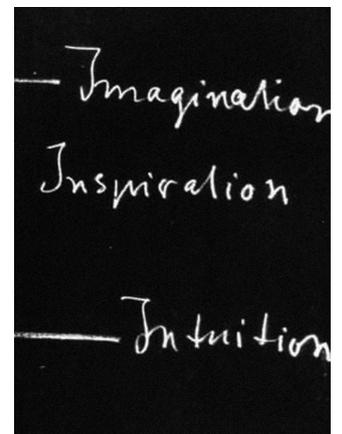


Anita Hrnić

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## Theory on Intuitive Practice

Research theory

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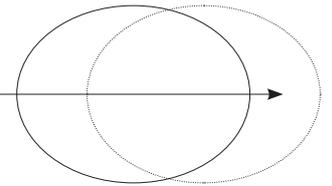
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## **Introduction**

This research considers the pedagogy that occurs from encounters with art. What does art do through its relationship with the public? How is information processed in such encounters? And to what purpose?

To begin, I first had to establish the type of art that I am referring to, as not all art has equal objectives. The anthropological understanding of art as exemplified by the artist Joseph Beuys serves as a case study of the proposed role of art in society as a laboratory for intuitive meaning-making. Encounters that stem from this type of art generate productive liminality by examining and subverting standardised modes of behaviour and normative formations of identities. The participant is confronted with urgency for individual capacities to narrativise and construct meaning, instead of relying on familiar methods. This defragmentation of the self is also called “narrative repair”. Through this experience, the liminal space can be used to invigorate the participant’s autonomy.

Through my practice as an artist-educator, I used exercises that produced voluntary liminality in order to test and map out collective behavioural patterns and the tensions that arose between them. These patterns were subsequently categorised into archetypal models, mainly focusing on the axis between intuitive and sensory characteristics as initially formulated by C. G. Jung (1921) and more recently further developed by Marta Sinclair (2020). Both processes (the sensory and the intuitive) explicitly relate to the different construction of narrativity. According to the Jungian model, the sensory in general is more concerned with factual data, details, and the present. Intuition, on the other hand, is more interested in concepts, implications, abstraction, and future possibilities. Both methods contain strengths and weaknesses, depending on the purpose of the task at hand, but they ideally function in conscious balance with one another, particularly in group formations.

Based on the information gathered through these observations, I have formulated a toolbox for an intuitive approach to collective processes, containing exercises that invite users to conceptualise the process as a narrative and address the difference in individual positions within the group. The intuitive interventions proposed here, are meant to bring balance to the collective activities that, often under performance pressure, tend to put emphasis on pragmatic and linear processes in order to generate instant output.

## EVOLUTION OF THE RESEARCH SUBJECT THROUGH THE PRACTICE

In a 2017 panel discussion “Why Don’t the Poor Rise Up?: Organizing the Twenty-First Century Resistance” organised by the Radical Imagination Project, prof. Michael Truscello explained that historically when the poor would rise up, they would often do so in a fascist way to acquire more material needs and power. In other words, the revolution’s goal would be to become the oppressor instead of the oppressed, as opposed to dismantling the oppressive power structures altogether. In the words of Audre Lorde: “The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations that we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us.” (Lorde, 1984)

This dilemma echoes the statement “it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism” (equally attributed to Jameson and Žižek by Fisher, 2009). The dilemma also offers a strong argument for the emancipatory power of imagination and why it should be cultivated in society (while simultaneously explaining why it’s so often neglected). To create a better future, the public first needs to be able to imagine it.

When I started this research project in 2020, my original premise was to examine how intuitive, speculative thinking processes can be cultivated through the experience and practice of art. For me, working in the arts, the urgency for visionary and future-oriented ideas felt evident as a way of empowering the public in shaping their world.

I was particularly interested in the emancipatory potential of speculative fiction as a source of possibilities to transgress and reshape the familiar and normative systems of power, particularly those that oppress and exclude anything outside the norm. My initial argument was that in order to imagine a better (i.e. less oppressive and more inclusive) future, intuitive thinking processes need to be (re-)activated and applied in everyday life. As what we cannot imagine, we cannot bring into being. In that case, art could help cultivate intuitive abilities by offering a practice laboratory. This idea corresponds with Freire’s pedagogy through counter-hegemonic storytelling, as a way of contesting the dominant stories and narratives (Freire, 1968).

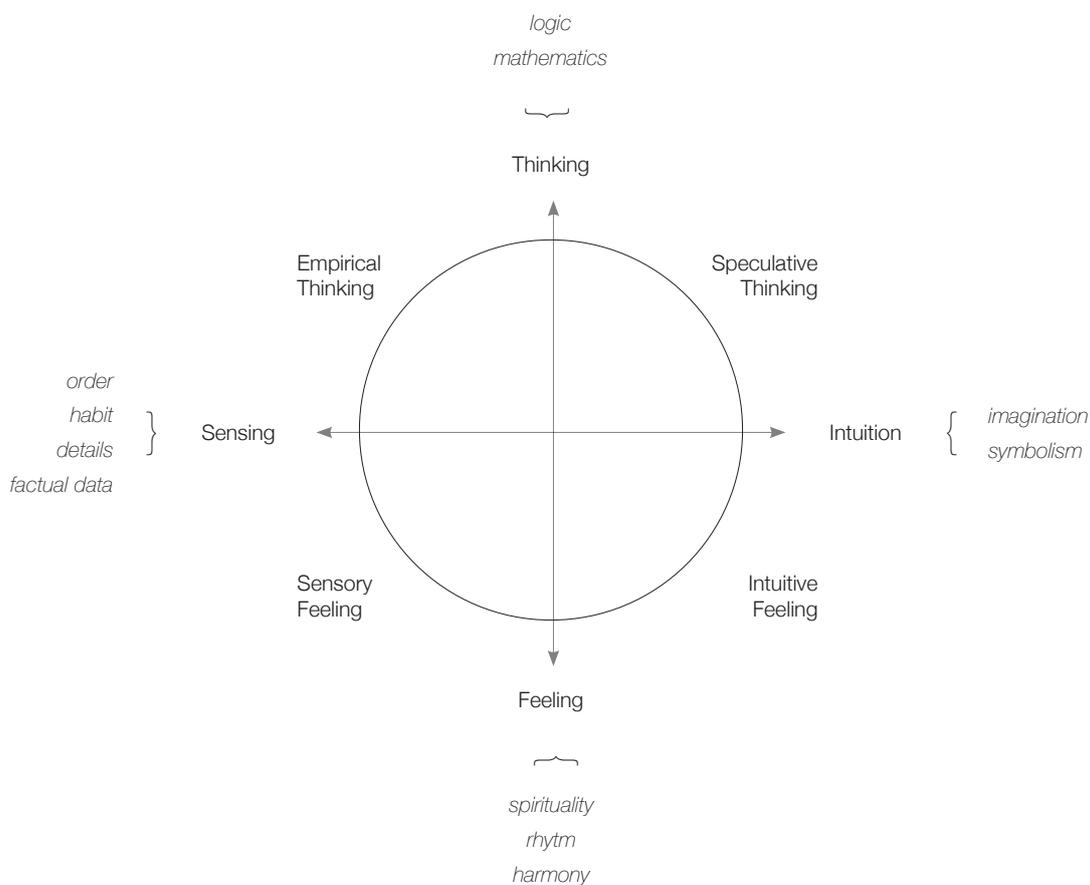
During the fragmenting and disorienting time brought on by the pandemic, and subsequent lockdowns, the urgency of this subject gained relevancy. The unsettling effects of this period resonated throughout the entirety of this research project.

In my artistic practice, I had been exploring the potential of art to transform the spectator’s preconceived notions on normative modes of being. While that exploration initially resulted in visual and material works, over the years, the materiality of the artistic object started to feel more and more like a diversion from what I actually wanted to work with, which was the conceptual notion of the work and the specific pedagogy that emerges from encounters between the art and the public. This substantive development of my practice resulted in a shift towards a more intuitive approach focusing on the sociological and anthropological understanding of art.

It’s worth noting that a large part of my practice does not take place in traditionally artistic or educational spaces. While I do work as an art mediator and my work is sometimes exhibited in art galleries, the most meaningful part of my practice occurs during in-between moments, unfolding in the forms of social performances, informal (and sometimes impromptu) exercises, and workshops with friends, acquaintances, family members, peers, colleagues, students, and strangers alike. Because of its ambiguous and precarious nature, this position is not always apparent as a form of art or education. In my experience, I have found that this in-between state offers surprising capacities for subjective engagement with the symbolic part of life and individual meaning-making precisely because it is not framed explicitly (i.e. domesticated) within an artistic or educational context.

