

INTIMATE MUSEUM

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sonic intervention as a tool to explore the notion of listening as an educational act

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INTRO

THIS BODY OF RESEARCH EXPLORES SOMATIC AND EMBODIED FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT THROUGH SOUND AND QUESTIONS MY OWN POSITION WITHIN ART EDUCATION AS I TRAVERSE THE ROLES OF EDUCATOR, ARTIST, AND CURATOR. DUE TO WORKING WITHIN THE RESTRAINTS OF COVID AND ITS VARIOUS LOCKDOWNS, MY METHODS OF INQUIRY HAVE BEEN INTIMATE. I HAVE SOUGHT CONNECTIONS AND FEEDBACK WITH THOSE NEAR TO ME. IN OTHER WORDS, FRIENDS AND CLASSMATES HAVE BEEN INTEGRAL TO THIS RESEARCH, WHICH IS AN EXPLORATION OF THE MEDIUM OF SOUND BUT ALSO MY OWN PERSONAL JOURNEY AS A PRACTITIONER WHO HAS MOVED AWAY FROM FORMAL MUSEUM EDUCATION TOWARDS MORE HYBRID AND INTIMATE FORMS OF INTERACTION.

DEPARTURE POINT. Four years ago, I resigned from my job at a museum. At the time I made that decision, I had been working as an education manager in a film museum and had participated in all sorts of educational art and film projects for nearly five years. I felt burnt out, very confused, slightly disappointed, and was searching for ways how to re-define my practice and re-position myself so that I could continue working in the realm of art and education in sync with what I believe in and stand for. Hence why I enrolled at the Piet Zwart Institute and undertook this piece of research.

I started my research with the focus mostly on institutional critique, specifically – art interpretation. At that point, the urgency for me lay in the form, the manner, in which the institution communicates with its visitors about art, and the role of a museum educator in it. My stance in terms of that matter was that a museum’s educational department operates sort of as “a de-coder of the curatorially constructed mystery” (Vagabond Reviews, 2014, p. 8). The visitor is often put in a position of someone who, in order to have a meaningful experience and to understand what they have encountered, needs to be enlightened by the museum educator, who is there to kindly interpret the actual meaning of the work and exhibition all together for them. In this structure an educator functions as knowledge transmitter between the curator and spectator. My uneasiness with this function and keenness to practice meaningfully served as a departure point for this research. I embarked on a quest to find ways how to open up museum and art interpretation, how to give visitors more agency and make museum education less hierarchical whilst partaking in museum education on my own terms.



Brie Moreno, Before, after, 2015

THE VIEWER IS NOT A DISEMBODIED EYE. As my research evolved, I became more and more interested in somatic and embodied learning and ways of knowing, as they seemed to offer options to, in a way, convert art interpretation into something more accessible and open for a regular art viewer. Teacher and researcher Joyce Brodsky in her essay *How to see with the whole body*, proposes that the entire body is involved when making art, while exploring the practice, and when viewing and interpreting artwork. She points out that during a sensory “whole body experience”, the lived body is engaged in both the making (exploring practice) and the viewing of (interpreting) artworks (Brodsky, 2002, p. 100). At first glance it might seem that she is stating the obvious, she further explains the urgency of her statement with which I strongly relate:

We have become more accustomed to regard multi-sensory and interactive experiences with artworks as part of contemporary viewing practices, although emphasis on just seeing is still a prime factor in theoretical discussions about many contemporary genres.

I have observed somewhat similar tendencies also in art education. Education in general still seems to be driven by Cartesian views: the logical and the measurable predominates, and physicality and emotions are regarded as something that must be controlled to achieve cognitive performance and gain true knowledge. However, learning does not happen exclusively above the neck. Learners are whole beings that make sense of the world through bodily sensations and feelings as well as through rational processes. Art educator Olga Hubbard (Hubbard, 2007, p. 51) talks about:

