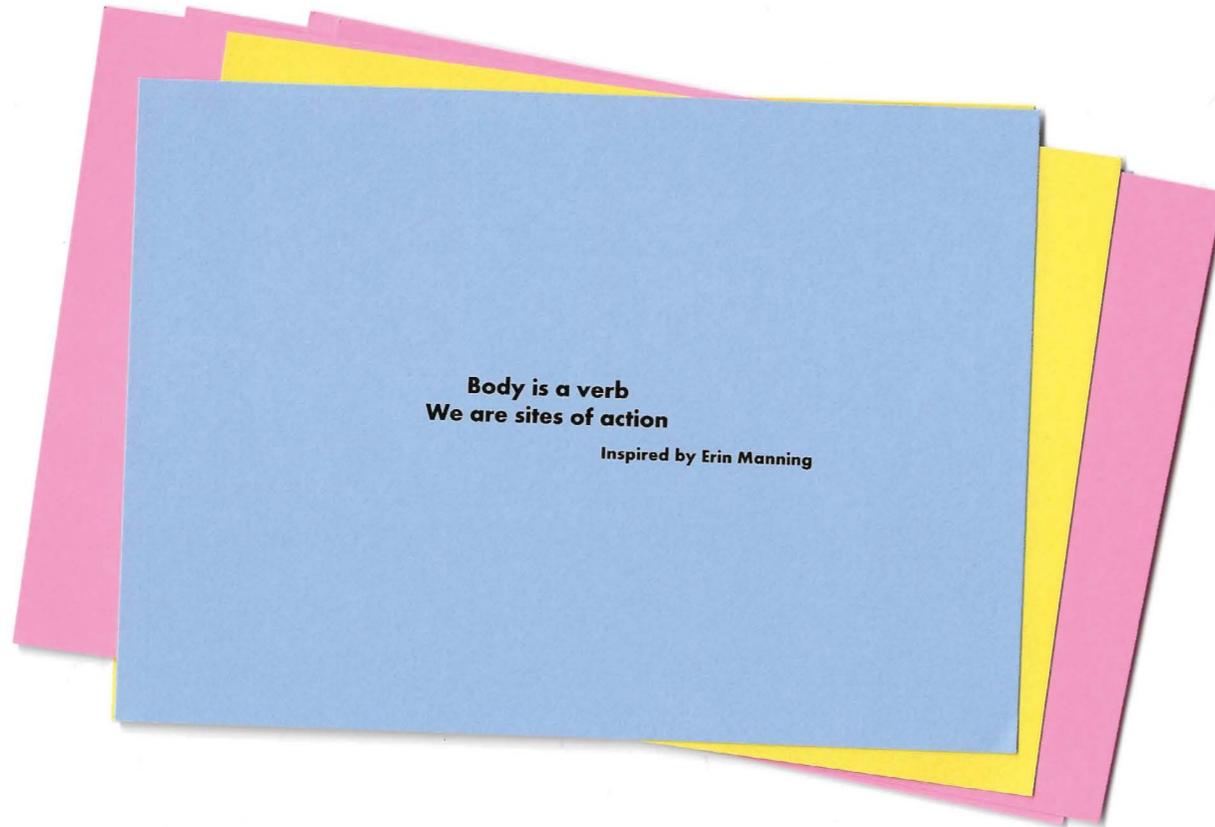
I had a strong felt sense nucleus but the frame wasn't clear yet. I opened MEiA's second year with two main questions; Who is my audience and which need can my graduation project answer? Following these threads, for a couple of months, *accessibility* was a leading concept. I envisioned this body-centered practice in museums that welcomes diversity – neurological, physical, and other. I followed this path while having conversations, reading, and visiting organizations in this field. By the end of this process, I understood that *accessibility* is inherent to my practice but isn't my main focus.

**A “choreographic mind” is a mind that has “a kind of spatial emotional map of a situation. The emotional psychological reading of place of people in relation to that place and each other”**

Susan Rethorst (Bridge, 2012)

(2) I raise a hand. I flex my fingers. Circle my head. Arch my back. I observe from different angles and from the corners of my eyes. I move through the halls. Watch other people as they move through the room. I move away from guardians. I sit on the floor – sometimes as a transgressive act, sometimes an acceptable one. With headsets on, I listen to my own soundtrack, or with bare ears just to sounds. I enjoy myself in this playful and solitary game.

**body is a verb  
we are sites of action**



Conversations are central to my way of understanding myself, my relations, and the world around me. I construct meaning, deconstruct bias and become aware through dialogue. Conversations play a vital role in this thesis as well. I think out loud, alone and with others, and the dialogue with its reflection propels the process: with my supervisors, peers, and friends, going back to literature and holding open-ended questions. The answers came mostly while I did seemingly nothing: during a walk, in the early morning coffee, taking a long shower, or while being in an audience. Art provides for me a space of reflection, gives me the ultimate conditions to meet myself, and hosts me. Purposefully, I created opportunities first for myself, and then to invite others to experience art that leave blanks for answers to pop up.

In MEiA, I was asked repeatedly to define what is my pedagogic practice. I found the term unclear and distant and therefore couldn't answer it. What does it mean? For me was clear, I have a practice and it is my pedagogy. Towards the end of the first trimester of the second year, I was asked once again, but this time phrased differently. Then I could hear: What do I want to learn for myself? What do I want to teach others?

I held these questions and went alone to a long, repetitive, analytical, aesthetic dance performance. My mind drifted, delighted by the movement, inattentive from what was explained about the performance and what I was supposed to see there. The questions that I carried with me fell into place and answers landed gently. Seeing movement moves me internally. I journaled the following cloud of words during the performance:

CARE

VULNERABILITY

FRAGILE  
POETICS

My  
Sensitivity

highly  
sensitive

is a resource more  
than an impediment

MEETING HUMANITIES  
MAKING SPACE TO  
MEET

HOSPITALITY

Channeling information,  
like following a recipe  
you are guided and also  
can change it

AGENCY

Traces of joy

WITNESSING OTHER'S RESEARCH

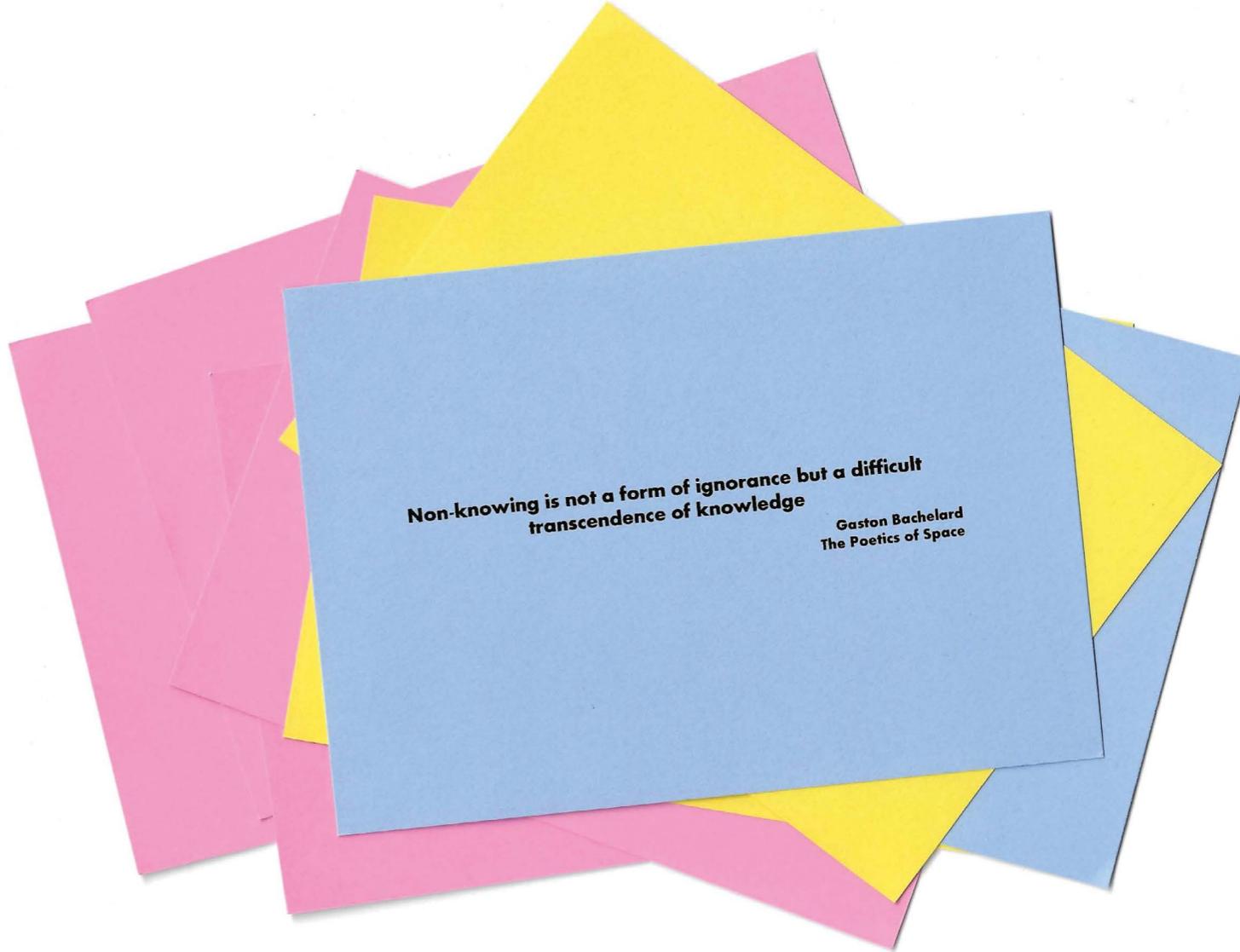
PUT TOGETHER FOR OTHER PEOPLE OPTIONS TO  
WIDEN BE PRESENT PARTICIPATE

SHARE ENCOURAGE a deeper CONNECTION

FINDING ALTERNATIVES IN COLLECTIVE SETTINGS

GIVING CONDITIONS - HOLDING SPACE

A process ripped between *hosting, agency, collective, and body.*  
I kept all these parts separately and together and carried them along.



**Non-knowing is not a form of ignorance but a difficult  
transcendence of knowledge**

Gaston Bachelard  
The Poetics of Space

# NON- KNOWING

Together with a group of friends, we went to see a dance evening composed of two pieces. The first was a duet performed by a male and female dancer recreating a couple attraction-friction-separation-reconnection. The second was performed by a female dancer who moved slowly on the floor, falling and raising, holding impossible positions, and releasing. After the show we exchanged thoughts. One of my friends found the duet more interesting than the solo, since in that part, she could understand what the piece intended to communicate but in the second part, she couldn't grasp it. She preferred a linear, narrative, clear plot. Personally, I prefer landscapes of the body that resemble meditation; thoughts drift, come and go, and I enjoy them all. Some get caught in the net, and some do not. Another friend commented that watching dance is a skill that you acquire with years of experience.

It wasn't the first time I heard this kind of comment about dance, that feels opaque and ungraspable. As someone who danced for many years, and I have watched dance regularly, the question of how to guide the audience in dance and how to encourage people to surrender to the abstract offer in dance has been a recurrent topic in my life. What could be a suitable way to share the skill of watching dance? I realized after this conversation that I found a need that my practice can answer. To enable more-of-the body to be involved while spectating dance performances and visual arts; Body as a verb to experience art; to "sense- having" art from the body.

The spectatorship in museums and dance performances have similarities. Both disciplines are mostly abstract and the artist's intention and vision are open for interpretation. This nonlinear invitation where the visitor is left to "choose their adventure" may provoke bewilderment in the audience, or to put it colloquially; that they "don't get it". Generally speaking, the text on the wall of an exhibition or leaflet in a performance tries to bridge and mediate between the audience and the meaning-making of the work that is presented.