## RELATION BETWEEN SUBJECTS AND CONCEPTS

The urgency to engage conceptually is not universal. Through my practice, I noticed specific patterns emerging when it came to different levels of comfort concerning abstraction, conceptualisation, and autonomous meaning-making. These differences



	SENSORY	INTUITIVE	+
<b>Focus:</b>	Detail oriented, what can be perceived by the 5 senses, clear and tangible data,	Big picture, abstract, perceiving patterns and interrelationships, speculative information	
<b>Approach to details:</b>	Fine details	Overall feel and look	
<b>Solution approach:</b>	Realism, practical solutions	Innovative processes, inventions	
<b>Information gathering and processing:</b>	Inclined toward sense-based information (sight, sound, etc.)	More abstract and less rational perceptions	
<b>Leadership style:</b>	Wants information that is concrete, and where possible, based on personal experience Administrative	Wants to see the big picture and pursue hunches Visionary	
<b>Stress factors:</b>	Feels insecure and stressed if what they consider to be important facts or details are absent	Feels bogged down or stressed if given too much detail and facts	
<b>Time perception:</b>	Prefers to live in the present and savor the moment	Prefers to attend to the future, and the pursuit of their ideas, dreams, and visions	

Fig. 1: Jungian model of cognitive processes

Fig. 2: Sensory and intuitive processes, adapted from Anita Finke, [https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Dimension-Sensory-Intuitive\\_tbl2\\_283845479](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Dimension-Sensory-Intuitive_tbl2_283845479)

seemed most explicit during moments of uncertainty in the collective and individual processes, which I identified as liminal. Originating from the Latin term *limen*, meaning “a threshold”, liminality denotes a term from anthropology, referring to a transitory, temporary space in which participants transition from one mode of being to another.

Liminality occurs when the old system is no longer functioning, but the new system has not been formed yet. It is a moment where change is possible, where creativity and innovation can thrive. It is also a moment where anxieties can fester, causing us to grasp the familiar notions, thus affirming the existing systems even if they no longer serve us.

Initially developed by Arnold van Gennep, the concept of liminality was later used by Victor Turner to demonstrate its position, importance, and power within ritual and ritualistic practices. According to Turner, society and culture are constantly balancing between the structure and anti-structure, with the liminal functioning as a space of pure possibility. Though without the ability to imagine the new future, we are stuck in the ruins of our histories, endlessly condemned to repeat it.

Process coach Marian Timmermans offers a framework for understanding human behaviour in the liminal space of the process through her lecture *The Art of Not Knowing* at The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (TIHR, 2021). While offering emancipatory potential, the liminal is also a space of anxiety, which causes the laminar (participant in the liminal process) to fall back on familiar patterns of behaviour compulsively. This behavioural mechanism is connected to the different ways we seek to form meaning. As long as the behaviour remains subconscious, it can keep the participant stuck in the pattern that is no longer working for them but against them, effectively preventing them from growing. I have used this framework, explained by Timmermans, through this research to reference behaviour in the liminal.

Noticing these behavioural patterns through my work with others, I started to recognise them as different archetypes with distinctly different ways of processing information and constructing meaning.

How do we make meaning? In the invitation for the 1985-86 Art-Of-Peace Biennale, the artist and educator Robert Filliou asked: “We’re all against war. But what are we for? Peace, we say. What is peace? Nobody quite knows. It’s an art, likely, not an abstraction.” This question urges the reader to consider possibilities of a radically different future, not just as an abstract or reactionary concept, but as a collective task in the co-creation of meaning.

Art plays a significant role in the formation of creative thought and meaning. For this research, I used the practice of artist and pedagogue Joseph Beuys (1921 - 1986) as a case study of a highly intuitive practice through an anthropological and sociological understanding of art. For Beuys, art was never a mere aesthetic object, but a means to evoke discourse, reflection and social engagement. He aspired towards a society that valued creativity above all, which would inform all social processes, believing in the ability of art to educate and expand thought through a synthesis of intuition and rationality. Beuys’s works provoke instances of productive liminality by conveying the potential and limits of art through art. Through this state, the spectator is alienated from the normative modes of being in order to question the familiar. As explained by the pedagogue Carl-Peter Buschkühle, this method of teaching through art can open up the spectator’s intuitive capacities for the imagination and subsequently produce alternative narratives and modes of existence.

Archetypes are primordial symbols of collective subconsciousness as conceptualised by philosophers from Plato to Kant, and in particular by Carl Gustav Jung in his work *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1921). These transcendent symbols of meaning permeate through our dreams, art, and culture that we create. They are inherent in every human being, and most specifically connected in the human capacity for imagination, channelling thoughts and actions into definite shapes (Frey-Rohn, 1974, as cited in Mayes, 2020).

According to archetypal pedagogue Clifford Mayes we use narratives to make sense of the world around us, to construct meaning when confronted with things we do not understand. In the words of Joan Didion: “We tell ourselves stories in order to live” (2006). Narratives organise events and experiences that occur throughout our lives, thereby providing coherence, patterns, and perspective to what would otherwise add up to a fragmented, disconnected, and ultimately meaningless log of events (Mayes, 2020, p. 2). Mayes asserts that the primary goal of education should be to empower students to form meaning through a student’s autobiographical narrative in relation to the collective narrative. In order to achieve this, the student’s subjective cognitive and emotional processes need to be taken into account equally, as well as the conscious and subconscious urgencies. Mayes proposes that by teaching the students to form meaning and relate it in a world-historical context autonomously, the students are more likely

to feel empowered to contribute to and exercise democracy (which in itself resonates as a collective meaning-making process). This research uses the framework for archetypal pedagogy as originated by Mayes through his most recent work *Archetype, Culture, and the Individual in Education* (2020).

I AM SEARCHING FOR FIELD CHARACTER  
only on condition of a radical widening of  
definition will it be possible for art and  
activities related to art to provide evidence  
that art is now the only evolutionary-revoluti-  
onary power. Only art is capable of  
dismantling the repressive effects of a  
semite social system that continues  
to fester along the deathline:  
to dismantle in order to build  
A SOCIAL ORGANISM  
AS A WORK OF ART

5

Fig. 3: Joseph Beuys, *Directive forces for a new society*. Blackboard 20, 1974-1977, Chalk on Board. 90 x 121 cm. Photo: Roman März (04.07.16).

Source: <https://www.intersect.mit.edu.au/-/se-/joseph-beuys-works>

Jung made a distinction between sensory and intuitive preferences (1921). This distinction is interesting in terms of neurodivergency in the classroom, particularly regarding the inclusion and exclusion through particular standards. A cognitive function is a type of information processing, and way of approaching the world, making decisions, and indicating preferences. Sensory cognition sees ideas as ways of explaining the world, whereas intuition sees the world as a manifestation of ideas.

According to the Jungian model, Introverted intuition is great at detecting patterns. It's about being able to look past the details and seeing that things of apparent uniqueness are actually different manifestations of the same concept in practice. A natural progression is to then apply the pattern, see what it implies about the future. Introverted intuition naturally ponders future implications of conclusions they have come to. This pattern-seeking way of thinking is also a natural narrative finder.

Extraverted intuition looks outward and brings in concepts and ideas from the external world to combine them in novel ways. Spotting patterns and connections between seemingly disparate and unrelated ideas is something that extraverted intuition does effortlessly. Certainty is met with scepticism because there is always another angle to explore (Glass, 2020)

The concept of autonomous meaning-making is related to what psychoanalyst Carl Jung described as intuition in his work *Psychological Types* (1921). Since Jung, intuition has been conceptualised further as a tool for navigating ambiguity and uncertainty, and described as “direct knowing without conscious information processing” (Sinclair, 2011), as opposed to sensory cognition, which is occupied with tangible data and experience through the senses. While intuition functions unconsciously, the sensory is a conscious effort to process information through reasoning. The exercises developed through my research are based on intuitive approach to meaning-making in practice.

### STRUCTURE AND METHODS

This research explores the productive and disruptive states of liminality and how archetypal cognitive processes can function in the liminal. I will examine how understanding and navigating liminality within different domains can open up the emancipatory creative potential to enact personal and social change, and how liminoid experiences developed through artistic practices can aid in practising intuitive and imaginative abilities to transform the participant's perspective and create a richer understanding of the world.

In the first chapter, I will focus on the position of art as a space for liminoid experiences (a voluntary or self-imposed form liminal), specifically through the artistic practice of artist Joseph Beuys. The aim of this chapter is to consider how artistic position and practice effectuates liminality through which the spectator is guided to develop new perceptions of their surroundings (Buschkühle, 2020). I examine Beuys's quest for “expanded consciousness” through intuition, which he tries to awaken in spectators through his works. Beuys' practice can be seen as highly intuitive, evidenced by his conceptual and ideological aims. His works and pedagogy are based on expanding intuitive thinking practices, explicitly putting the abstract over sensory (in other words: concept over the object).

Beuys's meeting with the Dalai Lama is used as an example of intuitive communication. While both Beuys and the Dalai Lama position themselves as humanitarians, the position of the Dalai Lama is less rooted in abstract strategies and more in individual belief systems. This difference eventually resulted in a disconnection between the two individuals. This chapter also discusses the collective graduation that our class attempted to produce during our Master programme. This experience is also an example of my own intuitive position that at times lacks understanding of the sensory need for a material output to create meaning. Both are subchapters on a fundamental misunderstanding between archetypes using different lenses to perceive the world. Finally, I propose the Trickster position, as described in this chapter, as an extraverted intuitive methodology to artistic pedagogy.