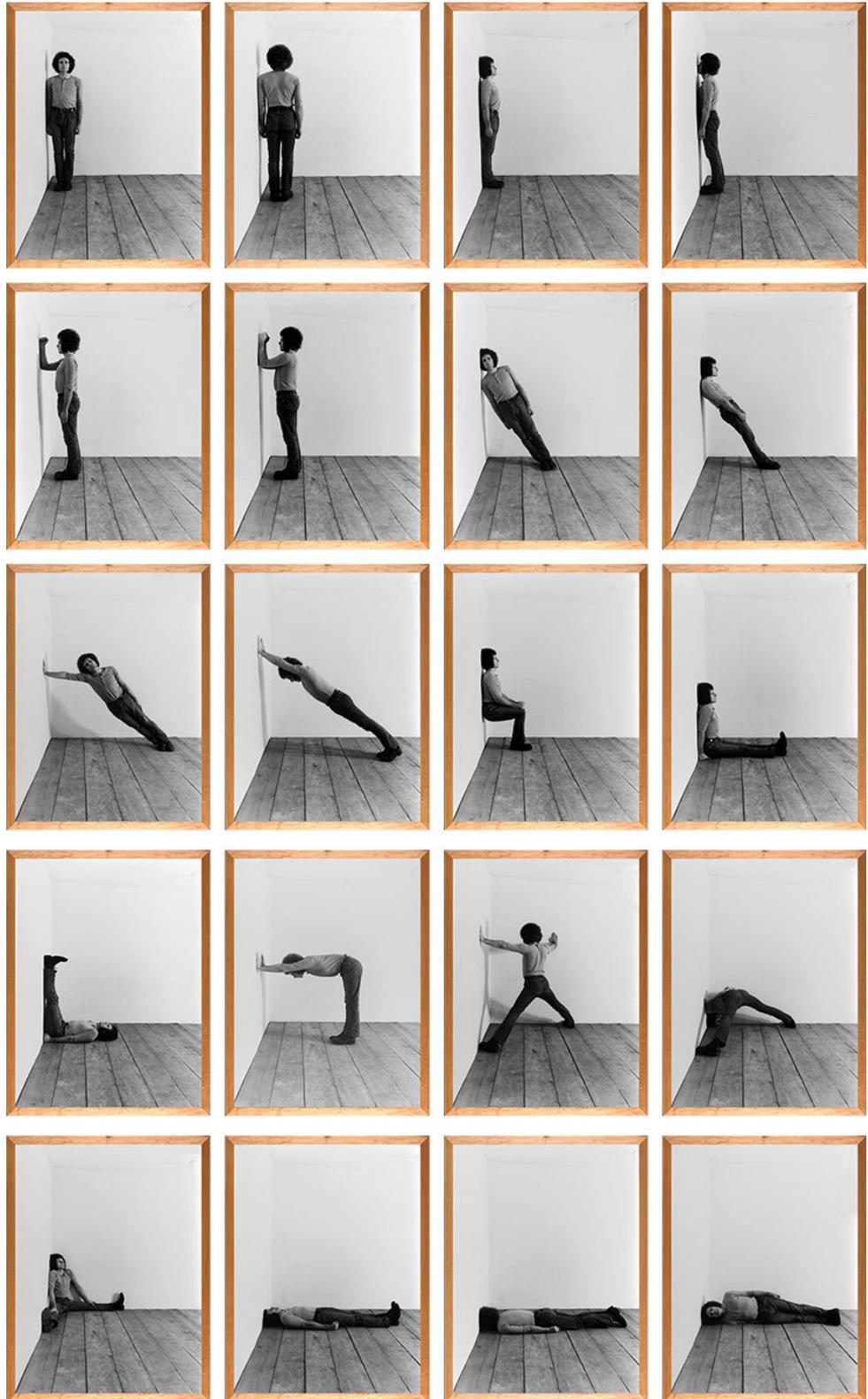
Cognition that goes beyond the rational and the measurable, one where perception, physical sensations, and emotions all constitute valuable ways of knowing.

Something, I am convinced, everyone has experienced at some point in their lives, but do not really have words for it, something that goes beyond words. Which is something felt more in the body rather than thought of in one’s mind. These are experiences that shape us in a manner of speaking, these are things we carry with ourselves, perhaps forever. They have more to do with the senses rather than with rational thought. They are actions (but not necessarily motions) more than anything else. I am keen to embrace and experiment with these ways of knowing and learning in my practice.



In the short film *Ten Minutes Older*, a group of children is captured watching a puppet show. The children, obviously unaware of being filmed, watch the show uninhibited and react animatedly to what is happening in front of them. A range of emotions are captured, joy, fear, sadness and many shades of each.

link to the documentary *Ten Minutes Older*, 1978, by Herz Frank <https://youtu.be/BesHd0TN3Ok>



Klaus Rinke Wall, Floor, Corner, Space, 24 Photographs, 1970

The physical experience of space is a central element in the oeuvre of Klaus Rinke. In 1969 he started to use his own body in artistic investigations in the explorations of his spatiotemporal and personal limits.

THE PROJECT AND METHODOLOGY

I was preparing to develop and execute my graduation project in a museum or gallery, but due to the limits imposed by the pandemic and temporary closure of all art institutions, my plans changed. Subsequently, the thought about not working in a museum anymore, which had already lingered in my mind for a while, surfaced again. The new circumstances were perfect for testing new, *museum-free*, ways of practising, so I decided to try. This decision, of course, has affected my research. What had initially begun as an attempt to find ways how to practice more accessible, inclusive sensory- based art interpretation in a museum whilst not being a part of an institution, due to circumstances, turned into a project about something else. Sound, voice and listening became essential elements of the project and this research. In a very literal sense – as part of my graduation project I have made several audio recordings and soundscapes which are organized in *a tour* called INTIMATE MUSEUM and will be discussed in this document. Also, a very important aspect of this research is the quest for my own voice. Within this research, I am exploring different positions I might take in my future practice along with exploring the developing practice itself.

In times of crisis when we have no physical access to museums, what we can visit is our memories and experiences, the embodied knowledge gathered over time, the experienced moment here and now. When I think about it, one's own body sort of becomes a (substitute of a) museum. All the places we have once been at in some way always resides within us. On a personal and broader scale, this project of mine is a journey from a museum to one's own embodied being.