## non-knowing

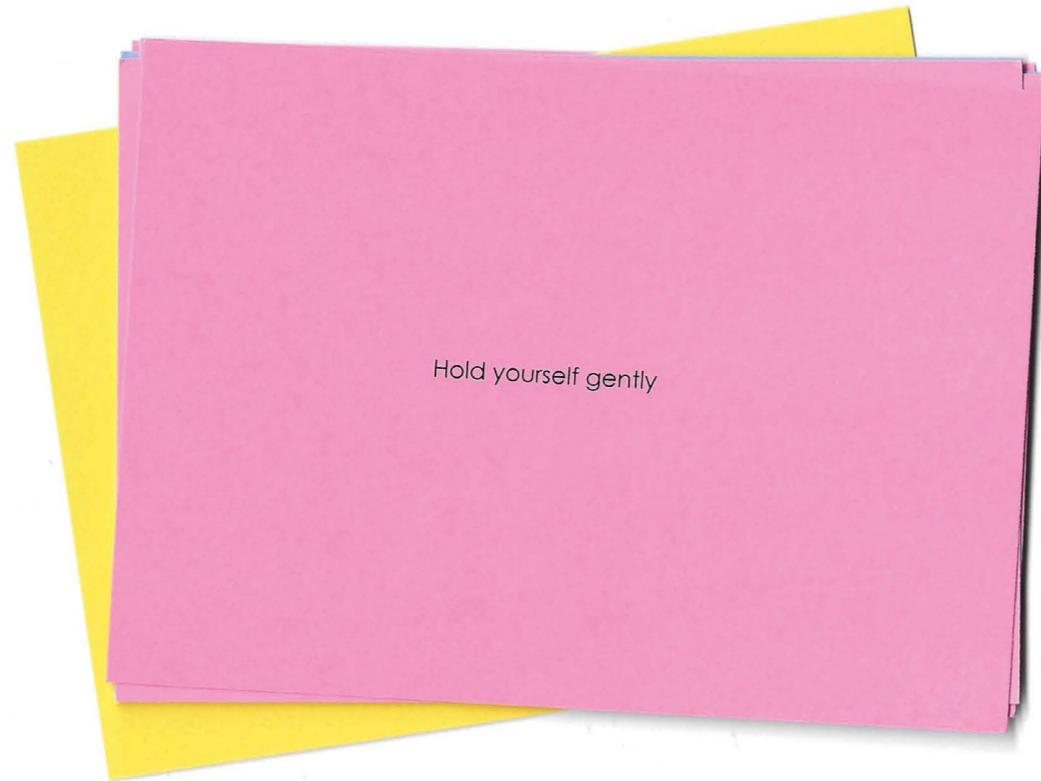
While sharing thoughts on dance audiences with another friend whose expertise is in communication for performing arts in general and dance in particular, she shared with me that she finds most interesting the “after-after-talk” with the audience. By that, she meant the conversations that happen after a Q&A session with makers and experts. She explained that in an informal setting, audience members share the less knowledgeable thoughts and questions. Then, there is a place “not to get it” and say it openly.

Lastly, reflecting out loud with another good friend, I realized that I am the one that needs the space to not know when it comes to dance. When I don't like a performance, my judgment jumps and deletes any good, depriving me of enjoyment. I become grumpy and condescending to what I just witnessed. Maybe being alone decreases the need to prove my knowledge? It seems that in my eyes, and maybe not only, to be knowledgeable is to be critical, and being critical means negative. I mentioned my limited capacity to reference other works or disciplines, and my friend answered: “referencing is one valid way to reflect upon art. The fragile state of sensing without knowing is another one”, pointing at my graduation project.

My inner critic was savoring ignorance and I thought that I hold two positions, one for each discipline: as a spectator in dance performances, I am not knowledgeable enough, whether in museums, I am ignorant by choice.

The words knowing and ignorant had walked with me always, and in the last few years, I have been looking closely at them. How much do I know? Am I entitled, legitimate to act, and to say? They are part of the last big shift in my life, where I left my second home and ventured into a new third country. I embrace what I called a “beginners mind” or at least that is what I aspired to. Otherwise, how to start over in a Germanic language landscape, back to school at the age of fortysomething, accepting that I know a few things, much of it I cannot name or quantify, but I embody it fully. This research project is the process of taking ownership of my ignorance and my knowledge while sharing my translations.

## dissolving hierarchies



Following the conversations, I recalled a paper that I read at the beginning of my project trajectory, *The Ignorant Museum* (2018) by Emilia Stizia. Stizia refers to Jacques Rancière's book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation* (2003). Rancière relates the story of Joseph Jacotot, an educator that succeeds in the impossible task of teaching French to a group of Flemish students while he doesn't speak their language. The way he went about was offering the students to learn through a French original book that has been freshly translated into Flemish. Eventually, the students learned the language outstandingly through their attempt to "observe, repeat, fail, try and verify" following the key actions in a learning process (Rancière in Stizia, 2018, p.78).

Rancière describes the universal teaching principles as a horizontal relationship between people's intelligence, emphasizing that differences between individuals lay on their wish to comprehend or engage with something, rather than inherent pre-conditions that determine their capacities, or in his words; there is "a will that commands and an intelligence that obeys" (Ibid, p.75). The effort to explain something creates an artificial separation between intelligence as if whoever explains knows better than who receives the explanation. In this reduction of the relationship between teacher-student, the liberation comes from asking a simple question: what do you think?

## dissolving hierarchies

In her text, Stizia's (2018) discerns between meaning-making out of the knowledge exhibited, and knowledge creation within the visitor. She describes the tension that museums are entangled in between being experts and being a public space, where the audience can construct their own meaning. Rather than offering information, she suggests that the museum can become a progressive institution and a site of learning, where the knowledge is formed by the visitor, in a holistic way within their net of associations and chain of connections.

Similarly to her approach, the workshops I designed focus on the participants' experience and their fullest being, offering a playground to observe oneself and others: mirroring, complementing, and contrasting experiences. It isn't about the art but about the art experience. Therefore, it dissolves hierarchies between viewers and authorities; it enables an encounter between equals. The workshops try to remove the assumption that there is a right way to experience art, or how it should be. No one knows better, just differently.

The decision to offer workshops in two different frames, art museums, and dance performances was both an intuitive and assertive one. In both cases, the art is mainly abstract, and the silent dictation of how a spectator should behave and what they should take away ignited my actions. I decided to act as an independent host in both frames, departing from movement improvisation. I offer open-ended prompts to facilitate tools for spectatorship before the art encounter, or sometimes during. I embrace universal teaching principles by posing questions to provoke each participant to search for a personal and unique answer and enhance the sense of ownership in their experience of art.

The artistry in teaching lies in encouraging personal searches for each and every individual to connect to their previous experiences, tendencies, and knowledge. By setting conditions for others to be curious about themselves, I try to invite (them, and myself) to disengage from what the outcome or result should be, and what is the subject of learning. Rancière explains and I translate freely from the text translated to Spanish: who searches always finds, not always what they search or what should find, but finds something new to relate to what they know already, the attention is searching for connections is what makes us learn (Rancière, 2003, p.22).

From the premises, I formulated my **research question:**  
**How can an *ignorant host's pedagogy* facilitate an *emancipated visitor* to both museums and art performances?**

My ignorance is about the art. I don't explain to participants what is there for them to take away. I do share a practice of improvisation as a mechanism to expand the contemplative lens by which we might perceive nuanced attunement. By attunement I refer to the attention, of allowing myself to be sensible towards what happens inside and outside; fine-tuning the senses. Consequently, the question "Am I doing what I want to do or am I following my habits?" awakens agency in participants to set their own conditions. Whether it is in a street, in the central station as a preparation for an art encounter, in the theater foyer, sitting in the darkness of the black box, or standing in the white cube, the possibility to check-in, is a base for choosing for yourself.

I called this project **HOW DO YOU KNOW WHEN YOU KNOW?** because it leaps back to the visceral confirmation and enhances self-assurance.

## big word: methodology

When I was asked what was my project's methodology, it sounded like such a big word that I couldn't answer. Immediately, I started to search for research approaches that suited my practice. In this search, I found out that methodology means how to create knowledge and with which tools and mechanics I choose to work. This project is a combination of several tools that inspired me throughout the way. Each of them informed or formed stages. Some upfront, others retrospectively.

The first method I chose was *movement improvisation*. Each time, I offered different prompts and in varied ways: guiding personally, or with written words; in a booklet with a sequential order or loose cards to choose from (and you see here in between pages); or giving only one. I planned every workshop after I had done the previous one, feeding forward what I had learned, based on the joint reflection with participants about their experience and my own.

The second method I found, since the very first pilots before embarking on this project, was *DAS Theatre feedback* (previously called *DASarts Feedback Method. Feedback Method, n.d.*). Developed in the frame of the DAS Theatre Master program in Amsterdam, the method serves to discuss interdisciplinary works in collective settings. The motivation to create this method was to reduce the stress in the feedback sessions after a student's work presentation, and instead create a learning instance for all – a focused manner to be an audience and non-threatening conditions to hear back from the audience's voice.

The full format is over an hour long and includes a moderator, a strict time management and around 9 steps with great care to who presented their work. In my graduation project, I scaled it down, to offer a half-hour conversation inspired by their questions that allow participants to reflect on their experience, which I moderated myself. *The DAS Theatre feedback method* enables to ask critical questions to develop further a work and also offers a real constructive frame to listen since it focuses on what is present and needs from the audience, rather than emphasizing what the work lacks.

My selected questions from the method were:

- What worked for you?
- Do you have (open) questions to ask about the workshop setting?
- What reminds you of what we just did?
- Do you have any tips and tricks?

Sometimes I asked them all, or only one. It varied from group to group and I was responsive to the interest of the participants.

By the time I was asked how I form knowledge, I realized that the method gave me access to the experience of the participants but was missing one part; I missed the stance where the participants have their time to form their own experience. I wanted to prolong the time and allow reflection, and not only feedback. I found the third method in Mathew Reason, audience and arts-based researcher, that coordinated years ago a multidisciplinary research focused on audience responses to dance performances: *The Watching Dance Project (Watching Dance: Kinesthetic Empathy, 2015)*.

## to dwell in translation

Matthew Reason mentions that the audience is “doing something”. He explains that perception is holistic, much is unknown and engages vast parts of oneself. In his approach, the spectator holds two levels of perception; outwards to the performance and inward to how it ripples in them. This simultaneity enables us to be very close and at a distance from the artistic manifestation, being an insider and outsider. In his words “how being a spectator entails both conscious, interpretative processes of meaning-making and embodied, affective processes of sense having” (Reason, 2010, p.20).

Reason designs creative mechanics to access what the audience is “doing” while watching a performance. Some examples are: offering creative writing workshops to process a theater piece asking visitors to point out where in their body the performance resonates as a survey, working with plasticine to form their experience, and much more. Although we come from different perspectives and have different purposes, he studies the dance experience and I try to facilitate tools for spectatorship, I find his work helpful to understand what I do intuitively, and confirms that doing research can be a learning opportunity for participants.

Our lived experiences are a complex matter and attempting to communicate what is beyond language, the ineffable, requests practice and patience. The interaction after the art experience in any language – symbolic or verbal – in their translation is the way the audience takes ownership of their experience. This is the opportunity to rediscover themselves and create a new experience “gaining a sense of self-knowledge, or new skills or new perceptions” (Reason, 2010, p.32).

With this in mind, the reflection space became inherent and prominent in the process, where the participants recollect (harvest) and yet process or prolong what they experience(d) and keep experiencing. To allow participants to find their own gems in the art experience, about their own crafted choices, whether it was how they walked through an exhibition or how the internal movements appeared while watching a performance or participating in a workshop. All of them are intuitively made, intelligently chosen, and observing themselves observing.

Far from evaluating their engagement, the reflection is about making the experience valuable for themselves. Each and everyone who has been in the room has the liberty to feel, think, feel-think, and formulate. The art experience is not only what people perceive during the performance with their whole being, but also what they do after, long after. In fact, the experience doesn’t end. The performance or museum visit has the potential to leave traces in each person that isn’t the art itself, but their way of engaging with everything that evokes in them – multiple contents as Reason says (Reason, 2010, p.26).

*The Laboratory on Feedback in Artistic Processes 2 (Laboratory on Feedback in Artistic Processes 2, n.d.)* brought additional inspiration and insights into the reflection sessions. In the project, dancers and dance scholars gave feedback to each other in more than verbal or visual options, such as dancing as feedback. I was not brave enough to include this option in my project but I am eager to try this out in the future. Maybe a dance hand, a handshake, may touch, or any other way to express with the body.

For each workshop, I chose different tools to dwell with participants in translation. I invited participants to translate their inner landscape and to capture an essence that goes beyond words, located in the corner of the eye of consciousness. I wished I had more time to try out additional forms.

## research-creation

After I finished the series of workshops, I finally found time to read Sarah E. Truman's book *Feminist Speculations and the Practice of Research-Creation Writing Pedagogies and Intertextual Affects* (2021). The aim was to give a conceptual language and a framework to my graduation project and I see it as the fourth and overarching method.