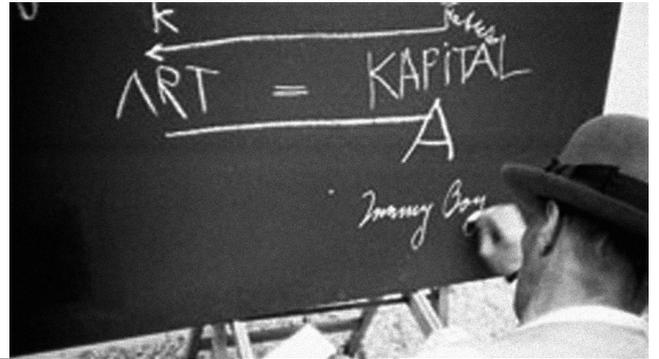
The museum hosts in the third chapter navigate art spaces, guiding the visitor through the liminal experience. The hosts themselves navigate a liminal position. Due to the abstract nature of their role, sensorial tasks often provide a reprieve from the abstract ambiguity of the hosting position. In the workshop that I develop for the hosts, I focus on conceptualising their roles as hosts with the intent to empower their meaning-making abilities as it relates to their positions.

The graduation project introduced in the fourth chapter contains tools and exercises for an intuitive approach to navigating the collective and individual creative process. The toolbox can be found in the separate document / booklet. The exercises conceptualise the process by detaching it from its original context. The concept is then abstracted down to a system that can subsequently be applied in different contexts. This tool can particularly benefit intuitive users in group settings and is, therefore ideally intended to be used consciously in combination with other, more sensorial tools to develop a more inclusive and considerate approach to collective meaning-making. The last chapter is a conversation between a sensory type and an intuitive archetype on the meaning of art. It is based on a real-life situation.



Fig. 4 Reading of Chapter 4 text on 29th of November 2020.





/01

## An Intuitive Practice

*"Art is what makes life more interesting than art."*

Robert Filliou

One of the fundamental influences on artistic pedagogy in the last century was the German artist Joseph Beuys, who considered pedagogy central to his artistic practice (Podesva, 2007).

Beuys's practice aimed to question the very notion of what art could be, thereby fragmenting its position in order to offer himself and his public space to construct their own meaning. His works and pedagogy are based on his ambition for expanding intuitive thinking practices, explicitly putting the abstract over the sensory and the concept over the object.

In this chapter, I will use Beuys's position as a case study to examine his specific understanding of art, not as an aesthetic object but as a conceptualised social practice with transformative, emancipatory potential.

In the second subchapter, I use the Jungian archetype of a Trickster to conceptualise Beuys's position as an artist and educator using an intuitive and subversive methodology to elicit social change.

The last four subchapters aim to connect circumstances from Beuys's practice to my own experiences navigating the liminal, the intuitive and the sensory during the Master programme. These subchapters speak of fundamental differences between archetypes using different lenses to perceive the world, which eventually motivated the conception of my research project.

## 1.1 PEDAGOGY THROUGH SOCIAL SCULPTURE

In her essay *Workers For Artistic Freedom*, bell hooks writes: “In a democratic society art should be the location where everyone can witness the joy, pleasure, and power that emerges when there is freedom of expression, even when a work created evokes pain, outrage, sorrow, or shame. Art should be, then, a place where boundaries can be transgressed, where visionary insights can be revealed within the context of the everyday, the familiar, the mundane.” (hooks, 1995) This definition corresponds with the role of art in society as envisioned by the Fluxus art movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and by Joseph Beuys in particular.

According to Beuys, the goal of education is to teach people how to lead a self-determined life (Buschkühle, 2020, chapter 2). For this vision of the future to succeed, Beuys felt the fostering of creativity should be made central to education. He was interested in an “expanded” understanding of art, as evident in the formulation of his concept of “Social Sculpture”, a consciously initiated and facilitated dialogue on how the world can be shaped and transformed. With this concept, Beuys sought to demonstrate the potential of art as an agent of social change and the artist as a creator of central structures facilitating that change.

As Carl-Peter Buschkühle explains in his analysis of Beuys, self-determined life through creativity forms an antidote to the complexities and intensities of modern life that suppress intuitive perception and knowledge. This condition leads to a loss of coherent experiences and the manifestation of a ‘decentralised’ self (Jameson, 1991, as cited by Buschkühle, 2020). This idea corresponds with Clifford Mayes’s interpretation of Jung: the narrative incoherence between the individual and the collective can produce a despair, and a dispirited society that is no longer in touch with the Sacred (Mayes, 2020, p. 7). Beuys used his performances to produce “counter-images” to train his audience in an intuitive approach to thinking and perceiving, that would prepare them for “narrative repair”. The term “counter-images” was introduced in reference to works that were challenging and demanded a degree of reflexive concentration from the spectator. These works aimed to reevaluate habitual behaviour and processes, thereby offering alternative modes of thinking and being in the world (Buschkühle, 2020, p. 37).

Many of Beuys’s ideas converged in the principles of the Fluxus art movement. The idea behind Fluxus was to bring art back to daily life, “permitting the most seemingly mundane actions and irrelevant moments to become sites for ethical and political engagement.” (Thompson, 2011, p. 75). His arguably most famous quote: “Everyone is an artist,” stems from the ideological principles found in the concept of Social Sculpture and the wish to reimagine socially engaged pedagogy (Thompson, 2011, p.143). The objects in his practice were subordinate to the “art attitude” they produced in this process. These artworks were “transitional objects” (APA, n.d.) toward the application of a creative approach toward everyday life that would eventually render artistic objects useless (p. 74).

What does it mean for a practising artist to render material outcomes of their practice subordinate to their meaning? By taking up this position, the artist subordinates the material to the metaphysical aspect of the work. In Jungian terms, this translates to the preference for intuitive over sensory processes (Jung, 1921). Besides, the focus on metaphysical abstraction can also function to circumvent the effortless appropriation of objects by the art market, where the focus on the materiality can appear as a (perhaps unconscious) attempt to subdue the transformative potential of the art when faced with substantively challenging work (conversations, 2021).

## 1.2 ARTIST AS A TRICKSTER

Through his capacity to take creative control of his autobiographical narrative, Beuys “found a means to come to terms with his past by reshaping the very experiences that had at times cruelly shaped him.” (Kort, as cited by Thompson, 2011, p. 113). Beuys’s “autobiographical fictions” function as “a device for bringing a kind of cohesion and intelligibility” to the experience that shaped him. Such interpretations speak to the perceived emancipatory potential of Beuys’s intuitive ability to narrativise. Yet, they also



Fig. 5 (previous page): Joseph Beuys. *Multiples* 1968 - 1980 (source: [tate.org.uk](http://tate.org.uk)); original invitation from Städtische Galerie, Erlangen, 1980.

Fig. 6.: Beuys's action *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (German: *Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt*), 1965, courtesy Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf.

speak of a subversive quality of Beuys's creative shaping of his reality. This subversion of creativity can be conceptualised and understood through the Jungian Trickster archetype.

Beuys's work can be characterised as ritualistic. The audience was often invited to witness and even participate in destabilising rituals that foster intense reflexive and transformative potential. Such performative works of art produce liminoid experiences (liminoid being an optional liminal practice that often occurs within leisure settings, according to Turner, 1969). Beuys as a Trickster archetype appears at the forefront in these works, aiming to disturb the social conventions. His use of animals alludes to the paradox of a Trickster as our pre-human, instinctual selves while also transcending humanity (Jung, 1968). The Trickster appears when life calls for radical transformation, at the edge of consciousness, symbolising the emancipatory liminal state. It is the shaman of the liminal. For Beuys, animals acted as both physical and spiritual helpers, indicating their and the human place both on earth and beyond (Buschkühle, 2020, p. 41).

In recorded texts and interviews, Beuys often speaks of the urgency to disturb what he considers the normative processes. Even when speaking of his position within the early stages of Fluxus, he recalls feeling "that this understanding of these new attitudes as a Neo-Dada attitude for me was too much only a repetition from an older state in the development and therefore in my first action I did it directly opposite. Inside the FLUXUS, I did my first action directly opposite to the understanding of FLUXUS." For Beuys, the old was not to be revered but placed instead within the realm of endless possibilities, to be continually transformed and reinvented through new intuitive insights.

One of the most famous works of Beuys is *Coyote (I Like America and America Likes Me, 1974)*. For this performance piece, Beuys locked himself up in a gallery room with a wild coyote (notably a Native American trickster symbol) for three days. The work was meant to symbolise solidarity with Native Americans and their trauma at the hand of colonisers. At the end of the three days, Beuys and the animal embraced. When recalling this performance, he said, "Can one make a statement about a fixed situation? It is very difficult to do so from one's own fixed situation. It is best to move outside into another realm, identifying with the beings which live in this realm. (...) I wanted to draw attention to the realm that exists beneath humans, which is a kind of precursor of human evolution, the autonomous animal realm." By taking on the position of the Trickster, a shaman of the liminal, Beuys conceived of a transcendental new perspective on a problematic situation, transforming and making peace with it.

In his works, Beuys appears to use Trickster positionality as an artistic methodology. This position grants him the ability to question and subvert normative modes of being and doing, both in the artistic context and in life itself. When considered as a broader artistic methodology, it's possible to distil these characteristics throughout various other artistic practices. Kelly M. Cresap recognises it in Warhol's public performance as a naive and incompetent fool, which allows him to disarm his subject and approach an almost unsettling level of intimacy (Cresap, 2004). Likewise, Timothy Morton likens the Rothko chapel to a trickster portal to the future that allows the viewer to re-evaluate the effect of aesthetics in art (Glottfelty and Royle, 2017). Not to mention Andrea Frasers performative lectures that offer institutional critique while simultaneously brought into the fold by these same institutions, creating a subversive ambiguity. In the words of anthropologist Barbara Babcock: "That the trickster and the clown have become major metaphors for the artist in this century with its increasing self-consciousness of the creative process is no accident. They have been artists for a long time." (Babcock Abrahams, 1975).