My decision to seize the ears of the viewer in my project was influenced by my interest in somatic and embodied learning. My goal was to invite my listener to look inwards, instead of looking merely at something in front of them. To be content and in their body. Aware of their fleshiness and sensitivity. The attempt being to invite the listener to dive into their own body, so to speak. To tackle and to listen to the fleshy and emotional knowledge. The idea behind the lack of my physical presence being to encourage such intimate exploration and learning process.

One might argue that the method I am using puts the listener in a position where they cannot talk back. I want to stress that my intention with this project was not for it to be a conversation, but rather an inner dialogue. An exercise in listening to others and oneself. The others being human and non-human beings, as well as material and non-material matters on which the listener is invited to contemplate through the prism of their personal and intimate experience.

The INTIMATE MUSEUM consists of 6 tracks which can be listened to as a tour or as separate sound pieces. Later in the report, I will discuss each track in three different chapters. Each chapter gives an insight into the process of developing tracks – intentions, findings, and the difficulties I faced. Along with my reflections on the process, I have gathered insights and experiences of people who have listened to my audio tracks.

In chapters EAR TO THE GROUND, SPACE & BODY and ALL EARS, I elaborate on the intentions and relevance of this research, as well as laying out the theoretical and personal underpinnings of my project.

Visual references in this document are meant to be evocative in ways that words cannot accommodate. They can be seen as visual ruminations on the INTIMATE MUSEUM tour and my thoughts about its making. The selection of works tackles and comments on topics somewhat kindred to the audio recordings of my project and this research per se.

Link to the tour:

<https://soundcloud.com/gundega-melberga/sets/intimate-museum>



Emily Cherrie Duffy, Goosebumps, 2012



Carl Andre, Equivalent VIII, 1966

Each of Andre's Equivalent series consists of a rectangular arrangement of 120 firebricks. Although the shape of each sculpture is different, they all have the same height, mass, and volume, and therefore are equivalent to each other.

INTERLUDE

EAR TO THE GROUND

ALONG WITH THINKING THROUGH THE COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES OF THE POSITIONS OF AN EDUCATOR, ARTIST AND CURATOR, IN THIS CHAPTER I AM OPENING UP ABOUT PERSONAL URGENCIES, DECISIONS AND INSIGHTS OF THE QUEST TO RE-DEFINE MY PRACTICE AND POSITION IN ART EDUCATION WITHIN CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES. IN THIS PART OF THE REPORT I RUMINATE ON OCCUPYING SEVERAL ROLES SIMULTANEOUSLY. ALSO, ON TAKING THE POSITION OF AN OUTSIDER AND THE ADVANTAGES SUCH A ROLE SEEMS TO OFFER. I ADDRESS THE QUESTION OF MY OWN VOICE WHICH THINKING ABOUT THE POSITION I MIGHT TAKE HAS TRIGGERED. I AM CONTEMPLATING WHAT MY VOICE HAS BEEN AND HOW IT COULD EVOLVE IF I FOCUS ON AND FOLLOW MY PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL STANDPOINTS AND BELIEFS.

WEARING DIFFERENT HATS. The more I think of all the positions I could take, the harder it gets to distinguish them from one another. It seems almost as if each position is a step that I need to take to keep on moving ahead towards my practice. In a way, I have embraced the various elements of the museum/institution myself. As an artist, I question, seek, explore, and express. As a curator, I collect, combine, and display like-minded and, also contradictory voices and through those also my own. As an educator, I invite others to partake in this process. But these positions and tasks, and activities, characteristic to each position, are tightly intertwined and sometimes even interchangeable. What an artist does, is also what an educator or curator is busy with, and this is true the other way around as well. In one way or another, they all seem to be keen to address, to speak to, to be listened to. Perhaps, what distinguishes them is the intention and motivation behind the desire to communicate. And then subsequently, the ratio of agency they give others and have for themselves.

At first glance it may seem that an artist tends to use more open, even elusive means and forms for exploration and expression such as sculpture or sound performance, for example, allowing more unexpected aspects and meanings to emerge. An artist leaves a considerable number of things to be decided by the viewer, that way providing them with a great deal of agency. This is especially true in an educational context. As artist Liz Ellis (Pringle, 2009) points out in TATE Modern research paper on the relationship between art practice and dialogic forms of gallery education:

Artists are clear that they are not there to convey specific interpretations. Instead, they aim to enable learners to draw on their personal experience to gain understanding, develop new knowledge and articulate their ideas.

However, such a stance doesn't necessarily make one an artist. Nor does it mean that someone who identifies as an educator or curator cannot approach teaching or curating from such a perspective.

A curator contextualises, weaves a narrative by researching and organizing works of art in an exhibition. Artist, curator and educator Paul O'Neill discusses the notion of curator as meta-artist "since the late 1980s, there has been a shift from curating as an administrative, caring, mediating activity towards a more creative one akin to a form of artistic practice" (O'Neill, 2007, p. 21).