Research-creation refers to the development of knowledge through artistic events and writing in dialogue with theory processes; it is a present continuous action rather than reflection post facto. Choosing *research-creation* implies that there is a distinct artistic quality to my workshops and research writing, a fact that I have been avoiding relating so far. I curate an experience, set the scores, and invite people to be in them. I find it hard to call my act art or artistic, although it is situated in art institutions and relates to works of art.

Truman defines *events* as interdisciplinary and stands at the intersection of arts practices, theory, and research (Ibid, XV). On recurrent occasions, participants called the workshop a curated or crafted event. The reason was that it is not only a workshop, a performance and a reflection session but it creates something larger than its parts. For the same reason, and because of the text, I hesitated about adapting the term *event* to describe my practice. Although it is a more accurate description, I will stick to the word *workshops* for the meetings I hosted under this research practice.

I will describe below aspects from research-creation I find most relevant for my practice. One of *research-creation* characteristics is the "ethical commitment to learning to become affected" (Derek McCormack in Truman, 2021, p.11-12). *Affects* in this case, among all the possible definitions, is the readiness to be affected by people and circumstances, and to affect conversely. I relate to my trajectory as constantly being shaped by conversations, practice, theory, and reflections. The lack of linearity that *affects* bring into the process contributes to the sense of *queer time/space* for the entire process and in each event. As it was mentioned in several workshops, the experience is non-linear and similarly to them, I experiment over these pages.

The unknowingness of the process, where there is no pre-determination, allowed me to witness what *emerged*. The humbleness to truly observe and learn, rather than direct speaks also to the principles of universal teaching and improvisation. Truman mentions that being accountable for all consequences and staying open to any reaction, whether accepting or rejecting, is an *affirmation* of the not-knowing and the responsibility towards the happenings, also when friction is in place, or even provoked by choice (Ibid, p.20-22). The term *hospitality* references to Derrida's explanation, as a total surrender to any guest that might appear without previous notice. By defining myself as host, I engage with the term *hospitality* in different ways and is recurrent throughout my research.

Truman speaks of (in)tensions as the direction and constraints that are part of the curatorial practice that planning research entails and calls it *rigorous activation*. It is about creating what I want to research, from the artistic event stemming from years of training and experience, choosing the literature that fuels and the methods to look through (Ibid, p.14-15).

In my first reading, I thought this term refers to my years as a movement improvisation facilitator and as a producer in performing arts, hosting people in events to meet, discuss, participate, and experience. During the writing process, I realized that my *rigorous activation* includes not only the artistic and pedagogic aspects of the project but also the academic. By being in search for a language to describe and share, how I engage with a text, and how I bring this whole project to coherence. And even how to trust myself better, to become more confident in my translations.

The graduation project is *more-than-representational*; it is a dialogue and a creation in itself. In this practice, I could remove layers, make connections, nuance my position, and unlearn how I speak about the project in a less romantic, and more anchored way. I could sense how I know when I know.

# WORKSHOPS

## we have a date!

I decided to host a series of 6 workshops: 3 in museums in Rotterdam and 3 in dance performances at Theater Rotterdam. I made some arbitrary-instinctive decisions and decided to offer one event per week from mid-February to the end of March. I looked at Theater Rotterdam's agenda to choose three dance performances I chose those I was curious about the makers. Then, I could fill in three art institutions in the city: Kunsthal, Melly, and Stedelijk Museum.

I wrote an informal invitation describing briefly what my project is about and included a simple form to choose from the 6 opportunities to join that I sent via email to friends, colleagues, peers, and acquaintances, following the thought that the project's audience is anyone curious about dance and visual arts, has mind space and time to meet up in the setting of a 3 hours length event.

Some dates filled up quickly, others not. Most of the people who expressed interest, showed up. Others joined last minute. I planned a maximum of 10 participants per group, knowing that fluctuations happen. I succeeded in realizing 5 out of the 6 workshops with 35 participants in total. The one canceled was planned for a dance performance for young audiences. I intended it for an adult audience, but it was misunderstood as a family activity and it didn't go through.

The atmosphere in the 5 workshops was mostly festive and open.; participants arrived gradually and introduced themselves to each other, mentioning how they knew me or heard about my invitation. It felt like a small celebration of my two years and a half in The Netherlands.

In every workshop, I shared firstly what is my graduation project about in a sentence, and gave a brief explanation of the day structure. Each time the introduction looked a bit different because of the location and the content. Two museum visits started outside of the institutions, and one we dove directly into the exhibition using the foyer as starting point. In the case of a dance performance, we met an hour and a half beforehand to go through a workshop, to then have a cup of tea and chat before watching together the performance. One workshop started in Rotterdam Centraal, the other in Theater Rotterdam.

I encouraged participants to ask questions and also to embrace non-understanding. I suggested that they can do what feels comfortable, or the opposite; it is their choice how much to engage. In the case of the museum, I disclaimed that the additional layer of information in the written prompts I provided may conflict and ask from them to negotiate with the material, themselves, and the exhibition.



# RECIPROCITY

**As one might wonder about the world in words, I am wondering the world directly, in movement; I am actively exploring its possibilities and what I perceive in the course of that wondering or exploration is enfolded in the very process of moving**

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (Manning, 2014, p.166)

(3) Steve Paxton recorded the [Small Dance](#) which exemplifies all the happenings and experiences of a body standing and describes the state of dance (Audio Recording of Steve Paxton Guiding "the Small Dance," n.d.)

## **Workshop I: reciprocity**

Theater Rotterdam  
OHM by Anne van den Broek  
workshop place: Centraal Rotterdam  
February 17th

## **Inspiration**

I found James J. Gibson, the American ecological psychologist's description that one discovers the surroundings through ways of moving and touching, a good manner to define how I perceive art and what I offer as tools (Godard & Bigé, 2019, p.95,98). Kinetic action allows us to embed ourselves into the world, to move in it, and move it simultaneously. This awareness of reciprocity is a generous action of sharing mutual dependence; it is an unconditional and unavoidable *hospitality*.

Gibson's work has been a big influence on Steve Paxton (3), one of the founders of contact improvisation. Paxton coined the term becoming-territory to explain the interconnectivity in the sense that others "pass" through me and I pass through others; We are common territories, not subjects isolated (Ibid). For the first workshop, I was inspired by this capacity to soften oneself and open to any "visitor" that will arrive, as a state of inquiry in public space for preparation, and as an audience member inside the theater.

While defining my position as a facilitator, I delved into the term *hospitality*, as I already mentioned. The etymology contains interesting contradictions. Hospitality derives from "hospes" originally in Arabic meaning "host", "guest", or "stranger". And the word "hospes" is formed from "hostis", which means "stranger" or "enemy"; the latter being where terms like "hostile" derive (Wikipedia Contributors, 2019). Through Derrida's prism, I asked who can enter arts institutions, and under which conditions, and envisioned the position of the host as an unconditional threshold that allows everyone to come in for the temporality that the visit lasts. Derrida points out the contradiction between the openness that is inherent in the act of welcoming and the demand that the visitor should speak the host language to be accepted.

## reciprocity

### Workshop

In the first workshop, I was nervous and rehearsed the session to be as precise as possible, timed my explanations, recorded and listened to my instructions, and imagined the movement in Centraal's huge hall. The workshop included 5 prompts, each 5 minutes long for exploration. By the end of each prompt, we met at a pre-agreed location in the huge hall. The prompts were:

#### 1 Practicing peripheral and focus sight

Stand inside the station while watching outside into the city.

Use your eyes as cameras, getting closer, focusing, or blurring. How do you edit your view?

#### 2 Listening

While being in the middle of the hall, close your eyes and listen. What is the sound landscape that Centraal has at this time of the day? Can you hear announcements, traces of conversations, mobile tunes, clothes, objects?

#### 3 Resonate

Look around at the people crossing the station.

Choose each time someone who calls for your attention.

Can you feel their style in moving? Maybe their pace, or energy, how they organize their way, themselves? From close by or afar try to inhabit their movement, in your imagination or physically.

#### 4 Shapes, lines, and mechanics

Pay attention to the big mechanisms that make this gigantic beast work.

Moving lines, statics. What stays, what rotates?

How does it feel to move with them or stand still while they change?

#### 5 Inner tide

What happens if we look at the movement of the mass. What patterns are drawn in space? What is the movement of people entering and leaving the platform area?

## reciprocity

People roamed, ran, walked afar, and got mixed with the crowd. Sometimes it took me a while to find them. Some were carried away by the invitations following the architecture or into their somatic sensations, or by people passing by. The 5 minutes frame felt a bit short for some and long enough for others. On the last prompt, we came together as a group at one specific point and formed a row near the gates. We became witnesses to what happened in front of us, and simultaneously a performance in ourselves in a kind of choreographed form.

After we finished the session in Centraal we walked together to Theater Rotterdam. We sat around a table, pulled chairs for all, and had tea. A picnic in the theater foyer. Before entering the show, I asked to suspend the question "what did you think about it?" immediately after the show. I invited the participants to pay attention inwards, clarifying that there will be time and space for opinions, impressions, memories, and other stories that connect to what we have seen.

Once the show was over, we gathered back in one side of the foyer, and for 20 minutes or a bit more, everyone engaged in translating into paper their experience: write, draw, fold, smash, paste, cut, staple, or any other variation. Personally, this time in making, was a chance to stay with the unknown, and what was not yet formed, labeled, or recognizable; it was time for negotiation with raw material, that slowly unfolded naming its parts.

reciprocity





## reciprocity

### Contextualizing my practice: *Context program*

In The Netherlands, many theaters have *context programs* for audiences as a complementing activity to better understand (and enjoy) the performances offered. These include introductions, after-talks, podcasts, and any other ways of engaging the audience in a conversation. One example is *Het Laatste Woord (The Last Word)* which takes place for over ten years at Theater Rotterdam. The professionals that initiated this program published a small book explaining the rationale behind it: *De Taal van de toeschouwer (The Language of the Spectator, 2017)*.

The Last Word is a format for a conversation right after the performance between audience members and a host, in the absence of the director or choreographer. Similarly to my research, they emphasize the aspect of sharing among equals, offering an alternative to the expert explanation of what the piece is about or providing insights about the creation process. The language of the spectator includes Rancière's conceptualization as well, explaining that the audience is a free-acting being and doesn't need to be liberated but heard or at least not bothered with explanations (Ibid, p.22).

The main difference between *The Last Word* and my graduation project is in how the language of the spectator is constructed. I offer tools for spectatorship before a show and invite to reflect afterward otherwise. The language can be verbal, or visual, can be linear but also metaphorical, can be spoken or just written. I suggest prolonging the pre-reflective state to dwell in translation, to break a learned behavior of encapsulating into words following known paths of thought. In both cases we ask the same question: "what do you think", convinced that everyone has an answer and curious to hear it.

## reciprocity

### Reflection & feedback

Following the feedback method questions, we started the conversation. Several participants talked about the influence of the workshop while watching the dance performance, that I consider them strategies. Someone mentioned playing with the sight as a camera, focusing on details, and widening into peripheral sight catching the whole stage. Another participant mentioned she felt empathy towards the dancers and felt their movement from within. Others added that they could stay in focus and accept the experience regardless of their dislike or resistance to the piece; to surrender to it. It was mentioned that the preparation enhanced an active position as an audience and made the encounter in a sense reciprocal – I see a performance, the performers see me, and I see myself.

The workshop and the group setting had an effect on the participants that allowed to open up their senses, foster concentration, and created an anchor to return to while watching the performance. Being part of the group and knowing that by the end of the performance there will be a shared moment created commitment and awareness towards the show, oneself, and fellow audience members.

## reciprocity

I offered to ask open questions about the project. I am almost sure that *DAS Theatre feedback* initiators didn't mean the maker should answer them, but to collect information of what requests refinement. In this setting of people voluntarily participating in my workshop, I felt that I "owed" them an answer, as if it was my duty to follow ancient traditions of *hospitality*. I used the words *emancipation*, *spectator*, and *ignorant host* to answer. The word *ignorant* resonated strongly and I was asked if I knew what is the piece about. Knowledge. Someone voiced that she would rather have had a different preparation. Although is a personal preference, I decided to prepare the next workshop according to material about the performance, in the same manner that I visit a museum before inviting others to join. I can know things about the art experience and still be an ignorant host.

The conversation at Theater Rotterdam continued until we were requested to leave the foyer and move to the bar, where more than half of the group grabbed a beer and chilled on Friday night.