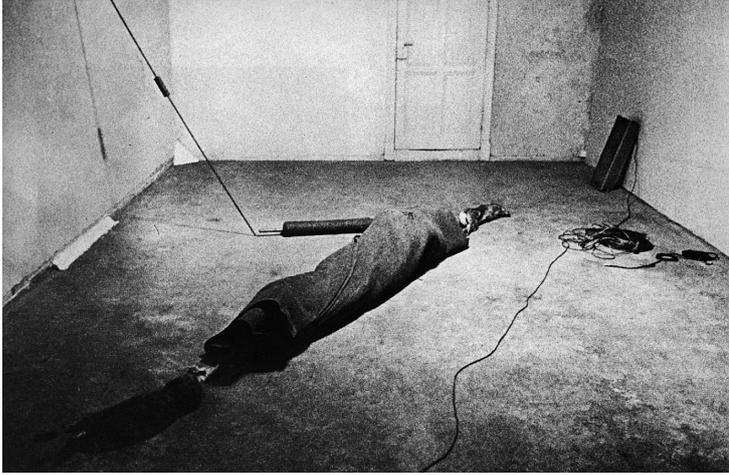
The Trickster is particularly unsettling in hyper-rational personality and community (Snider, 2009). The pedagogy that emerges from this positionality might be ambiguous enough to function in various contexts, from children's fairy tales to classrooms and artspaces. But while its aim might be the most effective in spaces where this position is least domesticated, they might also be the spaces where the encounter with the Trickster is the most unsettling. In order to benefit from the fragmentation produced by such encounters, teaching individual and collective "narrative repair" through intuitive knowledge is essential.



Fig. 7: Beuys's action *I Like America and America Likes Me*, 1974. Photo documentation by Caroline Tisdall

## 1.3 INTUITIVE BODIES

How does the encounter with the works of Beuys activate the intuitive potential in his public? In his research *Theory and Practice of an Artistic Education*, German art pedagogue Carl-Peter Buschkühle (2020) describes the disruptive effect of the Beuys's performance *The Chief – Fluxus Chant* on the will, the reason, and the emotion of the beholder, and the struggle it takes to bring them into harmony. In this work, the artist lays on the gallery floor for nine hours, enveloped in felt with two dead hares, while surrounded by objects made of copper, fat, hair, and fingernails. Throughout the performance, he kept producing incoherent sounds into a microphone underneath the felt cover.



As Buschkühle describes: "Beuys' performance aims to educate by mobilising will and emotions as well as reflection. In fact, the beholder must exert a certain amount of effort to bring will, emotion, and reason into harmony with one another. At first, they are in conflict with one another: reason is upset by the strange situation in the gallery; emotion is disoriented; the will is unmotivated to remain with the performance. After an initial period of chaos and confusion, within the "plasticity" of cognition, the relationship between these three faculties is ambivalent. Once emotion turns to empathy, it struggles against the will, which wants the beholder to leave. The beholder's will must change into a will to stay and observe. While reason still critically ponders the irrationality of the action, emotion

inspires the beholder to imagine what may be happening inside the felt wrap. Insight comes about through dynamic states of mind, in which the will, emotion, and thought, clash, critique and collaborate. When will and emotion succeed in coming together to motivate the thought process with "warmth energy" or love, then the mind is on the right track. The subject experiencing this process can discover its own capacities for free, creative thought. Beuys stresses these aspects of self-determined, reflective intuitive thinking: "Expanded consciousness is intuition. It is thinking, recognising itself. The moment of creation. Intuition is that which recognises that the man is free." (p. 46)

The existential struggle to balance will, reason and emotion as described above is not solely a domain of this particular performance or even art in general. It is a pattern of inner conflict that comes up when confronted with the unknown, or the as of yet unidentified, erupting in the liminal experience. The audience witnessing the performance is guided through a symbolic and ritualised choreography of the liminal, encouraged to question and intuitively give meaning to the disturbance they are confronted with through the performance. Within the space created by Beuys's performances, the trauma of the loss is renegotiated "between recreation and reparation" (Winnicott, as cited by Fraser, 2012).

Still, an intuitive practice cannot be developed without considering the sensory, i.e. the corporeal reality of the situation. For the development of intuition to function holistically, sensory cognition should not be taken for granted. While it aims to expand consciousness, the performance of *The Chief* originates in the bodies, both of the artist and the beholders. It is essentially a form of symbolic reenactment of an embodied trauma and can function as a repair to the traumatic rupture. Likewise, the learning process that occurs in the liminoid space of Beuys's performance can also be understood through the bodies occupying the space. The embodied meaning-making taps into a specific type of knowledge that can be understood beyond the symbolic and cerebral.

## 1.4 DEFAMILIARISING THE TIMELINE: AN EXERCISE

*Beuys's performance can be classified as the liminoid experience that teaches the viewer to practice "self-determined, reflective, intuitive thinking". Meanwhile, the disruptive effect of the first nationwide lockdown of 2020 offered a liminal experience that was less than optional or temporary. Through this ordeal, our class attempted "a symbolic reenactment" of what can be deemed a traumatic event. I formulated a collective ritual exercise for this occasion that produced a liminoid experience, aiming to renegotiate loss "between recreation and reparation" (Winnicott, as cited by Fraser, 2012).*

At the start of the pandemic disruption, our class expressed the need to ritualise a closure of the previous semester. Inspired by the urgency of the moment, I proposed creating a ritual in the form of a script of our last physical meeting (which I had recorded on audio). We could re-read our script of that moment together. It was an (at the time unconscious) attempt at narratival repair. The proposal of the collective reading of a transcript was met with initial enthusiasm from the group, as it was collectively agreed that it made sense to try an exercise to reflect on the world as it was before and the world as it was now.

I previously came up with the idea of doing a transcript re-enactment (or rather an "inhabitation") during an interview project a few years back. At that time, the idea was to transcribe a conversation and have the same participants take on the role of another participant while reading the transcript. It was an attempt to create the potential for examining the group dynamic through defamiliarisation. I proposed using this method within our group to bring closure to a moment in time collectively. We would all be speaking the words of someone else in the group.

As the day of the collective reading approached, the energy started to shift. The tensions in the group suddenly started to appear on the surface. So did the question: "What is it that we are trying to do here?" followed by: "I do not understand this at all." The participants who were excited to engage just the day before suddenly started to panic and question the collective decisions.

The anxiety we experienced was similar to the course of action that process-coach Marjan Timmermans describes when encountering the liminal. Some of us looked for affirmations from the authority figures in the form of tutors, while some retreated into silence, turning into spectators. Still, others felt anger and frustration and took this moment to express that. Holding the anxiety and continuing the thought process, as advised by Timmermans in her lecture at Tavistock Institute (2021), proved challenging. What followed was a demanding and emotional conversation. Similar to the teachings of Beuys, we were confronted with the "existential struggle to balance will, reason and emotion". Eventually, we decided to proceed with the script reading.

Some participants became very emotional and distraught at that moment, while for others, the script was just something they executed, as they explained. For the latter, there was no connection to the text, and they were glad they got it over with. For me, the experience was cathartic in the moment, although I struggled to understand certain reactions in relation to the uncertainty of the outcome this "ritual" suggested.

What did it mean to use our lived experience as a script, to be performed in a setting that only intensified the sense of estrangement we were all experiencing at that particular moment in time? And why did it function cathartically for some and disruptively for others?

The script connected the pre-liminal time by letting it unfold artificially in the liminal present. "What are we doing?" was a question proposed by a "reason [that was] upset by the strange situation", by "motion [that was] disoriented", and "the will [that is] unmotivated to remain with the performance" (Buschkühle, 2020). In this instance, Timmermans urges to give "an example of what being in and with the unknown can look, feel and be like". Timmermans defines this productive approach to discomfort as "cheerful apprehensiveness", proposing lightness, optimism, and acceptance towards the not-knowing to navigate the liminal space productively.

My initial confusion would later settle into curiosity and examination of different ways my peers and I preferred to position ourselves (consciously or unconsciously) and process information at that moment. It was too early to tell at the time, but in those moments, patterns were starting to emerge regarding our group's dynamic, specifically in times of uncertainty and decision making.

## 1.5 NEGOTIATING EXPECTATIONS

*Unproductive instances of dominant intuitive perception in collaborative relationships.* ←

In his book *Felt: Fluxus, Joseph Beuys, and the Dalai Lama*, Chris Thompson asks the central question: "What happens when nothing happens?" It is a question of narrativity that occurs consciously and unconsciously. With this question, he refers to the meeting between Joseph Beuys and the head Tibetan Buddhist monk Dalai Lama. This meeting represented in the broader view the relation between Eastern philosophy and Fluxus, a Western art movement from the 1960s and 1970s. The meeting was built up to mythical proportions before it ever happened, only to arrive at an impasse soon after.



Near the end of his life, Beuys fulfilled his lifelong dream of meeting the Dalai Lama. The two were connected through Louwrien Wijers, an artist, writer, and long-time collaborator of Beuys. As Wijers recalls in Thompson's book, she introduced Beuys through a catalogue of his work during her second meeting with the Dalai Lama in Dharmasala, India, in 1982. According to Wijers, the Dalai Lama noted the connection between his work and that of Beuys, recognising the common theme: "Impermanence" (Thompson, 2011, p. 143). He offered to meet the artist, and Wijers was tasked with organising the meeting, which took place in October of that same year.