Indeed, the narrative created by a curator conveys also the voice of the curator, rendering an exhibition from a display and mediation of artworks into an expression, perspective. A curator organises works in a particular combination, chooses the location where they are exhibited – all those aspects add layers of meaning to what is on display, and ideally set things in motion towards a dialogue, or at least an introspection or contemplation of certain topics. Is that not also something an educator does? Through organizing, collecting, and reflecting on *materials*, whether those are artworks, ideas or activities, producing knowledge? Not to forget, that an educator's voice is always present in their teaching – to some extent their self, their point of view is applied to whatever it is they are teaching on some level rendering them into artists and curators.

In a museum context, an educator is usually the facilitator of *educational conversations* or *interactions* initiated by artists and/or curators. Depending on the educator, the goal is then either to transmit the knowledge or set up conditions for a more experiential, process-focused learning. Perhaps, in most cases, an educator uses more articulate forms of inquiry compared to an artist and curator. Maybe there is more clarity about the outcome of the process. However, I truly believe that in the end, it all depends on a person who *wears the hat*, and not so much on the context and setting where the teaching takes place.

In this research, I employ different positions, shifting from one to another. This is not to feed my ego, neither is it to prove something, nor to rebel or critique, but to gain a different perspective, seek new approaches and try out different methods. Temporarily occupying different positions allows me to look at the same problem from a different point of view. If I choose to occupy different positions at the same time, I seemingly diminish the distance between them. The preconceived hierarchy of who comes after who in terms of importance and power, is torn down. That assumingly also puts the visitor/spectator/student in a fluent, constantly changing position.



Lee Kun-Yong, Logic of Place, 1975

The first picture shows Lee drawing a circle in the ground using a long nail. He is then seen standing and pointing at the circle. At this point in the actual performance he uttered the word there (kǒgi), before stepping into the circle and shouting here (yǒgi). Lee then stood outside it again, pointed behind his shoulder in the direction of the circle and uttered over there (chǒgi). Returning to the circle, he said here, there and over there before finally walking around the circle shouting where three times in succession.

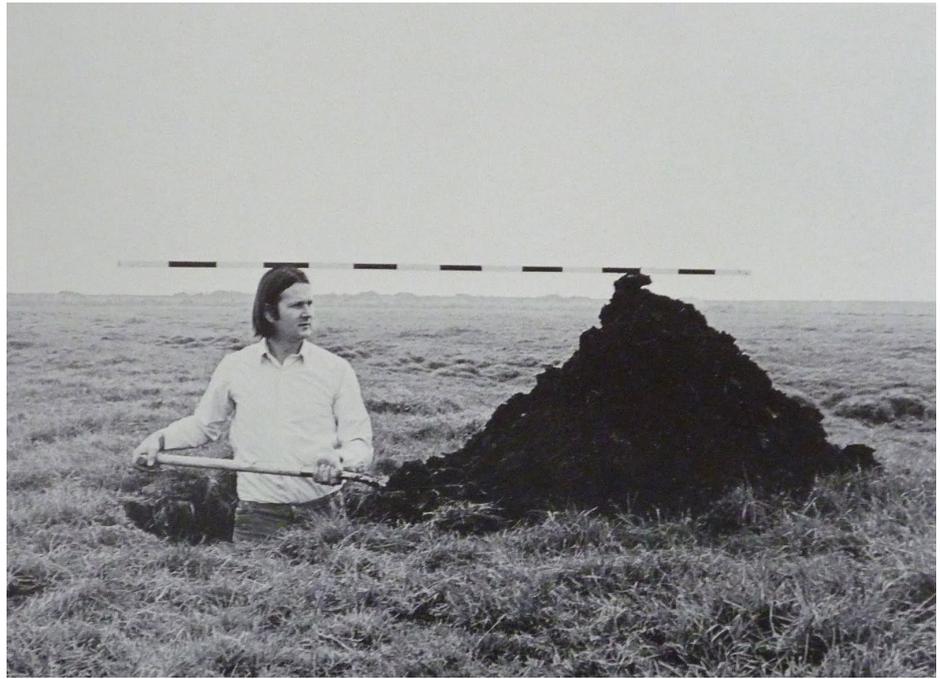
POSITION OF AN OUTSIDER. I have thought deeply about the position of an outsider and how I often feel tempted to identify as one and occupy that position. Perhaps this is because it allows me to observe from a distance? But does it? Is it about withdrawal or is it about constantly immersing myself into something unknown hence being on the outside, having not yet become a part of something? Perhaps, *a stranger*, as in someone who is not familiar, who is at a particular place or situation for the first time is a more suitable word. It implies the possibility or opportunity to transform and become someone else. Or to become more me than I was before. I am fascinated by this in-between moment. That is the moment when also learning happens, isn't it?

I believe taking the position of a stranger provides the opportunity to change and build something new. It constrains but also forces me to work with what I have. It forces me to rethink where I stand, to listen to myself, to seek for and see the options I have. In a way, it sets me free – it is up to me how to continue, what and whose expectations if any to meet.