7.  
I hear many voices  
and they are the artist's  
voices among them.

# SABOTAGE

## **Workshop 2: Sabotage**

Kunsthal Rotterdam  
Workshop at Museum Park  
Friday, March 3

### **Contextualizing my practice: *Art mediation***

The way I envision my position in a museum is as a movement facilitator. I only met the term *art mediation* in conversations with education department people in museums as part of the research while already running the workshops. I found that the term is being used widely, and diversely. For example, the *Louvre* defines art mediation as how all information meets visitors, whether they are objects, curatorial decisions, or guides (*The Concept of Mediation | What Is Museum Lab? Louvre - DNP Museum Lab, 2023*).

For *MANIFESTA European nomadic biennial of contemporary art*, mediation is about inviting a group of visitors to contemplate together and converse about their opinions and ideas while walking the exhibition. The mediator's role is to keep the group dialogue and supplement it with information when needed, to facilitate a better engagement with the artworks and promote collective understanding (*What Is Art-Mediation? - Manifesta10*, n.d). For the 10th edition, they published a workbook with a chapter titled *An Emancipated Visitor* that uses prompts to raise criticality, similar to my graduation project. Some examples are: an invitation to move slower than usual in the museum; or to look at other visitors, instead of the art; or suggests to edit curatorial texts (Manifesta Workbook, n.d.). I enjoyed finding additional allies and also measuring the host's role importance, and the group setting.

## sabotage

### Workshop

Although this group was the smallest and counted 5 members, working in a big museum was a challenge to keep track of the group and each participant's pace. We gathered on the Museum Park, by Kunsthal entrance. I described the day structure; starting with a brief session outside, a visit to two exhibitions, and a reflection session lastly.

The attunement part invited for 15 minutes exploration and was composed by 2 prompts:

#### 1. Follow your eyes

small details, big pictures, a nest, a tall tree, and people inside and outside the building.

What is the museum's surrounding?

#### 2. Step on different surfaces

gravel, stones, grass, asphalt, and in different inclinations; ramps, or stairs.

Try to bring your mind to your feet, balancing your weight on different surface's resistance or texture.

We entered together the museum, went through the box office, and cloakroom, and gathered just before entering the main hall. Then I gave every participant one booklet, a notebook, a pen, and a bag to carry all the items. I also explained where we will meet after 60 minutes and that I would take care of the time, and call them for the reflection.

Here are 2 examples from the 12 pages booklet:

-1-

Welcome

This is an invitation to play with your attention between the richness that surrounds us and arises in us. Through curious observation, let the words resonate after you read each prompt for as long as you want. Then, you can follow to the next one, or re-read it, as many times as you wish.

-2-

Choose a spot to be present in this space.

Be present for your own pleasurable contemplation.

Admire your senses while standing, walking or maybe sitting?

## sabotage

Something in me that day was not as accurate as I wished. I was responsive to what people did and said. There is a way of guiding that takes potential unclarity and names them upfront to reduce confusion. I couldn't provide it. The museum was full. Passages in the maze-like building were closed, it was noisy and I needed to make changes on the go where to meet for the concluding session. I couldn't anticipate how people would move around. Someone came late, and another felt uneasy. My planning was too dense, trying to cover two big exhibition halls in one hour. Half of the group saw only one. I found myself chasing after participants, worried if they were doing fine, suggesting to go in this or that direction, but I lost mine.

### Finding language to name choices

I found in phenomenology studies a language to describe accurately what seems ineffable, on how to approach human experience, consciousness, and the way we construct meaning. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, one of the initial voices in this philosophy branch, elaborated on perception and defined the body as the primary site of knowing. He explains, similarly to Gibson, that by interacting with the world, the body and its environment reciprocally define each other. The perception happens simultaneously and interactively in different senses, with the "whole being" in his words, and captures its unique form (Pallasmaa, 2005, p.23).

I choose phenomenology as the medium to explain the lived experience and lived body in movement, as many dancers-researchers. One of the prominent voices in the intersection between dance and phenomenology is Maxine Sheets-Johnstone that defines *corporeal consciousness* as the pre-linguistic stage that brings information from kinetic and the emotional to later confluence with awareness (Hermans, 2015, p.5). In both, the booklet and the attunement session, I tried to bring the fascination of the lived experience into a relatively easy-access and playful form for participants. I think about how to evoke the whole being, creating conditions that address more than the rational, and not only physical attention.

## sabotage

### Reflection & feedback

The reflection session started with the invitation to the participants to write a concise descriptive text of just a few lines, HAIKU-like. From this short text and their notes in the notebook, we continue to extract a few words and write them on sticky notes. Together we displayed all sticky notes on the table and tried to find the connections between them, and moved them around. Such a contrast between participants' backgrounds and reactions towards the exhibition! Some were delighted, while others felt abjection.

In the same setting, I asked the question "what worked for you?", which led to an open dialogue. For some participants, the booklet offered a calm island to be in and phrased it as: "strong sense of self" "a space in a space", "shield" or "immersed". One participant mentioned that this state is fragile and easy to lose, another that this made her set her own conditions on how she walks the hall; One last participant added that she became aware of being overwhelmed and that it increased her discomfort.

Although I left aside purposefully sociological theories that inspect the powers in art institutions, without mentioning Bourdieu, Foucault, or other texts of Rancière or many others, the workshops raised questions and caused friction with codes of behavior. Some mentioned that we take for granted the structures where we see art, including the irritation caused by the constraints within a museum. Some called the workshop a *sabotage* to curatorial decisions because it invited them to interfere with the experience offered by the artist and the curator, since we hold different agendas for the space. This conversation continued on how we are trained to look at art. Someone voiced she missed the appropriate thoughts she is used to have in a gallery, and therefore the art in itself by following an external guidance rather than the texts and labels.

incoherent

great floor

uncomfort-  
-able

incomprehens-  
-ible

SELF

WATERY BODY

healing  
art

BOUNDARIES

behavior

circumstantial

discomfort

## sabotage

In this workshop, I had the chance to ask other questions from the *DAS Theatre feedback method*. When I directed the questions “do you have any open questions to the project?” and soon after “do you have tips and tricks?”. Someone answered with a question “how this booklet can be integrated into daily life in an exhibition?” and went on developing his idea:

“For the last two years, I forced myself not to read everything in an exhibition, just to get as much as I can from the art, from the situation. In the Netherlands, in big museums the curatorial texts are very much “this is The interpretation”. This booklet could be amazing to have in a curated show. For example, every third Saturday they cover all texts on the wall and hand in this booklet. A whole year like this! And then this is real sabotage (referring to his own “manifesto mood” as he called it). We have assumptions that everything has been chosen, that the curator has authority and you are supposed to follow because it is written professionally. I think trust is given right away. But maybe they didn’t choose the best for you or for the art? I think this kind of intervention (referring to the booklet) is really good for questioning the situation that you are in a museum. And I think, it really works very well approaching art, yeah, you are not led by a piece of art but you are led with a very different point of view, like there is no rule, you just open it up right now, maybe before or after you read it through. It works in its randomness. You can open up on any page and it will work.”

Another person replied: “Is interesting that you think this booklet is sabotage, for me the information on the wall is sabotage to my experience.”

And asked the first person “What do you do for a living?”

“I am an artist”, he replied.

“Ah, well this explains all”, she said.

And we all laughed.

## sabotage

If there is a conflict in the art experience, might be of power relations and social codes: what is expected? What is allowed? What do I need to understand? What should be my takeaway? A group of visitors frees the participants from the division between insider and outsider because it seems that the group belongs to itself. It allows a sense of belonging and of permission because a mediator (independent in this case) encourages one to be in search, and in a way, delegates some level of self-control. This diffusion between the frame and the visitor facilitates new conditions. “The mere conversation is sabotage”, was said in the reflection, as visiting art is entertainment, and having a conversation together already makes the difference. Someone defined it as “a frame inside a frame”.

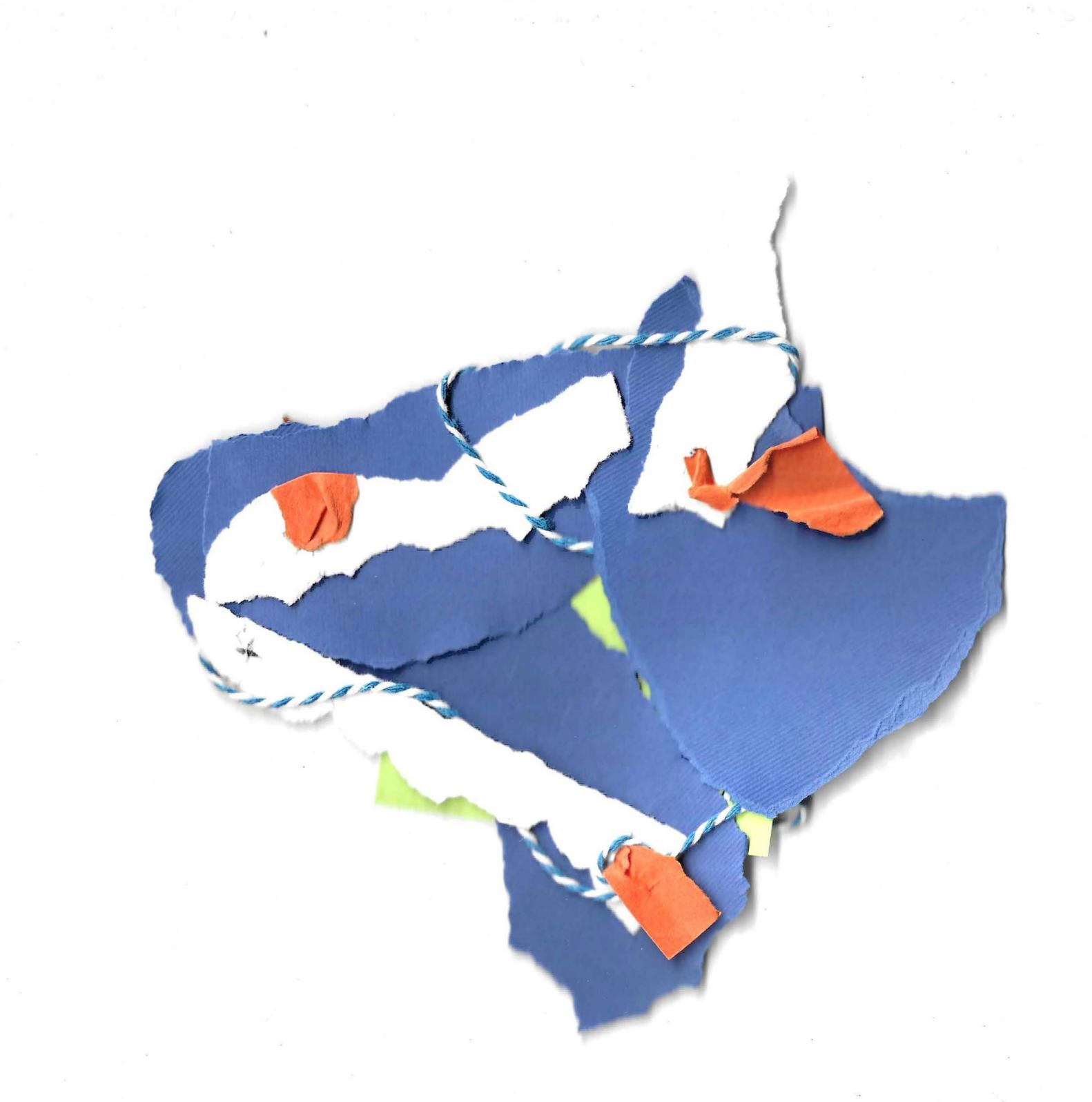
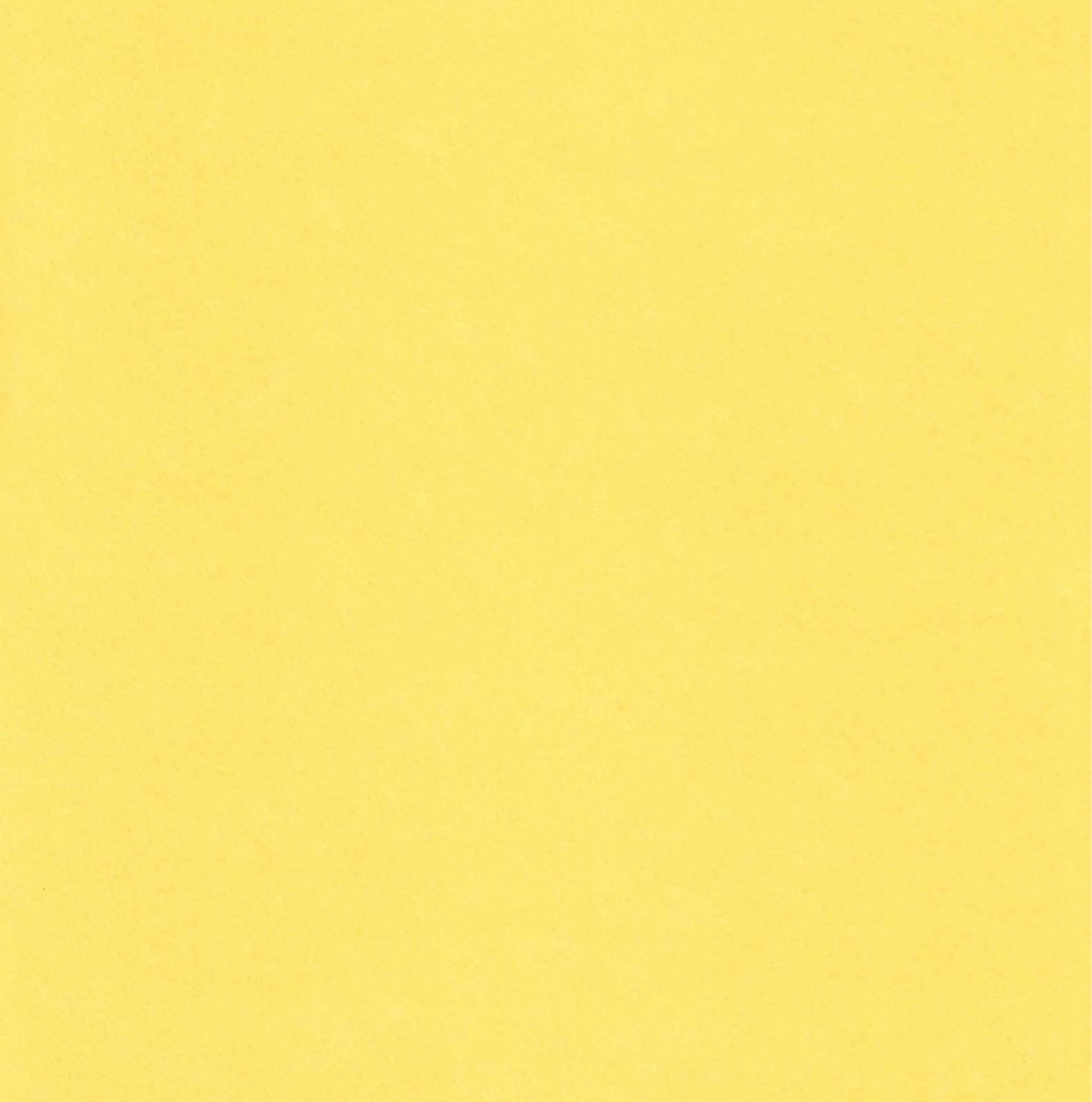
I was left with an uncomfortable feeling of not enough: calmness, accommodation, planning, and taking the time that’s needed. After looking closely, at the verbatim, I can finally change my perception. There maybe was too much to take in!