During their initial meetings, Wijers was impressed by the practicality of the Dalai Lama's answers to her questions on topics ranging from art and the concept of Direct Democracy

to money. The meeting in October was dubbed: "Permanent Cooperation with the Dalai Lama", but no one knew what that would entail. Only Beuys, relying on his belief, trusted that "it would work" (p. 146). When their meeting eventually happened, no recordings were allowed, and even the photographs of that day never turned up. Only a general report exists, written by Wijers as a reflection on the day's events.

Two topics of discussion that day were the Chinese occupation of Tibet and the possibility of staging a Social Sculpture performance in Beijing as an experiment for Beuys's economic model of creativity as a capital. In response to the Tibetan anti-Chinese stance, Beuys suggested that position was not feasible and urged the Dalai Lama to consider rebuilding the society with the Chinese in Tibet. In response, the Dalai Lama asked Beuys to be more specific about his plans and whether or not he had any friends in China, to which Beuys responded: "We will make friends in Beijing!" (p. 149). The meeting was wrapped up soon after.

Wijers, Beuys and their friend retreated to the nearby café afterwards. Few contacts were made with the Dalai Lama after, primarily through his subordinates. Beuys would later recall that the Dalai Lama mainly was listening and observing during their meeting, as Beuys himself was speaking. He speculated that the concept he was presenting the Dalai Lama with was simply too complex to explain in the short time they had together. But as Thompson concludes, something else was put in motion that day while everyone was waiting for something to emerge from the meeting. The gathering at the café, which included Robert Filliou, would lead to the Art-of-Peace Biennale involving hundreds of collaborators and Wijers's own *Art meets Science and Spirituality in a changing Economy*, a panel of multidisciplinary dialogues at Stedelijk museum in Amsterdam (1990). Both Filliou and Beuys died shortly before the AmSS dialogues would take place.

As Thompson explains, Beuys was disappointed that the meeting went as he had imagined (p. 162). He struggled to reconcile the idea of the narrative in his imagination with the actual events being played out before him, which lacked a definite conclusion. → pg. 18

## 1.5 NEGOTIATING EXPECTATIONS, AGAIN

*Unproductive instances of dominant sensory perception in collaborative relationships.*

The question “What happens when nothing happens?” echoed throughout our class sessions during the second national lockdown in early 2021. During one of these sessions, our group decided that it no longer made sense to execute an idea that originated when the world looked differently without reflecting on what it meant in the present moment. This awareness led us to pursue the idea of collective graduation.

However, almost as soon as we had agreed on this idea, our fundamental differences became a challenge. Mostly, we appeared divided on how concretely the collective process should unfold. For some participants, the initial thrill towards the possibility to try something new soon made a place for the urgency for concrete results. While at the same time, others did not want to leave the comfort of contemplation too soon, just to execute a product.

This divide would loom over all of our online gatherings at the time. To me, our search for the form was not necessarily for the substance it would bring, but in the words of Wittgenstein (1997), for what appeared to be the “ornamental coping” that would support us. Only later would I understand why others sometimes need something tangible to hold on to in order to believe.

Activist, facilitator and writer Adrienne Maree Brown speaks of these urgencies in her recent work *Holding Change* (2021), the chapter on interdependent/decentralised facilitation. Addressing the facilitator of groups, she says: “Under pressure, people both give less room for mistakes and are much more likely to make mistakes, to overlook crucial information and dynamics. Your work is to help groups stay centered, connected, and focused under pressure, and to remove false urgency from the work. (...) Being together shouldn’t be a performance of process. Build agendas that have room for real people to have real conversations. (...) Don’t fake a collective process for the sake of meeting an urgent deadline, this practice will eventually deteriorate trust in the group. Trust the people by asking real questions, good questions that everyone doesn’t already know the answer to. Trust the people to learn together, in real time, in small groups. Help people find each other in the space.” Looking back, these are the words that during our crisis would have helped to facilitate our being together under challenging circumstances. The pressure, of the graduation process, the isolation of the lockdown, and general anxiety, produced an urge to perform the process in what Timmermans calls “script behaviour” (i.e. tendency to fall back on familiar modes of being and acting, and in this case producing, to counteract the uncertainty, 2021). Brown further speaks of paying attention to individual values being compromised in a collective effort to move forward, and how to counteract such issues by asking whether or not something aligns with individual values.

For Brown, intuitive knowledge lies at the basis of facilitation work. There is no right or correct approach, but an acceptance of “many rivers of knowledge” (2021) that can help participants become comfortable with each other’s visible, invisible and hidden differences.

For our group, the lack of an efficient, concrete outcome would eventually lead to the abandonment of the idea of collective graduation altogether after only a month. Without an ability to form a coherent narrative, our collective attempt exhausted itself before it ever took form. Just like the meeting between Beuys and the Dalai Lama decades earlier, our expectations could not hold up against the reality of individual differences. I thought of this particular meeting frequently during this period and what we could take away from the emerging parallels between the two events. I wanted to believe that the disintegration was temporary and that we would overcome the initial disappointment by still managing to organise. But I was also unable to believe fully.

During this month, we recorded most of our gatherings. In retrospect, these recordings present one possible answer to the question that Thompson proposes. While on the surface, the answer to the question “What happens when nothing happens?” would appear to be: “Nothing,” our collective ordeal nonetheless impacted our time together and left its traces throughout our individual projects. For me, the most meaningful content from this experience can be found in the recordings of our meeting in which showed us negotiating our → pg.19

pg. 16 → When interpreted through the lens of archetypal differences, this encounter exemplifies the problem of intuitive communication. Beuys's "knowing" and his belief that he could successfully facilitate the relationship between China and Tibet is not explained further or supported by factual data or experience. He presumably believed that subverting the familiar and long-standing relationship between the two nations would cause a productive liminal rupture, forcing them to reevaluate and come to a different standing. This incident correlates with the original meaning of intuition as a type of "knowing" without conscious information processing (Sinclair, 2011). But such "knowing" requires unconditional trust from other participants in an individual's insight. Without a clear understanding of where these insights originate and their possible agenda, such belief remains a challenge. Beuys's approach, in this particular instance, appeared too abstract to fully mobilise his public towards his revolutionary ideals outside of art spaces and their comfort with abstract concepts.

pg.17 → positions through the liminal void, attempting to formulate a collective narrative. These works were formed while we were looking for the form elsewhere. Yet, our group could eventually not find meaning in presenting our raw interactions.

The “nothing” in this case appeared to be too much of an abstraction.

These events brought once again to the surface my wariness toward the necessity of tangible form. At the time, the urge to objectify meaning and produce tangible outcomes seemed to once again distract from looking inward and meaningfully reflecting on what was really happening. Only later did I realise that we needed to understand each other better in order to be able to co-create collective meaning.

As Timmermans explains, it's generally difficult to stay with the emptiness, to let it simmer and enjoy the not-yet (2021). To stay with the trouble of not knowing but trusting that meaning will emerge. But when we grasped at familiar forms or signifiers of meaning too soon in the creation process, we risked creating a symbolic form, a false collective narrative that could not consolidate with our individual ones.

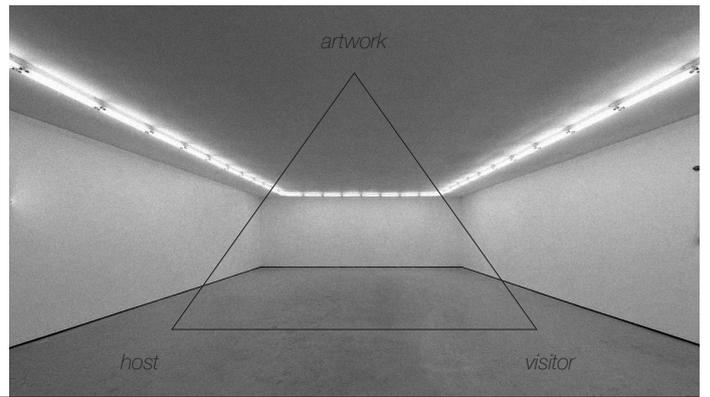
What eventually appeared as an essential task in the early stages of the process was initiating difficult conversations in which we would have to contend with our current conditions and positions. The risk with such challenges is that the initial enthusiasm might deflate. The question then becomes: how to productively balance these elements of criticality and enthusiasm, of abstraction with concreteness?

In the spring of that year, shortly before the graduations, we were invited for an official external panel to evaluate our experience during the Master programme. When asked how we experienced the handling of the lockdown within the programme, various participants remarked on the institution's choice to adhere to our pre-set schedules as much as possible. Some participants deemed this as particularly surprising for a programme positioned as innovative and experimental. It seemed that at the moment where radical change felt possible, our daily routine kept us distracted. Yet, this familiar routine might have also kept us from unravelling. And even if we did want to revolutionise our environment, our imagination could not keep up. Not yet, at least. We might have kept grasping at exhausted ideas of what revolution looked like. In the words of Timmermans, the best we could do at the moment is to “develop the capacity to hold the anxiety and keep on thinking.”

As our world became smaller and our daily existence became “sites for ethical and political engagement” (Thompson, 2011), the ideologies of the Fluxus movement and its “little enlightenments” seemed to gain relevance. What emerged from this situation was the insight that the contemporary liminal experience called for the profound need for care, connection and understanding of individual creative processes that can be applied to the conception of collective narratives. To achieve this, we needed to educate our intuitive abilities and bring them in communication with the sensory. Art offers an experimental space for this education where intuition can be developed through liminoid experiences to practice co-imagination and co-creation a better future.