MY VOICE. My whole life, I have been trained and shaped and encouraged to fit in, to set goals and then work towards the desired end results. As a person and a teacher, I have internalised the impetus to be rational. How do I get out of this outcome and goal-oriented loop? How to embrace and integrate the notion of process in my practice? How do I teach more bodily, fleshy knowledge? I am a very emotional person, but I live in a world that has taught me that this part of my being is not valid, at least not enough when it comes to *serious matters* like education. However, on a very personal level, although constantly doubting myself because of rooting my actions and thoughts in such irrational reasoning, emotions have always played a crucial role in how I make sense of the world and exist in it. How do I teach others something I am still learning to value myself? How do I find my own voice, embrace it to the fullest and build my practice on it? I always use a singular form of *my voice*, but perhaps mine is more of an ensemble?

I like to hide behind like-minded voices, I tend to borrow their words to find shape for mine. It affords me a sense of safety and legitimacy. However, I notice how I seem to bounce between the ideas of others and positions they have taken when I am trying to position myself. I seem to shift from one role to another, then another one and then back where I started.

bell hooks argues that being an educator is first and foremost an act of service (hooks, 2003, p. 86). My view on working in education is of kinship to hers – I believe, being an educator requires caring for others, giving rather than taking, being in service indeed. To some extent, the same goes for artists and curators, basically, everyone involved in the museum/art/ education field in one or another way. Hence my initial hesitation to allow this research to be so personal. However, I am also convinced that it is essential to know where one stands. I cannot be a responsible educator, nor artist or curator if I am not honest to myself about my own practice. As my classmate Marton pointed out in one of our conversations, one thing is to know how one wants to position themselves, something completely else is how one acts, which seems to show who one really is. To what extent, if any, do I meet my own beliefs and opinions on education and art in my practice? How do I minimize the distance between who I am and who I want to be? I do not know if this project of mine will answer these questions or illuminate if those questions are even answerable. The world around me is constantly changing, I as part of it am in constant motion myself. Perhaps, what is of real importance is figuring out a way how to stay alert and aware of this change, this constant flow, in order to be always willing and ready to re-define and re-consider my position versus my actions.



Sigurdur Gudmundsson, Situations, 1970s

Series of staged photographs in which the artist himself is a stand-in for a persona caught in often absurd or ironic situations.

SPACE
 OPEN SPACE
 ENCLOSED SPACE
 OUTER SPACE
 SPACE SUIT
 SPACE AGE
 LIVING SPACE
 PROJECTIVE SPACE
 SPACE CAPSULE
 LACK OF SPACE
 SPACE BAND
 SPACE HEATER
 DEEP SPACE
 SPACE ODYSSEY
 SPACE SALESMAN
 EUCLIDEAN SPACE
 SPACE CADET
 SPACE STATION
 BLANK SPACE
 SPACE OUT
 PARKING SPACE
 SPACE INVADERS
 SPACE WALK
 SPACE TIME CONTINUUM
 SPACE BAR
 LOST IN SPACE
 STARING INTO SPACE
 WATCH THIS SPACE
 SPACE CURVE
 SPACE LATTICE
 SPACE OPERA
 CATCHER SPACE
 SPACE SICKNESS
 BUNCHER SPACE
 THREE-DIMENSIONAL SPACE
 HAIR SPACE
 SPACE RACE
 NULL SPACE



BODIES IN URBAN SPACES. At pre-determined parkours, a squad of dedicated dancers, performers and parkour runners move through the city. Up to 20 colourfully dressed people fold and stack up in doorways, on stair landings or park benches

SPACE & BODY

THIS CHAPTER FOCUSES ON THE OVERARCHING THEORETICAL LAYER OF MY RESEARCH PROJECT. THROUGH THE PRISM OF MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AND OBSERVATIONS I AM INTRODUCING NOTIONS OF INTRA-ACTION, EXPERIENCE, EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE, AND SOUND. I AM TALKING ABOUT INTIMATE, SOMATIC EXPERIENCES DURING AN ENCOUNTER WITH AN ARTWORK, AND HOW THOSE CONTRIBUTE TO THE PRODUCTION OF EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE. I TOUCH UPON THE QUESTION OF HOW SUCH INTERACTION DETERMINES ONESELF AND ONE'S PERCEPTION AND COGNITION OF THE MATERIAL AND NON-MATERIAL WORLD. I FURTHER DEVELOP MY POINT THROUGH THE LENS OF A SOUND SPACE, AS SOUND IS AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN MY PROJECT.

INTRA-ACTING. In a paper on post-human museum studies Vibrancy, repetition and movement: posthuman theories for reconceptualising young children in museums, the authors argue that meaning emerges from encounters with the world, from relationships between non-human and human in the midst of experience “rather than the child acting on the world, materials also act on the child; intra-action rather than inter-action” (MacRae, Christina; Hackett, Abigail; Holmes, Rachel; Jones, Liz, 2017, p. 507).

My physical body takes up a certain amount of space in a tangible world, physical reality. I share it with other bodies, human and non-human. Microbes, viruses, algae, plants, animals, buildings, things, objects. This list could go on forever. Every second my body is changing in relation to everything around me. I breathe in and out. I move. I intra-act with my surroundings and everything they entail. Where do I end and where does the world around me begin? Is there a strict line? Perhaps I am rather a part of the space which surrounds me. My arm lying on the table is also the table and the table is also my arm? It determines me just as much as my awareness of it makes it real. My skin rubbing against the wooden surface says just as much about my physical body as it does about the table.