We walked back to the cloakroom. Some hurried up, some left unnoticed, and with others, we had our own tea and lunch in Kunsthal café. Another picnic in a cultural institution in a group date setting.

how to accommodate  
your (sensory) needs  
in an un-accommodating  
space?

talking right  
now. ~~Or~~ Or  
listening to  
words. I want  
to listen to  
sounds and  
music instead  
and silence.

Absorbed.  
Galaxy



# PLAYGROUND

## **Workshop 3: Playground**

Theater Rotterdam

Three Studies (for a self-portrait)

by SIMON BUS / CORPO MÁQUINA SOCIETY

Thursday, March 9

## **Inspiration**

In each workshop, as in movement improvisation sessions, I deliberately allowed each participant the freedom to choose how and how much to engage. My practice aspires to be the clearest to initiate the inner/virtual movement, rather than the factual. I am thinking here of an embodied response, a pre-reflective engagement, that can be termed *affects*, as I also included in Truman's description of *research-creation*; Anything that has not yet been articulated: a change in tension, excitement, and agitation (Reynolds, 2012, p.124). Moreover, *affect* is the encounter between the body and the world - being engaged and simultaneously not judging, being in the context rather than conscious about oneself. Mark Hansen differentiates between perception as "a modality of vision" and affection as a "modality of bodily sense" (Ibid, p.130).

## playground

### Workshop

This evening was a surprisingly cold and wet week, with snow and torrent rain pouring over. The initial plan was to have a workshop outside of the theater, but the weather decided against it: we had the workshop inside. This time, I was prepared to shift and adapt. I came earlier to Theater Rotterdam and chose a place for our gathering. Gradually the participants arrived, a bit delayed but all made it from afar and close by. This group of 9 participants had a somewhat shy and open dynamic, that surprised in what they did together and apart. For this reason, I describe below briefly what were the actual movements that happened.

I opened with an invitation to **scan the body**, while everyone sat closely over steps, floors, and benches.

Try to imagine how your skeleton is organized.  
From feet to tip of your head. No need to have anatomic knowledge.

Let's change places or adjust how/where you sit.  
How does it feel to move from the bones?

This time think of the following layer: the flesh:  
how it covers all bones and in between them, runs through joints, rounds, shapes, and allows movement.

Once again, would you like to change place or position?  
Check how the muscular structure slides.

Lastly, let's move to the last layer that envelops all the others, the skin.  
How it protects and contains, allows us to meet the external world.  
Can we make a last change in this setting with the mind on the skin?

## playground

We continue in the same area bringing attention to the **space in between** people. I invited them to shift places once more, and this time pointed at the whole rectangular area that spread in front of us and called it a *playground*. This second invitation ignited serious and unexpected body playfulness: people crawled on the floor, rolled from steps, and hid behind curtains with witty smiles.

The third prompt included the whole big foyer of Theater Rotterdam, and the focus I offered was **how to relate to the space, objects, and people**; to observe the public. I asked: Is it possible to sense the tension it brings being close or going afar? And once again, people took in the invitation fully and folded themselves to fit inside tables, stepped on them; others climbed stairs or got very close to walls.

The last invitation asked to sense how we **leave and re-enter the theater** paying attention to our breath. How do we transit spaces? I explained that we will take 5 minutes for a relatively simple action. And added: Can you think of the traces while you walk? Which shape do you draw? How fast? How slow? How far do you go?

Most of the group got involved in a game around the front theater doors: opening, closing, holding them for each other, or running fast to take advantage of an open space. At this point, some ushers asked "what are we doing?" and I explained briefly. No one stopped us or asked us to be less noticeable.

We sat back in the same area where we started and I asked everyone to write down a short text HAIKU style (as in the previous workshop) reflecting on the first part. We had tea until the show was about to start.

## playground

Before entering the venue, I also asked this group to postpone the question "what did you think about it?". After the performance, we gathered back in the same spot. I shared different sizes of papers, strings, and writing implements and asked them to translate their experience into a form with attention to the shape, the space they use, and the pressure they fold, draw, write, and cut. there is no need to describe it as "it is" but to depict how it manifests for them. At the end of this part, I asked to write another HAIKU.

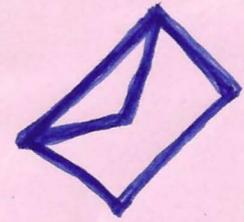
Writing is an act of slowing down, much required to capture subtle impressions that easily turn into poetic because of the sensibility invested, where the description gains the author's voice. Dealing with translations connects with Derrida's term "countersignature", where an original expression travels and changes when represented or misrepresented by another author (Reason, 2012). One example of a countersignature is Ekphrastic writing which seeks to evoke in the reader a non-textual experience through a poetic form.



Senses heightened there  
Where touch left/piles  
up. Too much, too little.

I am alone  
We play at  
the schouwburg  
We are together

open, close, open  
people going out and in  
movements.  
and I am  
stand still.



AS MY SKIN ENVELOPS ME  
IS THE THEATER  
IS ENVELOPING VISITORS  
+ ~~MOVEMENTS~~ ARTISTS (BONES)  
(FLESH)

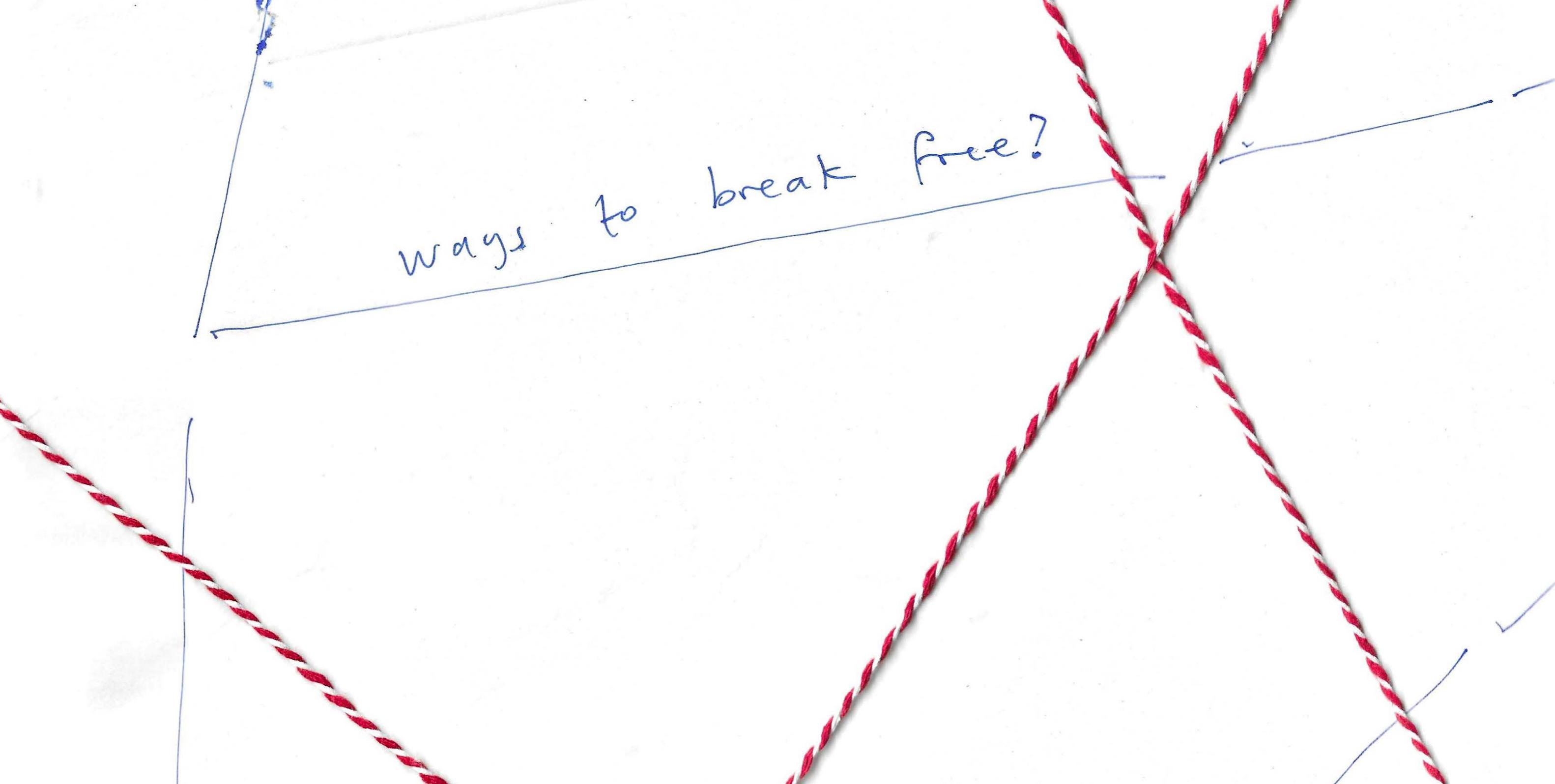
Hanging on over  
my elbows insensitive skin  
leaking through wet cloth

INSIDE OUT  
W. GAIS, IN O

Playing together  
In the world we inhabit  
Rediscovering joy

DE NATTE MATTE TAFEL  
IS EIGENLIJK LAK  
IK RUIK MN ADEM

ways to break free?



ruimte vol  
verwachting  
mijn lichaam wil  
rondjes lopen  
ik zit stil

full of expectation  
my body feels like  
moving  
I sit still

Que de pa  
abrir la  
fuente para  
ir a jugar

## playground

### Reflection & feedback, finding language in others

We started the feedback session exchanging thoughts about the first part. Someone mentioned that he struggled with "mentally feeling" rather than "bodily feeling". Another participant mentioned that she felt her own restrictions to let herself play in the game. For others, it was an invitation not to overthink, but just do, not understanding or analyzing it, "to put our bodies and interrelate".