But only art is not enough. For a process to function inclusively, recognising individual positions within the collective is imperative. This experience was instrumental to developing my research project in the form of a toolkit. This toolkit contains exercises that foster the conversations, as previously referenced, examine individual positions, and conceptualise the collective process, offering an intuitive method for (collective) meaning-making when facing the void of endless possibilities.





**/03**

## **Liminal Positions in Institutional Art Spaces**

From 2017 to 2018, I worked as a host in several art institutions. This chapter is based on conversations with people currently working as museum hosts in Rotterdam.

Earlier this year, I was invited to create a workshop, focusing on substantially deepening hosts' position as mediators of meaning between the art and the public. For this workshop, I used archetypal narrativity that I was developing throughout this research, intending to create space for hosts to develop their own meaning of their work and position themselves more consciously.

The workshop, consisting of several parts, is still in progress at the time of this writing.

The role of the museum host is in many ways akin to that of the priesthood. Both mediate between the metaphysical (artwork and the divine, respectively) and the public, narrativising its meaning. The work of both disciplines oscillates between humble service to the public and authority on the subject. Both are tasked with prolonged periods of silence, during which they spend time with their subject. They watch as the public struggles to believe, just as they themselves sometimes struggle to believe that there is indeed more than meets the eye.

Most museums and art institutions employ young people, either students or artists, tasked with being present in their gallery spaces as hosts. The function of a host varies from institution to institution. Some are assigned a supervising role primarily, taking care of the work logistically and keeping it safe and intact. This type of host is effectively a gallery attendant. Other spaces prefer to focus on the social and substantive aspect of the hosting, mediating between the work and the spectator on the co-creation of meaning.

In the last decade, the call for inclusivity and accessibility in arts has led to museums shifting perspectives in their approach to visitors (Schavemaker, 2018), and the role of the host came to reflect those changes. A museum host has slowly become an informal art mediator. Yet, this informality makes the position of the host ambiguous, making it easy to devalue its importance.

In many ways, the work of the host deals with “impermanence”. They might be the closest embodiment of this term (as used by Beuys to refer to the connection of his practice to that of the Dalai Lama).

Museum hosting is often perceived as a low-level job, while usually performed by college-educated people on a freelance basis. A contemporary host is required to represent both the institution and the artworks competently to a diverse audience while finding meaning in spending time with the artworks for hours on end at times. Hosting thus requires a high degree of adaptability, patience, representative skill, knowledge, and intuition. They are a part of what Silvio Lorusso calls *Entreprenariat* (2019), working in a position where “affections and emotions become a professional tool.”

Because of its inherent ambiguity, forming a meaningful narrative for its position forms a challenge for the host. Contradictions and inconsistencies rapture their narrative through the many implied yet unspoken requirements of the job. They are compelled to intuit these requirements, to shapeshift and accommodate divergent contexts, presences, and attitudes they encounter on their job.

## 2.1 LIMINALITY PRACTICE

The narrative ambiguity of the position makes gallery hosting inherently a ‘liminality practice’ (Borg and Sönderlung, 2014). Research shows that social actors who occupy the profoundly liminal positions and roles within their work experience long-term effects on the formation of their identities (Ybema, 2011, as cited by Borg and Sönderlung, 2014). As Victor Turner proposed in his seminal research (1969), the liminality is strongly associated with transformation and thus shaping of identity. Social actors can briefly reevaluate and dispose of conventional social structures by occupying the in-betweenness. But what happens when the in-betweenness, which is always meant as a transitory and temporary space, becomes permanent? Such is the case for many young people that Lorusso describes in his research on the contemporary creative class, most of whom are permanent freelancers and flex-workers.

The effect of liminal position can manifest in different ways. It can become a professional identity in itself (Zabusky and Barley, 1997), offering freedom to mediate and negotiate between different communities. It can also have adverse effects on developing a sense of community in the workplace (Boland and Griffin, 2015, as cited by Borg and Sönderlung, 2014). The sense of impermanence in the workplace is detrimental to the formation of meaning and sense in work, leading to boredom. In the case of hosts, there is a disproportionate focus on the logistical and operational aspects while sacrificing the job’s intrinsic, social, and even spiritual elements.

This conduct falls in line with behaviour in the space of uncertainty (Timmermans, 2021), which is to seek familiar and identifiable support systems. In this case, the tangibility of

menial and managerial tasks alleviates the in-betweenness of the position on a daily basis. However, while the official art mediator follows a script within a defined timeframe (often one-hour intervals repeated several times a day with different groups), the work of the host happens when informally facilitating engagement between the artwork and the visitor. These characteristics require (development of) intuitive abilities from the host to offset the position's ambiguity.

The position of the host has been used conceptually in the past by artists and institutions alike. In 2016 Tino Sehgal, an artist with a background in choreography, filled the spaces of the Palais de Tokyo in Paris with 300 "interpreters" who performed his choreographed pieces, which he calls "constructed situations". They engaged with visitors, singing a cappella, posing, chanting, jogging, and mingling with visitors, initiating random encounters, and engaging them in brief conversations (Hurwitz, 2016). All the while, the visitor's assumptions on encounters that occur in art spaces, not to mention their comfort zone, are subtly tested and provoked. The position of the host lends itself to being positioned in (and even as) the artwork precisely because of their inherently ambiguous identity, unlike that of a director or a curator.

The work of a host happens primarily in a museum or gallery space in the form of a White Cube, itself a liminal, transitory space. Staying with the artworks for long periods of time seems a thing of the past. A tutor recently remarked on the implication of the term "doorstroomlocatie" used for cultural institutions to place them within Covid-measure categories. The term is meant to signify: a location that the visitor moves through swiftly. The implications, conscious or not, are that the visitor goes through these spaces consuming instead of contemplating the exhibited artworks. Moreover, the significance of this term brings up the question of whether the contemporary art visitor even associates artwork with its emancipatory potential. This conclusion prompts additional insights into the relationship between the host and the contemporary art public.



And yet the art and the activities available in these spaces can still temporarily liberate the visitor from societal conventions or provide insights and reflection on their presumed identities (Mulcahy, 2017). This process entails a certain tension related to the uncertainty of the liminal experience. Journalist Charlie Lee-Potter describes in *Cereal* magazine his visit to the Palais de Tokyo when the exhibition space was closed for refurbishing. Still, some of the visitors suspected the heap of builder's tools in the corner to be an installation and the man walking around and doing construction work, to be a performer. Everything becomes suspect of subversive meaning in a gallery space (*Cereal City Guide: Paris*, 2018). Visitors are often unsure what awaits them there, and some are more comfortable with that idea than others. This uncertainty leads to their behaviour being susceptible to seeking familiar comfort, whether it's focusing on the logistics of the artwork (how it's made and even the cost) instead of the content (why is it made and what it's supposed to represent), or by using it as a background prop for a social media image.

Mediating a work of art means providing a meaningful narrative that is not a mere summary of the components, but that speaks to the spectator's imagination and opens up new ways of perceiving and, at best, empowers the visitor's own meaning-making (Manifesta.org, n.d.). Some works require more guiding than others (i.e. performances in which the artist is the direct mediator between the meaning and the public), just like some visitors feel more comfortable independently speculating on possible meanings. In contrast, others require tools and permission to express their opinions from what they perceive as authority figures.

The not-knowing is often a space of discomfort and anxiety. But as Timmermans observes: "anxiety is an inevitable feature of mental life." The questions come up that you do not know the answer to, and the instinct is to flee into the known by performing "script behaviour" (i.e. non-reflexive and unconscious autopilot behaviour, Timmermans, 2021). Seeking out a bond with an authority figure (i.e. someone who knows to help alleviate the

discomfort of not-knowing) is an example of such automated behaviour. Other examples of script behaviour include overexplaining, being dismissive or defensive, avoiding, downplaying and making light of the situation, jumping to conclusions, or simply taking a break and scrolling through the phone.

Yet, when it comes to art, the act of meaning-making does not thrive with straightforward answers (Büschkhule, 2020). It requires a degree of intuition, awareness, and the ability to stay with the discomfort, as the (temporary) comfort created by “script behaviour” is at the expense of learning (Timmermans, 2021).

## 2.2 ARCHETYPES IN A MUSEUM

Recently, I was invited to develop a workshop for hosts of Kunstinstituut Melly and TENT Rotterdam, intending to focus on their positions as a meaningful part of the museum experience. For this workshop, I started with the question: “How can the position of the host be transformed from being grounded in “permanent liminality” to being empowered into a “liminality practice”? How can their knowledge and experience be applied as “liminality competence” to develop distinct strategies toward mediating in the artistic liminoid space? By utilising the qualities of the liminal position meaningfully, the aim was to develop a professional identity that offers the individual more freedom of movement among diverse knowledge domains (Zabusky and Barley, 1997).