Just like my physical experience and the surrounding world determines my body and I determine it, the non-material, mental part of my being plays a crucial role in who I am, and how the world around me is. My physical awareness and experiences working as a gateway to layers of myself beyond the body – thoughts, emotions, memories. From there I access the world outside my physical and mental being, which then again, after taking a bypath in the out of me realm, through my senses and emotions leads back within me. My body and mind working together, making me and the world around and within me exist, with every move beyond and back adding another layer of embodied knowledge to my being.

EXPERIENCE & EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE. Teacher, dancer and researcher Karen Barbour in her article Embodied Ways of Knowing writes that:

‘embodiment’ incorporated many things as one; a person’s biological (somatic), intellectual, emotional, bodily, social, gendered, artistic and spiritual experience, within their cultural and geographical location. (...) Embodiment thus indicates a holistic experiencing individual.

Also, just as embodiment acknowledges diversity, “an embodied strategy for knowing acknowledged explicitly the importance and influence of who a person is” (Barbour, 2016, p. 230).

Voice-over fragment of Jonas Mekas' film *As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty*- experimental documentary film compiled from Mekas' home movies. The film is an attempt to reconstruct his life through various home movies filmed over a period of about 30 years.

Link to the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOwescpyMqQ>

As I Was Moving Ahead Occasionally I Saw Brief Glimpses of Beauty

Jonas Mekas

I have never been able really to figure out where my life begins and where it ends.

CHAPTER I

I have never, never been able to figure it all out. What it's all about, what it all means. So when I began now to put all these rolls of film together, to string them together, the first idea was to keep them chronological. But then I gave up and I just began splicing them together by chance, the way I found them on the shelf. Because I really don't know where any piece of my life really belongs.

Let it be, let it go, just by pure chance, disorder. There is some kind of order in it, order of its own, which I do not really understand, same as I never understood life around me, *the real life*, as they say, or the real people, I never understood them.

I still do not understand them, and I do not really want to understand them.

Without knowing, unknowingly, we carry... each of us, we carry with us somewhere deep, some images of Paradise. Maybe not images... some vague, vague feeling where we have been some place... There are places, there are places in which we find ourselves in our lives. I have been in such places where I felt, ah, this must be like Paradise, this is Paradise, or something like that. A little fragment of Paradise. Not only the places... I have been with friends. We have been together, my friends, many times, and we felt some kind of togetherness, something special, and we were elated and we felt, ah, we felt like in Paradise.

But we were right here on this Earth. But we were in Paradise... Those brief moments, those moments... And that is maybe what it's all about... Forget eternity, enjoy. Yes, we enjoyed those moments. Those brief moments, those evenings. And there were many such evenings, many such evenings, my friends. I will never forget them, my friends...

A few years ago, I was at Tate London lying on the floor in one of the galleries where in a darkened room Nan Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* was being projected. Although I did not come to the museum with the intention of seeing that work, I nonetheless ended up in the installation. The room was full, so I sat down on the floor right next to the entrance. I stayed there for quite a while. Leaning against the dark, cool wall. I think the floor was wooden, but maybe I am wrong. People kept walking in and out of the gallery. I could see bodies of others watching in the dark. I vaguely remember Goldin's photographs. However, my body seems to still know how it felt to be there on the floor, first sitting straight, then slowly turning on one side, half-lying against the wall. Goldin's photographs made me think of my friends. Looking at them brought to the surface something, a sensation, a feeling maybe, perhaps a combination of both. Something very familiar in a completely different and unknown context. Did everybody in the room have this experience? What were they thinking about? Did we all become Nan Goldin for a second? Or did she become us?

As time goes by, the theoretical knowledge about the work keeps fading from my memory in contrast to the sensed one – the one where I seem to understand in some strange, only partly rational way what something is about with my whole body. I've had moments when a certain position that my body takes, or a combination of sounds or smells bring that moment in the exhibition back within seconds. It feels like I am there. For a very short moment, I am not here. I am half-lying on the floor again back there, and it is such a vivid experience. Totally irrational. Very brief. Something very similar to what some people call *déjà vu*, an uncanny sensation you've already experienced something, even when you know you never have.

Somehow, I cannot detach this sensation, this lived moment that keeps coming back from time to time, from what the work of Nan Goldin is. My experience seems to have become a part of it, of its meaning. What it did to me is stronger than what I was told about it.

This experience of a certain physical space, emotional and sensuous space which it has created, resides within me. It's a space within a space within a space. Embodied knowledge that I carry within me wherever I go. It binds me with others who have been there, it relates me to that specific place, that time, and time in someone else's life years before and after that. It has probably given me the opportunity to be someone else for a moment. Or it has allowed me to simply see myself, to be myself to the bone. This encounter with an artwork and the relationship established with it has allowed me to understand myself better through the lens of someone else's being, someone else's self. Simultaneously providing me with the understanding of who that other person, through whose prism I have been gazing at myself, might be.