When searching for words that name processes in "improvisation mind", I find Erin Manning voice a clear and poetic one. She defines dance as the instance of being in the movement, rather than producing it, thinking with movement as if it is made on its own. Manning relates to the body as a verb, in her words: "What we have come to know as 'body' is felt, as wonder-ful paradox, but only in the moving, and what is felt is not its exteriority or its external image but the with-ness, the in-actness of the event coursing through it" (Manning, 2014, p.178).

I witness my actions, I enact my choices, I am in between levels of consciousness; I produce movements and I am the site of the movement; I am my dance. As a participant in an early stage of my research commented, it is a "third dimension", as he was in the process of becoming, neither in the body nor mind, hard to be captured or directly accessible; as being inside and the outside of an experience simultaneously.

Similarly to the first workshop in Theater Rotterdam, the first part of the evening supported to see the performance from the body, to be immersed, sensing it as if the movement talked directly to the inside. Another person described entering the venue and seeing the dancer leaning against the metal construction, he could connect to the bodily feeling of what he saw. The term *kinesthetic empathy* coined by the philosopher Theodor Lipps and further developed by dance thinkers such as John Martin and Susan Foster, explains accurately all of the above.

## playground

*Kinesthetic empathy* relates to the inner mimicry response while watching another person's movements or objects, such as a spectator in a dance performance, providing a sense of active participation by experiencing the movement and emotions (Reason & Reynolds, 2010, p.52). Complementarily, the term *kinesthetic sympathy* relates to cognitive and interpretative reactions. Some examples are the capacity to recognize virtuosity, appreciation of the dancer's effort, or sensibility to the emotions performed (Ibid, p. 62). The simultaneous responses such as escapism from reality, sensuality, and admiration co-live and form the experience. The audience is "overpowered by a feeling of others" as the emotional contagion has the potential to happen (Ibid, p.53). As Reason and Reynolds suggest, the pleasures overlap and are non-hierarchical. The array of motivations connects the audience's needs and the reward the dance piece can offer. The responses rely on the personal characteristics of each viewer, which include their cultural context, rather than on the performance attribute (Ibid, p.62)

## playground

In this workshop, I explained extensively about the rationale of the project. When speaking about the conditions to be a spectator, it was mentioned:

D.: "You were hosting. You gave us food, you care for us. I can be in it (the exercise) because someone is taking care".

F.: It feels like a safe place

J.: You are giving a lot of space so we feel comfortable. Not too much to think about. You just do it. It was our first meeting and we immediately started to play. Nice to explore the space, and play in the theater before going to see a play together. Sometimes it feels that we take for granted the structures in which we perceive art in a broader sense. And they can make me feel constrained. "Now you sit". It was cool. Creating playful – getting into my body.

G.: I may enjoy my following visit to a theater, taking my time to come before the performance starts.

*Hospitality* isn't just what a host does but what the group allows to each other. Steve Paxton explains that improvisation is a practice of allowing all to emerge (*affirmation* in Truman's voice). The first gesture is reciprocal hospitality and acceptance. From this angle, I ask to make a living community in theaters (and museums), that recognizes the interconnectivity and different perspectives.

A bit before we wrapped up, a theater usher asked us to move to another place. Following a performance in the bigger venue, a moderator invited audience members to participate in "Het Laatste Woord" meeting. They needed to call several times on the intercom to gather participants for it. We moved to another place to allow the "official-in-house" group to have their reflection. It became a comic situation highlighting hierarchies and the right to space. Especially since our group was double in number. Everyone helped to carry the materials and drinks, and, I felt taken care by the participants.



WHAT ARE WE DOING?  
CAN WE BREAK OUT?



ПОСЕЩЕНИЯ В МУЗЕИ И ПОДОБНИ МЕСТА ОТ  
НАМ 15 ГОДИНИ, НО ВИНАГИ ПРЕВЪРЧАМЕ  
ПРЕЗ ПРОСТРАНСТВА И ИЩЕМ. ИНТЕРЕСНО И  
ВНЕЧАТЛЯВАЩО ЗА КРАТЪК ПЕРИОД ОТ ВРЕМЕ,  
НО КАКВО ОСТАВА И КАК ПО-КЪСНО МОГА  
ДА СЕ ОБЪРНАТ ОТНОВО КЪМ ТЪЗИ ИДЕЯ?  
ИМАМЕ ПЕРИОД, ПРЕЗ КОЙТО СТИМАХ ВСЯКО  
ВИНО ПРОИЗВЕЖДЕНИЕ В МУЗЕЙ - ЗАЩОТО СЪ  
БЕХ ВЪКЪНОВИЛА ОТ НОВОТО СИ АМПОЛ  
КАТО ИСТОРИК НА ИЗКУССТВОТО, СЪБИРАЙКИ  
ЗНАНИЕ В ХИЛДЪИ СЛИККИ И МЕГАБАЙТИ  
НА ~~НЕ~~ ТЕЛЕФОНА, В БЪРВЕ РИЧТОС И НА  
КОМПЮТЪРА. ЗА ПО-КЪСНО, ЗА НЕКОИ ИДИ  
В БЪДЕЩЕТО, КОГАТО ЩЕ МОГА ДА ПОКАЖА  
НА КОЛКО МЕСТА СЪМ БИЛА И КОЛКО МНОГО  
ВНЕЧАТЛЯВАЩИ ПРОИЗВЕЖДЕНИЯ СЪМ ВИДЕЛА  
НА ЖИВО.

# CANDIES



## Workshop 4: Candies

Kunstinstituut Melly  
Friday, March 17

### Feedforward from previous sessions

Following the workshop at Kunsthal, I was decisive for this occasion to have a clearer role during the visit, not only trying to be present but also facilitating in an active way. I had in mind to bring a more sensorial translation session into the reflection as well. And lastly, inspired by the previous workshop at Theater Rotterdam, I wished to create a sense of togetherness during the visit and not only after. It was a challenge to implement all the changes. It became a work in progress.

I decided to leave the written text as a medium and give more non-sequential choices (different than the bound booklet). The image I had in mind was of a kiosk where people come and on-demand get a prompt. Though, I couldn't find the mechanism by which everyone could find me, that there would be enough prompts for everyone, and how to keep track of who took what. After a brainstorming session, I decided to prepare for each member a bag full of *candies*. The *candies* are prompts classified in three categories: actions, questions, and inspirations. Each has a different color: pink, yellow, and light blue therefore the candy imagery. All of them are either quotations that feed my project, or questions that are fueled by somatic practices, and actions to do or imagine. I chose 10 for each category, making a total of 30 cards per person. I put them in different containers, partly because of my indecisiveness, and partly because of circumstances such as supplies in stores. Throughout this workshop description I mention some prompts and many of them are in between pages placed as dividers and titles of sections in the thesis.

## candies

### Workshop

The meeting started on the ground floor of the Melly/TENT building gathering 9 participants. I explained the bag of “candies”, and what category each color is. In a similar way to previous workshops, remarked the negotiation aspect within themselves, the exhibition, and other visitors. We accorded to meet 60 minutes later on the last floor, where there is a semicircular artwork that has carpet and huge pillows.

My personal experience with visual art is of contemplative space, mostly individual one. I like to be immersed in a gallery as in a temple, a sanctuary, an opportunity to slow down. This felt sense that I tried to inspire, cannot be seen from the outside, and only those who experience it can tell. In this workshop, I was confronted with my biases and expectations, once again. People walked fast, they talked with each other, some came late, and others I couldn't find. I walked around them and doubted the timing, if I should end earlier, unsure of my offer.

Once we sat together, I offered sheets of paper and pens and invited the participants to 5 minutes automatic writing in any language they felt comfortable with. Right after, everyone chose 5 words. One after the other, we read out loud our choices in a circle saying it first in the language of origin and then translating it to English so we can all understand. Lastly, I opened the feedback circle with the question: what worked for you?

## candies

### Reflection & feedback

Different participants shared their strategies on how they engaged with the prompts. One person shared that she chose only 3 cards and dedicated 20 minutes to one artwork, making her visit based on 3 artworks in total. She sat in front of each and journaled her experience with the prompts: “We are connected territories”; “Choose simplified mode”; “Are you alone?” To each of them, she drew and wrote in her notebook. In the circle, she said that the prompts said what she saw or felt, crystalizing her experience. Another person read all the pink cards in a row and saw what effect it had on her. A third one, made the cards talk to each other and described it as a joyful experience.

Someone remarked that as the question cards, art asks questions too and the museum is a space for reflection. She highlighted the prompt “How do you know when you know?” as one that resonated with her, and helped her to understand the moments of irritation or satisfaction and tap on the reasons. Another participant shared sincerely, that following the questions helped her to connect but with the actions and inspirations she couldn't find an instinctive connection to the exhibition and as a consequence lost interest. In reaction, she said to herself “I don't understand anything”. Her frustration made her aware (embarrassed?), and even more disconnected from the exhibition. Then she added, “I didn't feel anything concerning the art”. Others mentioned that the actions are confrontational, as the prompts “put” them in space, meaning they became aware of their body's presence which might act differently than the norms.

how do you know when it is  
working? how do you know when  
you know?  
This question

what a gift. This question  
stayed with me for the most  
of the time. I really enjoy  
to wander with it in the space  
of the installation in the art installation  
with the works that mostly "did not work"  
for me in this very moment.

but entering the beige "office" space  
from the 90' stopped me for a  
longest while. how do you know when  
you know? What does it feel like?

What does it provoke? What is  
the reason I want to stay with  
this specific installation?

it is not especially stimulating  
work, and I am not the  
biggest fan of an ASMR  
so what is it? Perhaps it  
is exactly in the disturbing  
discrepancy.

WHEN AM I PERFORMING?

AM I PERFORMING?

AM I? NOW? NOW? NOW?

THE BODY FEELS BUT THE BRAIN  
CONCEPTUALIZES. OVERTHINKS

STOP THINKING. IT IS A  
PERFORMANCE. DO THEY SEE IT?

ARE THEY BOTHERED BY IT?

DOES IT DISRUPT THE WORK?

DOES IT DISRUPT THE NORMAL  
HABIT OF EXPERIENCING ART?

BUT DISRUPTION IS GOOD. DISRUPT-

TION OF THE HABITS MAKE YOU MORE  
AWARE. YOU TUNE IN MORE

ATTENTIVELY? OR NOT? DO YOU

TUNE IN MORE AWARE? AWARE

OF SELF? OF SELF IN THIS

SPACE? NOT SURE IF I WANT TO

BE AWARE OF SELF. BUT JUST BE.

## candies

A big part of the discussion touched upon disruption and that the prompts act as an interference with the art experience, the exhibition, the curation, the artist's intention, and a performance that took place on the first floor when we arrived.

One person mentioned that the design of some of the *candies* kits is too strong for the space and distracts other visitors. Later she added, that the invitation influences the audience in a different way than the curator intended; it is a deviation from the artist's work. It was mentioned that the prompts made them overthink by becoming more aware of what they were seeing and of themselves. "I was not sure I wanted to be so aware. It became performative for myself". Another participant said that anybody's presence disturbs the performance while being in the space, even with minimal gestures.

The question of awareness concerning the performative aspect in everyday life could have been a great focus of this research but I choose a different angle regarding the behavior in such constructed space as a gallery. Undoubtedly, the cards and the situation enhanced the performance. They are meant to do so. By making the conditions affectively tangible/clear, the workshop invites you to observe and make decisions.

This workshop at Melly set discomfort that I am dissolving while writing these lines. By re-listening to the feedback session, I see that my question "what worked for you" was answered also as "what didn't work for you?". This discussion put me in a defensiveness that wasn't manifested in the conversation and still ran underneath. In addition, it confronted me with how I tell my research and revealed an ambiguity I hold within myself. On one hand, the actions awaken the unspoken norms, and the need for an inner dialogue for negotiation with the (constructed) space. It works through friction. On the other hand, the tools that I choose are in the playful realm, embodiment, and freeing the improvisation mind. I offer to find personal meaning and this trajectory isn't at all harmonious. I talk about the workshops as there were only a fun product, while there are a reflective tool.