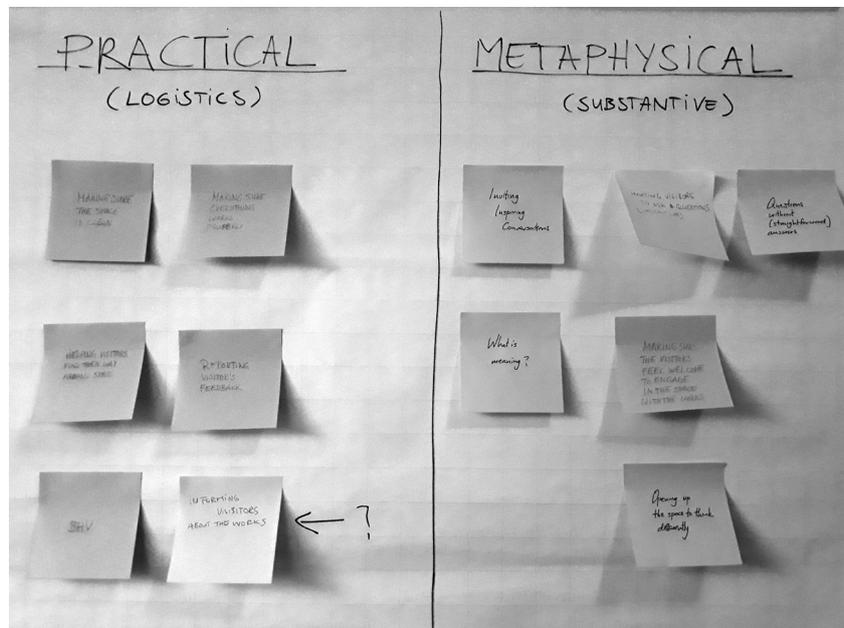
The workshop was initially developed to include several sessions over several weeks. We started the first session by facilitating a conversation among the hosts to share their experiences with the public. Soon into the conversation, the subtleties of the work became evident. An entire conversation revolved around the use of books by the hosts as almost performative devices to make themselves available to the public without feeling intrusive where they are not needed. This subject came up in response to the concept of “script behaviour” occurring in the liminal space, as explained by Timmermans (2021). A book as a device was an example of how the ambiguity of hosting can cause the hosts to seek comfort in habitual behaviour. It was an example of the choreography of the liminal.

From these conversations and experiences, we started archotyping visitors by making a general distinction between the knowledgeable visitor, an art professional, a casual visitor, and a novice who often isn't sure what to expect in an art gallery, but is curious nonetheless. We then proceeded to map out each archetype's possible needs and wants by providing them with speculative narratives. Based on these narratives, we abstracted the behaviour by removing them from their specific circumstances (i.e. museum visitors) and inverting them into host archetypes. The participating hosts were then invited to use these general host archetypes to formulate a subjective narrative of their own position as a host through specific situations, assets and liabilities.

The fact that most of the hosts were artists themselves, as well as the frequent museum visitors, fostered lively and empathic engagement in the workshop.

One of the hosts became aware of their sensitivity towards visitors who appeared too reluctant to engage with the artworks that were activated through physical engagement. Instead of starting a conversation about the work, she explained how she would physically demonstrate this engagement silently, be it by entering a cave sculpture or by going through the book on display. The visitor would be made aware of the possibilities through subtle interactions initiated by the host and feel increasingly comfortable with the artworks. The host decided to explore this skill of non-verbal engagement more consciously in the upcoming weeks.

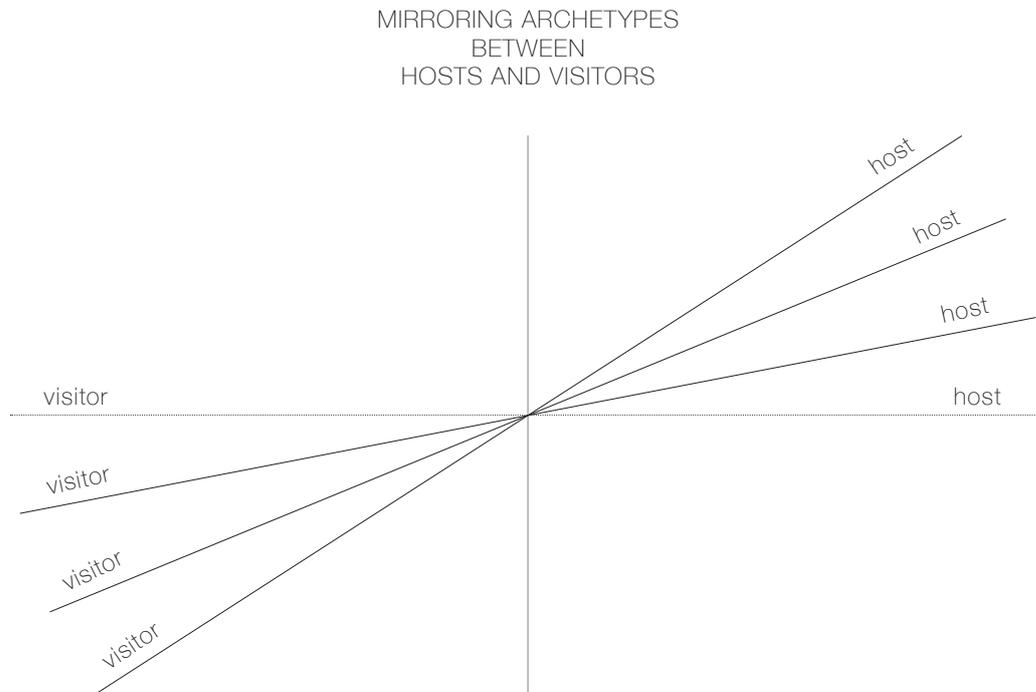
Another host shared an anecdote of a visitor who appeared confused by some of the works in the exhibitions containing several abstract collages, sculptures and even a tiny garden. They kept asking what the artwork was supposed to mean and how they felt confused by it. The initial attempt at an explanation did not work, as it seemed too abstract. Eventually, the host focused on the garden, explaining how the office staff and the hosts take care of the garden and what that entails on a daily basis. This was a subject that the visitor could relate to from personal experience, and it opened up the conversation. From there on, the



host veered more into the meaning of the plants for the artist and the work. Eventually, the visitor expressed feeling involved in the artwork and gaining an appreciation for it. The host had managed to find an element that the visitor could relate to and, through that element, find meaning in the artwork. This way, the host made the experience of meaning-making possible and more inclusive for the visitor. They decided to explore further how to connect works to the personal affinities and experiences of the visitors.

After the first session, all the participating hosts were invited to reflect on their experience and keep a notebook of the most meaningful encounters. They were also asked to try out different positioning than the one they occupied most comfortably and reflect on the awareness these less obvious positions brought to them.

Shifting the focus to the conceptual aspect of both the hosting position and the artwork requires awareness of the behavioural patterns that have often been formed subconsciously. By recognising the liminal archetypes in their own behaviour and that of the visitors, the hosts can hone their ability to take another person on a journey through the unknown.

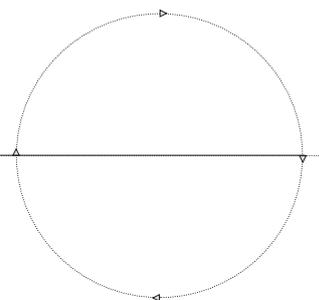


REFLECTION THROUGH  
ABSTRACTION



1. observations and experiences
2. abstracting experiences into narratives
3. formulating visitor archetypes through narratives
4. inverting the visitor narratives into host narratives
5. formulating host narratives and archetypes





**/04**

## **Transforming the loop of stagnation**

*Introducing the Toolbox for Intuitive Practice*

From the urgencies for narrational repair described in the previous chapter, a new question emerged: *How to transform the loop of stagnation during a liminal rupture to make room for meaningful change?* Not to alleviate or even avoid anxiety altogether, but to move through it, transforming it into a meaningful part of the process.

Looking back at the experiences during my years at the MEiA programme, specific patterns started to emerge. The programme required us, the students, to formulate a narrative of our practice through our research and positioning. While that is always a challenge, it proved to be even more so during a time of social instability. This experience led to a hypothesis that those two levels of identity formation are related. This premise was confirmed through my research, particularly by Mayes, who explicitly identifies the connection between the collective unconscious and the individual and how they feed off each other (2020).

Bringing these observations back into individual practice, I attempted to formulate a tool based on my experiences of collaborating on various projects throughout the years. In my personal experience, collaborations require moving through an impasse at specific points in the process. Such situations often occur due to lack of communication (when individual assumptions take over) and ask us to put aside our ego and adopt a willingness to communicate openly and honestly, with the same goal in mind. They thus necessitate the “will and emotions as well as a reflection” to be

mobilised in order to move forward. As such, these proposed activities are related to Beuys’s concept of a Social Sculpture in that they produce conversations that are initiated and facilitated through proposed exercises.

In her work *Holding Change* (2021), Brown speaks of a brave space, which are “spaces that are not just safe, but spaces that also encourage us to (...) practice in ways to open up possibilities of transformation.” In this chapter, Brown speaks of the importance of safe space, but also of our addiction to safety, comfort, and lack of conflict. “The framework of inviting each other into brave spaces is, at its core, a baseline agreement to be in authentic working relationship. Its focus is on becoming skillful in navigating the messiness of different starting points, divesting from perfection, working at the speed of relationship, attending to our own frustrations, and practicing accountability, transformative justice, repair, and even separation in generative ways that create more liberation in the midst of work, not just as a result of it.” The idea of a brave space speaks to my position and the way that my work functions. To me, it also relates to the idea of cooperation of coexistence as expressed by Beuys (Thompson, 2011).