Satijn Panyigay, Twilight Zone (Museum Boijmans van Beuningen), 2020

Twilight Zone (Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen) is part of a larger project in which Satijn Panyigay is capturing the empty exhibition spaces of leading Dutch museums.



Kai Wai Wong, untitled, 2018

Preoccupation with life's fleeting nature forms the basis of Wong's visual aesthetic. Utilizing tone, colour, and line as graphic elements, the photographer's work seeks beauty in the banal.

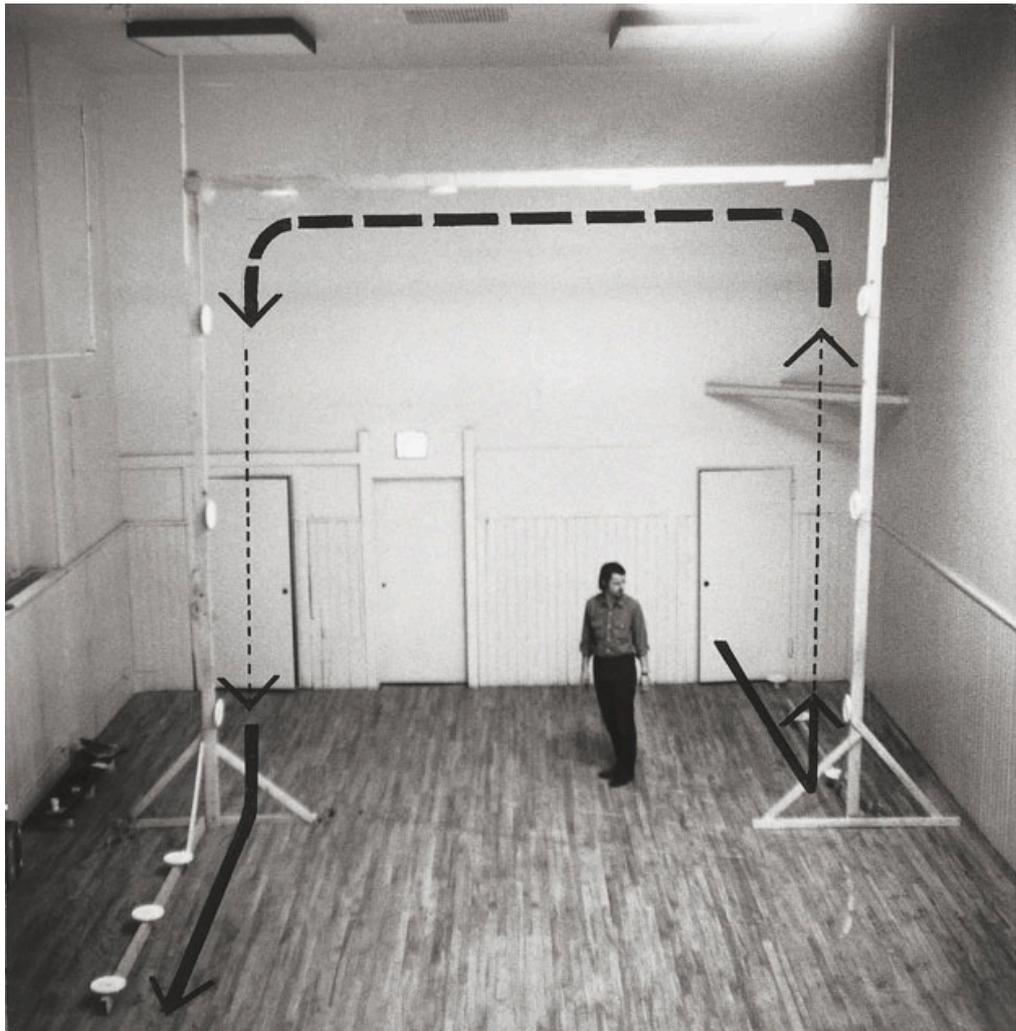
SOUND SPACE. Somewhere in-between, crossing boundaries of both- material and mental worlds of ours emerges and exists a sonic dimension of space.

Sound is produced by human and non-human beings and things, space produces sound, but the sound is also space. A multitude of spaces within which my body is immersed. It is this moment here and now- space taken up by sound waves that are travelling to me. Penetrating my body and those of others. Subtle vibrations that create resonating physical and temporal space, “extending ear to tactility, to a feeling body (...) deeper and fuller embodied presence” (LaBelle, 2009, p. 20).

Sound has an informative character which helps my mind and body to distinguish inside space from an outdoor environment, sound gives away the size of a room, tells you about its interior and the materials used for creating it- the immaterial matter of sound constitutes the so-called aural architecture. I can tell by the sound if a place is crowded, empty or cramped. Albeit noticing that requires my attentiveness, I must listen.

Brandon LaBelle in the essay *Other Acoustics* suggests that sound also transforms the “strictly functional or spatial programme of architecture into ambiguous spaces” (LaBelle, 2009, p. 17). According to him, how we hear the space in a way depends on who we are, and where we are located in the physical realm. Musician and researcher Elen Fluegge, in an article on personal sound space, suggests that due to the subjectiveness of listening, “it is our projection and understanding that to a large extent defines a sound space” (Fluegge, 2018).