**Finding comfort with others, in theory**

Within the behavioral laboratory that I offer within these workshops, I find Hadas Ophrat, Israeli visual theater, and performance artist descriptions very accurate. In his book *Too Much Reality* (originally in Hebrew, 2012) he depicts performance art. As I read it, I see similarities between the context of this project and his work. Ophrat reflects upon his own projects when orchestrating performances in galleries, or public spaces creating friction with the reality and creating an intended “more real” one. In his departure point, he defines conditions to perform certain actions and create states of consciousness. He cannot rehearse, the performance has no syntax, and neither asks for meaning. It requests to go out into unknown territory equipped with instructions. The performer is simultaneously the creator and the product of his creation, that exists thanks to his intention and attention. A viewer isn’t needed, since one can create the emotional, physical, and mental distance required to observe the performative consciousness.

Ophrat brings the definition of *play* as defined by Johan Huizinga, the Dutch cultural historian and author of *Homo Ludens*, through the commitment to a process, its conditions, and being exposed to other inter-players. In this game, the performer might exceed norms and social agreements and locate themselves even when in the most private instance, into political action. It explains why some participants might not be willing to engage in such a manner with themselves, others, and the space. I believe this is why during the two years in MEiA the words “guerilla” and “institutional critique” were mentioned in relation to my practice. In this workshop at Melly people’s concerns were around respect and disrespect towards the “authorities”.

Another aspect that unsettled the group was what is pertinent to the art experience, what is “allowed”, and what is mundane and doesn’t pertain to the museum. As if you are not supposed to interfere with the art experience with yourself. One way of dissolving, or maybe highlighting the boundaries in this workshop was through the prompt “Give one of your prompts to someone else in the group”. One participant described the situation “as a performance inside a performance”, another said that it was more performative than the performance itself.

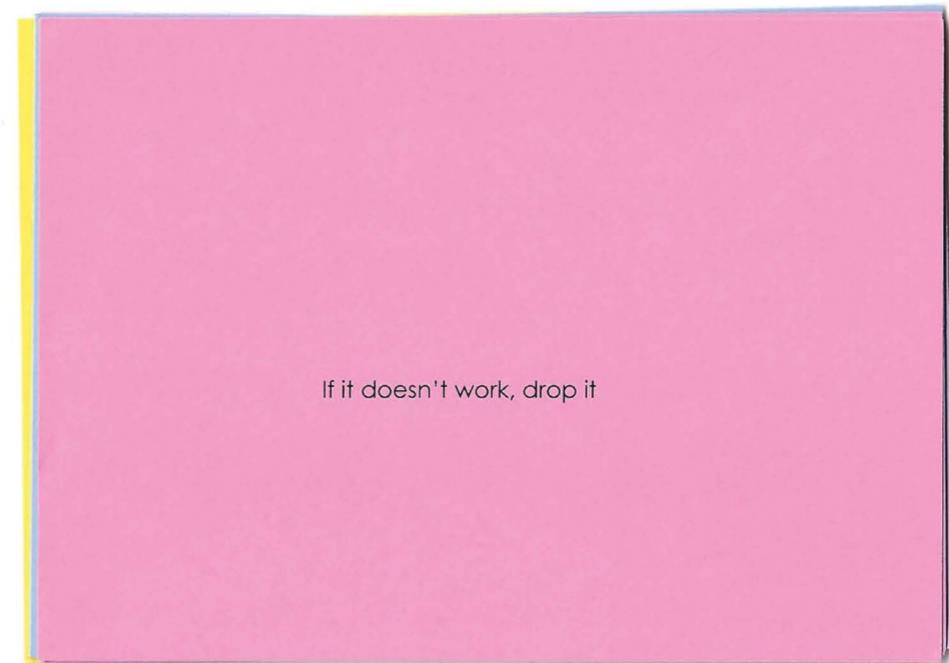
**Shifting moment**

In my intentions and research question, I speak about agency and an emancipated spectator. This workshop made me reflect seriously about by means. Perhaps my proposition takes away from participants rather facilitating choices; maybe they just create another level of self-control?

I couldn’t settle how the two kinds of workshops, for dance performances and in museums, can pollinate each other. Is it possible to facilitate a lighter atmosphere in the museum? I was not sure if it is related to myself, my judgment about my work, or the experience of others about it. Does freedom of choice in both settings taste the same? Can I sit with the discomfort of bringing people to sit with their discomfort that arises from art spaces and contents?

When revisiting the recording of the feedback and reflection session at Melly, I found out luckily the after-after talk with a few participants. The person who created her own “score” to see the exhibition with three prompts, described that she is also researching jam sessions and workshops as an instance for sharing processes. We repeated the word “score” which connected with my improvisation sources and feedforward to what will be the last workshop.

With feelings of unease that didn’t have words but brought questions about my methods and aims, I had a conversation with someone that participated in one of the workshops at Theater Rotterdam. After I shared with her my feelings regarding the workshop at Melly, she suggested allowing the participants in the museum to be alone and not guided by prompts. “You may give the frame before and after”, she suggested. “You didn’t speak to us while watching the dance performance. So maybe it could be good to leave the participants in the gallery unguided, trusting that the preparation will give enough to walk with.”





# GRAZING

## **Workshop 5: Grazing**

Stedelijk Museum Schiedam

Saturday, March 25

The Stedelijk Museum Schiedam is a welcoming place. The renovated old building is impressive and warm simultaneously. Eclectic artwork hangs on the walls and on the huge shelves. As you enter the first thing you see is a well-thought-through buffet, before meeting a cashier. You can take what you please, and pay as you can. The space has about 5-6 tables where people have a coffee or a bite, read the newspaper, visitors or not. Because of its coziness, I decided to coordinate with the museum staff where I could host the 10 people in the group. I was guided to the atelier where groups of youngsters and adults have drawing classes on Saturdays. I greeted the art teacher who showed me where I can leave my material and even saluted security workers who looked at me suspiciously but didn't ask many questions.

## grazing

### Workshop

The weather once again played its role. My preparation session was shortened to avoid the cold and strong wind. Gradually all arrived. People grab a cup of coffee, a bite before and after, and in between. In a relaxed manner, we started outside for a **short session**:

Let's walk towards the canal, and on our way let's **name things differently**. For example, when you see a chair, call it a cat; If you see a lamp, call it Mister.

While walking back from the canal and crossing through the museum courtyard, try to **pay attention to your breath** and how you feel it from the tip of your fingers, the tip of your toes, and your tongue.

Once we were back inside, I shared with the group the contact improvisation jam session analysis of Nancy Stark Smith, another member of the group of Contact Improvisation founders. A jam session is an open floor where dancers (or movers as they are called) engage freely with each other, the space, and themselves. Stark Smiths came to realize that there is a pattern in what people do in a jam (as is called), individually and collectively. With the help of other practitioners, she designed 20 glyphs for phases that commonly happen in such events. The glyphs serve the *Underscore event* which is a self-aware version of the jam session. At the beginning of the event the glyphs are explained and later hung on the wall to revisit along the event. Differently from a jam session, where one can come and go, or have a chat, in the *Underscore* participants are present throughout the 3 hours event (*Underscore glyphs 2023*).

I am very much fond of the *Underscore*, and especially of the phase called *grazing*. As sheep do, nibble some grass here and then there, movers dance for a short time as 10 seconds, a gesture, or one minute with most of the participants in the room. Later, they can engage and develop their dance, as further steps the jam analysis suggests.

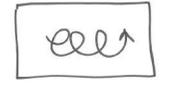
# UNDERSCORE

( ) ARRIVING ENERGETICALLY

( . ) ARRIVING PHYSICALLY



ASSEMBLY



PREAMBULATION

SKINESPHERE

⊙ BONDING WITH THE EARTH  
↓ ↑

⊗ MOBILIZING/AGITATING THE MASS

# X CONNECTIONS

- ⊙ TOUCH
- ➔ CONFLUENCE
- DIVERGENCE
- ⇒ COINCIDENCE
- ← ATTRACTION
- ←→ REPULSION
- TANGENT
- ⌚ INFLUENCE
- ↑ CONTRAST
- ⊕ INTERSECTION
- ⌚ EMPATHY/ RESONANCE
- ⚡ COLLISION



GRAZING

⊙ ENGAGEMENT

⊙ DEVELOPMENT

X END/RESOLUTION/DIS-ENGAGEMENT

<X>

↻ RECIRCULATION THROUGH THE SCORE

□ OPENSORE w/ observing + reentering

⊙ FINAL RESOLUTION OF THE ROOM

□ DIS-ENGAGEMENT FROM WHOLE PATTERN

⌋ REFLECTION/HARVEST

○ SHARING

## ANYTIME ALLTHE TIME ASPECTS

⊙ STREAMING

⌋ NOTICING

[ ] GAP

⌋ COMPOSITION

⊙ TELESCOPING AWARENESS

⊙ OBSERVING

⊙ SIMPLIFY BUTTON

⊙ LISTENING

## grazing

My explanation to the group included the glyphs and pointing at the similarities I find in a museum visit and a jam session. We are in a group setting among ourselves and other visitors. We graze artworks, public, and spaces; this is an invitation to be aware of what attracts me or repulses me, whether it is a human body or an artwork, the lightning, or the guardian's look. Knowing that all are temporal experiences, where I have the agency to change and mold according to my own curation: confluence with a different path, divergent, look for coincidence, feel attraction, allow repulsion. I remarked that they don't need to remember the stages but stay with the idea to follow the first reaction or suspend it. To observe the inner movement.

After the exercises and the explanation, we started the visit to the two main exhibitions in the museum for one hour. For the first exhibition, I just walked around back and forth, seeing who was where, and especially if someone crossed the building to the second exhibition. The reason was to welcome them in the second exhibition, where I decided to hand in a card to every participant out of a selection from the previous workshop. I made a selection after removing the cards that I heard or interpreted that didn't work out of the 30 *candies*. This way, I got the chance to try the idea of the kiosk in a small scale.

By the end of the hour, we met back in the entrance hall. And as in the theater, I added: suspend the question "What did you think?".

### Finding language to name choices: Dance of attention

Improvising means to think in the act and to dance with attention. In their book *Thought in the Act Passages in the Ecology of Experience* (2014), Erin Manning and Brian Massumi look through philosophy at processes and modes of thought to name the unspoken in artistic processes and taping on that the making is an inseparable mode of thinking. Their dialogical approach between the thinking and the making with practitioners brings the complexity in the ecologies described, as they call it the multiplicity of thinking in the act. In the first chapter, they delve into modes of awareness unfurling the divergent and normative spectrum. I find that the description of the environmental mode of awareness which pays equal attention to different affordances and the relation between them, where the human is one aspect but not central, is similar to the practice of improvisation and imaginative play. On the other extreme, they point at the neurotypical mode as language-oriented that retrieves from memory what is seen and blocks out details that are not necessary to understand the function and meaning (Ibid, p.6-7). The selection of exercises for this last workshop trains the muscle of multiplicity. As one participant mentioned, very much childlike capacities; another called it a playful mind.

The capacity to dance the attention, as Manning and Massumi call it, is what movement improvisation supports: breaking through shortcuts to evaluate situations out of habit, memory, functionality, or affordances to allow an immersive and undifferentiated experience, and the meaning to emerge from within. In this multiplicity lays a poetic expression that blends all ingredients to describe and translate impressions, in its full associative forces, following impulses and traces from the very personal sensitivity. *Bodily poetics* was one of my transitioning titles for this same reason, naming our sensual pleasure. I was inspired by Gaston Bachelard's work and his quote "poetry is a soul inaugurating a form" (Bachelard, 2000, p.11) explains to me that while moving in/at-tentionally we constantly discover not necessarily forms as shapes but somatic textures.

### Reflection & feedback

We walked together to the museum atelier. Having a quiet space to reflect, at a maker's table, was a perfect setting to play with the materials: paper, strings, staples, and small toys. I invited them to translate their experience in whatever way they find suitable. We had a short feedback session with just one question: "what worked for you?" that didn't inspire many of the group to talk. That's why I reformulated my request, and I asked them to walk us through what they have done and share what they have harvested. That made easier for most of them to share.