A Social Sculpture requires a willingness to be open to challenging conversations. As noted by Beuys concerning the specifics of Social Sculpture: “Peaceful coexistence means that I want to repress difficulties. A political system is worked out, planned in such a way as to prevent problems from rising to the surface. Hence I consider peaceful coexistence the biggest lie ever told. Coexistence doesn’t exist, only cooperation exists.” (Beuys, as cited by Thompson, p. 44, 2011). This tool aims to foster more profound understanding and cooperation ultimately. In the words of activist and facilitator Adrienne Maree Brown, the presence of differences between individual members of the group (and society in general) “is quite probably the main thing we need to get comfortable with, and good at, if we hope to survive as a species.” (2021)

Using the ideas proposed by Brown, Jung, and mythologist Joseph Campbell, the practice proposed in the second part of this research uses archetypal narratology to conceptualise and recontextualise individual and collective processes through abstraction. It also invites the user to (temporarily at least) focus on the challenge of “staying with the trouble” and move through these ordeals rather than succumb to the lure of the efficiently produced outcome. The idea behind this work is that the process is what eventually (in)forms the outcome to become what it needs to be, which might be different from what the participant wants it to be in the first place.

The tools and exercises are divided into different segments, starting with archetypal cards. The cards allow participants to reflexively consider their position within the group’s ecosystem through an archetypal narrative. The archetypes used here are based on Jungian typology, cognitive typology, several other esoteric systems such as astrology and enneagram, and empirical research through personal experiences and observations. The goal is for the participant to recognise behavioural patterns exhibited in specific contexts and circumstances. Several variations of exercises with archetypal cards are proposed,

ranging from one-on-one reflection on sensory versus intuitive preference for processing information, to a collective card exercise through which the participant invites others to construct their archetype in the group. The latter requires a different level of trust in the group.

These types are not fixed and do not claim to reflect the entirety of a person's personality or character. Instead, they (attempt to) represent the role or positions that the person takes on within the dynamic of the group or the context. In that sense, it functions similarly to a Beuysian "counter-image": as an invitation to reflect on our choices within the systems that we occupy.

Jung distinguishes between the Personal Unconscious, based on an individual's life experience, and the Collective Unconscious that contains elements or cognitive structures that evolved over human history and are therefore common to all. They are what Jung called Archetypes. These cognitive structures manifest through various metaphysical concepts or symbolic structures, which form the basis of many myths. By recognising these patterns in ourselves, in others, and in the situations that we find ourselves in, we can move through the process more consciously, effectively and evolve accordingly.

Archetypes are universal symbols found in religious art, mythology and fairy tales across cultures throughout history. Jung and Campbell concluded that these similarities exist because many mythological themes and symbols emerge from an area of the mind called Collective Unconscious. These patterns depend on the situation, but they often emerge subconsciously. Our behavioural patterns are forms of Archetypal positions.

The second part of the toolbox is based on Joseph Campbell's concept of the Monomyth or a Hero's Journey.

Hero's Journey is a narrative device based on stories found in ancient and myths found all over the world, as well as contemporary stories found in books and films. It follows the fundamental pattern of individuals undergoing heroic adventures as they seek to actualise their higher potential. In the toolbox, the collective process is conceptualised as a Monomyth. The elements of the Monomyth have been juxtaposed with their equivalents of different stages of the collective process.

The collective project becomes an archetypal narrative by abstracting the process and removing it from its specific circumstances. The distance gained from this conceptualisation allows participants to see subconscious patterns and address them accordingly. In the subsequent exercises, this speculative narrativity is used to exercise meaning-making and empower participants to collectively and individually exercise authorship of their own story.

Abstraction can offer repair to unsettling situations too complex for straightforward approaches. In his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, pedagogue Paulo Freire proposes a "codification" (i.e. abstraction) as a means of approaching circumstances that are too "dense, impenetrable, and enveloping" (Freire, 1968). He thereby warns of "reducing the concrete to the abstract". Instead, he proposes maintaining both elements in order to facilitate reflection. The fragmentation that occurs through abstraction of "codifying" is then refragmented in his concept of "decoding", meaning: returning to the concrete situation with gained insight and ability to reflect on the previously "dense, impenetrable, and enveloping" situation critically. These "decodings" can also be applied to Beuys's use of "counter-images" to reevaluate habitual behaviour and processes (as discussed in the first chapter). The figurative choreography proposed by Freire equally coincides with the Monomyth in which the archetypal protagonist moves from the "ordinary world" in search of higher potential, crossing the threshold to enter the "supernatural world", encountering "tests, allies, enemies" and an "ordeal", to eventually return to the "ordinary world" with gained insights and knowledge.

While the proposed toolbox is still a speculative prototype, it is based on the exercises and workshops performed and tested in my practice over the last two years. After being developed further through practice, it is meant to be used by others.

## A Refresher Course

*An archetypal conversation.*



“You’re doing a really good job over here. As a visitor, you feel really well informed to go through the building.” explained Marcel.

He is sitting in front of us behind the desk.

We had just finished watching a short video in which a person’s phone battery exploded, seriously injuring his hand in the process. We have come here today to learn about Emergency Response in the case of fire (or BHV in Dutch). Right now we are waiting for someone to prepare an emergency scenario that we can enact as a group.

Meanwhile, Marcel continued: “I mean, I come to all kinds of public places because of my job as a volunteer fireman. Places like nursing homes, department stores, libraries, places like that. And you should see some of them... Confusing information, or sometimes no information at all, no clear rules... And the thing is, people really like to know what they can and cannot do and where they can and cannot go, especially when they are visiting a new place. And especially in times like these, when everything is uncertain, and the guidelines keep changing. People have a need for plain and simple rules. Trust me, I see it all the time in my line of work. Dealing with uncertainty is one of the most stressful things in life.”

“Yes, well we really cannot be lax towards our visitors,” explained one of my colleagues, “since we are funded by public funds and by the municipality, we have a responsibility.”

Marcel nodded: “And... is this what you call a museum?” he asked.

“No, no... well, it’s different from a museum in a sense that we don’t have a permanent collection. The work that we exhibit is always changing. That’s why it’s more of a Contemporary Art Centre. That’s the official term.”

“Contemporary...” Marcel repeated, more to himself. “I was recently at this other place and they also used that phrase. What makes something Contemporary Art?” he stressed the words Contemporary Art as if placing quote marks around them.

“Well, it basically just means it’s made today by the artists working today...” began my colleague, but Marcel continued: “But is everything made today Contemporary then? Or is there something else... You see, I’m curious. Like I said, I was recently at this place where they also have exhibitions and in one room they had these things that looked like pans, but they were huge, really too big, and there were so many of them it filled the whole wall... and you just saw the bottom of these... pans... in front of you... and it was so weird... I mean, what is contemporary about that? All I can think of when I see something like that is: “What the hell is going on, who would do this... and why would anyone do this?” he stopped and got very quiet for a moment, as though just thinking of this disturbed him again.

“Well there you go. That’s it.” said Paul, leaning back into his chair with his arms crossed.

Paul has been here the longest. Not only today, since he’s always the first one to come in and last one to leave the building, but he’s also one of the founding members of the Contemporary Art Center that all of us work for. He is the deputy director, which essentially means he takes care of the less alluring parts of an exhibition that our more cerebral colleagues come up with, while taking care of the building and making sure the day-to-day work runs smoothly. His practical, down-to-earth demeanor and hyper efficient way of communicating, seems curiously at odds with the institution’s image as a place for contemplative debate and experimental activities.

“What do you mean?” asked Marcel, giving Paul a puzzled look, as though he was making sure that Paul was not mocking him.

“That feeling that you described right there.” Paul asserted, “That’s it. That’s all. That’s what art is about. It’s at Voorlinden, Museum Voorlinden, what you’re describing, right?”

“Yes, yes... But...” Marcel continued, “I just don’t get why anyone would make such a thing. It just made no sense. I couldn’t... I mean, who would do such a thing? I would think it’s a crazy person who does something like that. Een dorpsgekkie.”

“But the fact that you are confused, that you are right now trying to make sense of something that you can’t, that’s the work.” Paul explained.

“But...”

“And all you have to do is allow that feeling. Gewoon toelaten. You don’t need to do anything with it. Je hoeft er verder niks mee te doen. Just encountering that feeling and dealing with it.”

“What do you mean...?” Marcel looked more confused than ever, trying to adequately convey the feeling of agitation and discomfort he was feeling, which he was not sure Paul was really understanding. “How do I know what the person who made it wanted to say with it? What if they wanted to say something entirely else with it, that I have no way of knowing?”

“You can always ask someone that works there and they’ll gladly explain it to you. But... What I’m saying is that it doesn’t really matter what the artist wants.

Look, Voorlinden is a great place to visit, they have a café there which is really nice, it’s by the water, a great location to go. Take your wife for a day. Trust me, she’ll love it. And it’s not as out there as some of the stuff we have here. I mean, sometimes I’m not even sure what’s really happening with some of the work people bring in here. So I wouldn’t recommend starting here. But if you want to learn more about this, Voorlinden is a good place to start. And the more you experience these things, which yes can be strange and uncomfortable, after a while you can even start to enjoy it. Really. Echt waar. Let maar eens op.”

Marcel smiled. He seemed not really sure what to believe. We sat there in silence for a couple of moments. Then the false alarm went off and we pretended to save people’s lives from a fictional fire.

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