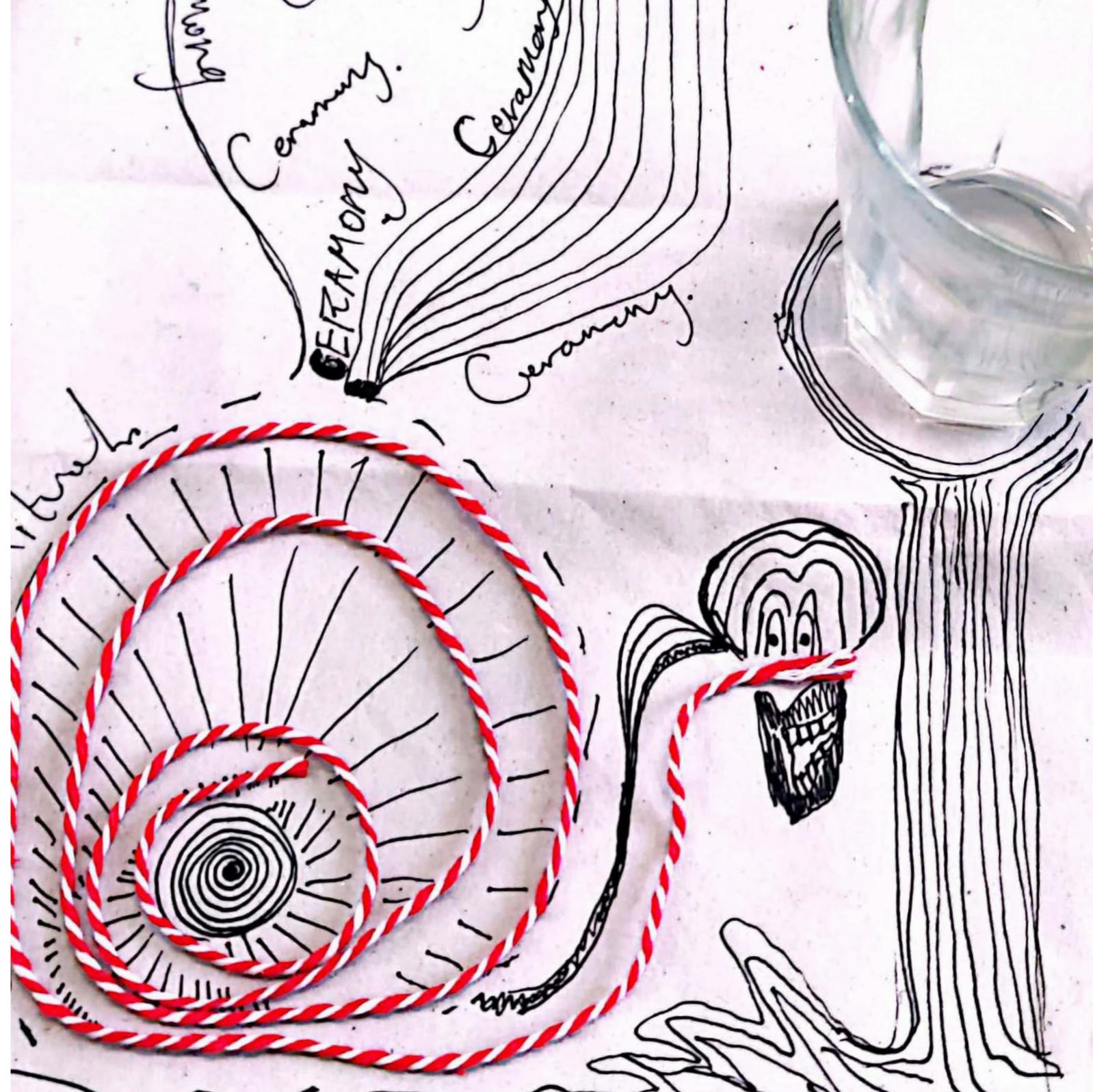
I used to dance in a company in the desert of Israel, in a not-so-populated and isolated area. The audience traveled from afar to watch our performances and spend the evening or whole weekend in the beautiful hangar renovated as a dance center. One of the choreographers, Nir Ben Gal, used to say to the guests that the experience of their visit started maybe with the first email, or on their way to the desert. In the same manner, Reason explains that an experience has no expiry date. We can point as well that might be difficult to track the genesis of an experience as well.

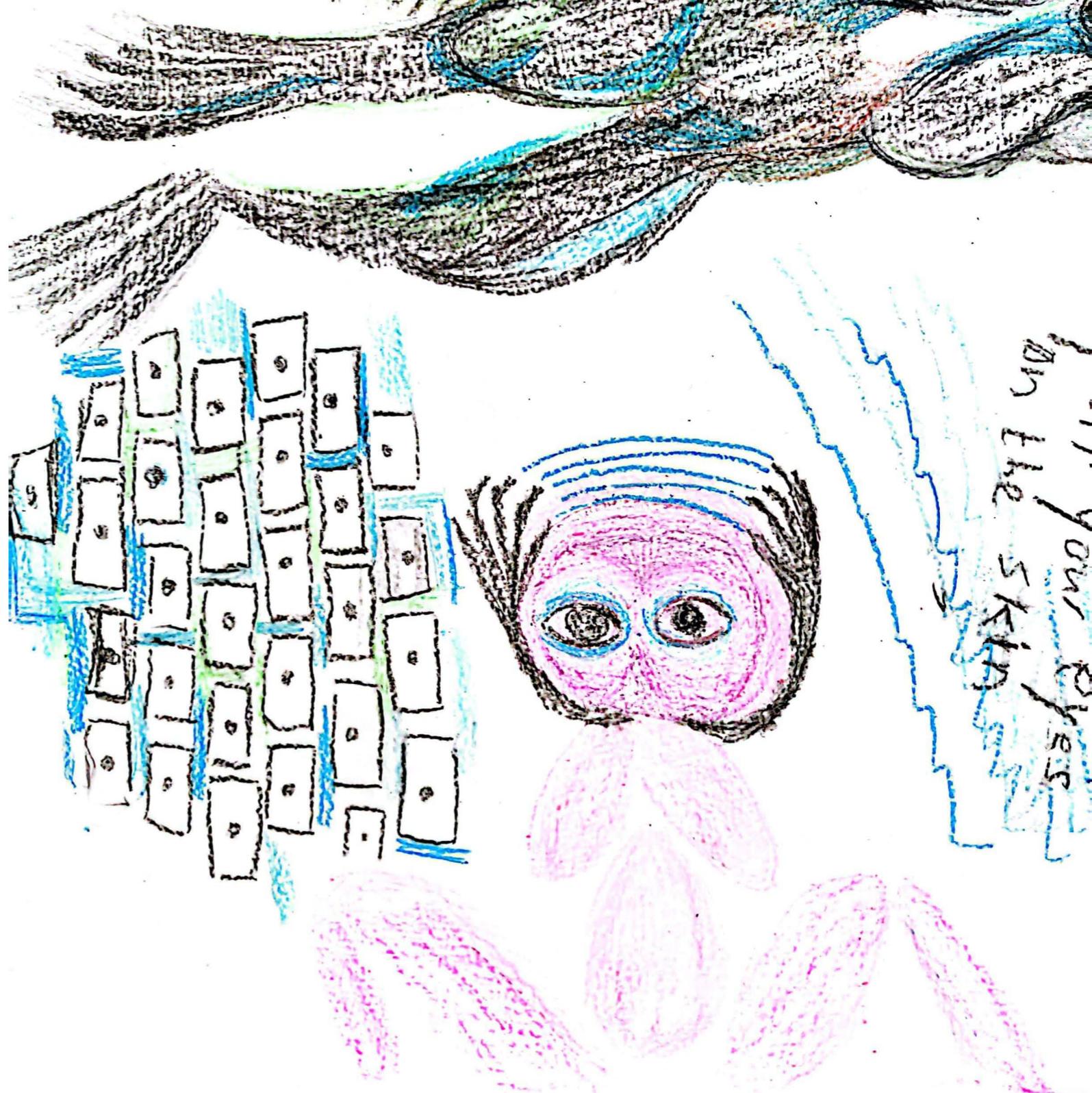
One participant's reflection exemplifies this vignette: she tied different toys with a string to show that she had different encounters, and all are connected. Then she pulled from one figurine and all the rest followed. "I carried them all with me and took them home," she said. I personally liked the phrase "what do you take home?" as a way to reflect together.

This last session had a relaxed atmosphere and merged reflection on the visit and their experience of the day and themselves. As someone called it "Don't leave yourself outside, bring yourself inside the museum". She called the first part an act to dissolve borders between inside and outside. I am not sure if this continuation of the street and daily life was because of the workshop or simply the museum's approach to the audience and passers-by. Someone else shared openly how her mood filtered the whole visit. "You bring all of you", she added.

Another participant doodled and wrote the words "ceremony" and "ritual". She explained that the invitation to walk in the museum with such attention after attuning the senses heightens the sacred aspect of art. I connect her words to the performance art mentioned previously and the capacity to create a state of consciousness where one is the creator and the creation, the witness and the performer. Another participant described her visit as being a dance between other visitors and the art exhibition, feeling the tension in moving toward or away from them.

It felt like every workshop mastered the previous one. How to work with an institution, rather than against it? Pirating, squatting, and appropriating aren't necessarily the best way. Synergetic and conversation are a possibility too.





your eyes  
on the skin

Choose simplified mode

## CONCLUSION

## conclusion

Dance has been simultaneously the propellor and the obstacle of this project, and tension between the explicit dance and the implicit state of dance. At the beginning of this process, I tried to share a personal perception, by inducing participants to a certain behavior and sensation. I intended to avoid imposing a performative action upon them, while actually, I expected a specific outcome. Once I defined movement improvisation as a mechanism, I could kill my darling and demystify my actions. In the last event in Schiedam, I managed to resolve the tension and be explicit. Dance became information participants can engage or choose not to use as a tool for their spectatorship. Within an open invitation, I can hear a refusal and an affirmation.

Another premise I departed from was that the fragile state of dance is a practice of solitude in public spaces. Partly because of fear of criticism or being accustomed to being alone, through conversations, workshops, and the methods, it became clear that the practice is inherently an instance of collective learning. I acknowledge that I long for togetherness, flourish in it, and wish to offer a space for others to do so too. I host participants in instances to find meanings and meaningful conversations within the art experience. To do so, I needed first to accept my ignorance, and as I wish for others, also emancipate myself to stay in re-search; to suspend the judgment and criticism that narrows down the prism by which art experience is considered, gaining nuanced complexity in the personal translations.

## conclusion

Alternating contexts for the workshop, one in a theater and the following one in a museum, made clear especially two things: it helped to define movement improvisation as a method and to unveil the existing regulations in both contexts. The events in the theater worked organically with the medium, by offering prompts from dance and for dance. Once I came to the museum, I searched for the same quality of presence that ultimately happened when I thought through improvisation as a mechanism. On the other hand, the practice in the museum made it unavoidable to ignore the elephant in the room; it brought to the surface both the constraints and expectations from the institution, and from the participants about themselves, norms, codes, and existing hierarchies. All became tangible. Some participants were able to embrace and others stayed perplexed. The tools I offered for spectatorship and reflection don't dissolve-resolve the friction with the structures but allow the participants to host themselves, and stay with the trouble.

Forward-looking, I would like to develop further the tools for preparation and collection, spectatorship and reflection, with attention to an honest self-reflective spectator, and "emancipated community of narrators and translators" (Ranciere, 2009, p.22). I wonder if my position as host, who mediates between the art institution and audience should stay independent or if there is a place to work in-house. And if so, what could be the relation with the artistic authorities - curation/programming or artists. I can see here a risk in turning instructive or extractive from the audience experience to improve programming or other decisions.

## conclusion

I believe that dialogue with practitioners will be integral to finding the right contexts where my practice can contribute and be appreciated. I tend to assume that now I can make space to read about the context constructions and let this dimension inform the practice. I am curious to see how the events can take place in different geographical contexts and age groups. In both cases, how a more or less regulated societies or sectors influence the practice of universal teaching, and what will be the contents that will bring to the table.

I have searched and still do while writing, for a personal research language, how to work within a theoretical framework without losing myself; how to choose terms in my terms, as I was told. It requires daring to cross my hesitation and self-doubt to speak with high-distant-afar knowledge and make it visceral, autobiographic. It allowed me to find my language in others and to find others in me. This is my first independent, long and multilayered spiral process. I have learned to work in a *rigorous activation* and appreciate how I learn, while making the right effort; and trust my searches and finds. I am much looking forward to the after-after moment.

## acknowledgements

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