The informative aspect of sound and notion of aural architecture can be used to create non-material spaces. Those beyond reality or present moment where I am being taken to when I, for instance, put on my headphones and close my eyes, an alternative reality a possibility, or a memory.



Bernhard Leitner Sound Gate 1971

Bernhard Leitners' works deal with the audio-physical experience of spaces and objects which are determined in form and content by movements of sound. The focus is the relationship between built structures of sound and the human body.

What is your earliest memory of sound ?
How do you feel about it now?
When do you notice your breath?
What is attention ?
What sound reminds you of home?
Do you listen for sound in your dreams? What
do you hear? How does it affect you?
What is sound ?
What is listening?
When do you feel sound in your body?
Are you sure that you are hearing every thing
that there is to hear?
What more could you hear if you had bigger ears?
(or smaller)
Can you hear more sounds if you are quiet? How
many more?
How long can you listen?
When are you not listening ?

OLIVEROS, PAULINE,

Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice (New
York, Lincoln, and Shanghai: iUniverse, Inc., 2005), pp. 55-56.

Can you not listen when something is sounding?
Try not listening to anything. What happens ?

How can you not listen if your ears never close?

What sound fascinates you ?

What is the soundscape of the space you are now occupying ?

How many different soundscapes can you imagine?

What would you like to have in your own soundscape?

What sound makes you speculative?

What sound gives you chills?

What sound ruffles your scalp?

What sound changes your breathing ?

What sound would you like whispered in your ear?

OLIVEROS, PAULINE,

Deep Listening: A Composer's Sound Practice (New York, Lincoln, and Shanghai: iUniverse, Inc., 2005), pp. 55-56.

ALL EARS

IN ALL EARS I FURTHER INQUIRE INTO THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS OF MY RESEARCH. AS THE TITLE OF THIS CHAPTER MIGHT ALREADY SUGGEST, THE FOCUS IN THIS PART OF MY WRITING IS ON THE NOTION OF LISTENING AND DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF IT. I START BY DISCUSSING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HEARING AND LISTENING. FROM THERE I MOVE TO EXPLORING WHAT LISTENING ENTAILS AND HOW IT IS RELATED TO PERCEPTION AND COGNITION. THAT BRINGS THE POLITICS OF LISTENING INTO THE PICTURE, WHICH RAISES QUESTIONS SUCH AS WHO DO WE CHOOSE TO LISTEN TO, AND WHAT DETERMINES THOSE CHOICES? I FINISH WITH ADDRESSING A DIALOGUE WITH ONESELF ALONG WITH TACKLING THE NOTION OF INNER VOICE FROM A BROADER PERSPECTIVE, I REVEAL DIFFICULTIES RELATED TO AN ATTEMPT TO FIND MY OWN VOICE WITHIN THIS PROJECT.

HEARING AND LISTENING. Composer and sound art pioneer Pauline Oliveros in 1989 coined the term *deep listening* – a practice that explores the difference between hearing and listening. She describes hearing as a physical means that enables perception, listening on the other hand is giving attention to what is perceived, both- acoustically and psychologically. The ear hears, the brain listens, the body senses vibrations (Oliveros, 2015).

Writer and curator Berit Fischer (Fischer, 2014, p. 13) in *On the Notion and Politics of Listening* writes that:

Listening involves assigning meaning to our own social relations and amplifying and transforming the way space is produced and accounted for. Everything is in conversation; everything is interconnected.

Her words made me think of notes we take for each other during critiques. What we write down, what we consider important. How sometimes when I look at someone else's notes or listen to an interpretation of a conversation, I get the feeling that I have attended different meeting than my classmate has. This mundane example illustrates how we are constantly applying filters of our experiences, our identities to everything we encounter.

By listening we shape and define, we ascribe meaning, but we also become – if we are truly listening, we are allowing ourselves to be receptive to a potential change. In a way, we become the other. We allow our perspective to broaden, to undergo change, to be altered. As Berit Fischer puts it “it is a desire for and an anticipation of understanding”. We open ourselves for reconsideration of what we know, who we are, what we might become (Fischer, 2014, p. 15). The sound artist and theorist, Brandon LaBelle, in his essay, *Lecture on an Acoustics of Sharing*, describes attentive listening- lending an ear- as “giving over one’s body for a distribution of agency” (LaBelle, 2014, p. 21). This raises an interesting question, especially within an educational context. It seems to imply that what I say only has power (and meaning?) if I am being listened to. Not merely heard but listened to. Someone is taking a step away from who they are to become more who I am. I am crossing the boundary of who the other is to make sure I am *audible*. If the goal is to have meaningful interactions from which one can learn, it is indeed of essence which form of expression has been chosen, what language is being used, what is being discussed. And that requires genuine interest in the one of whom we expect the lending of an ear, what they have to say to us as much as what we want them to listen to.



Ger van Elk, *Hanging Wall*, 1968, Installation view, *Op Losse Schroeven*, Stedelijk Museum cafeteria, Amsterdam, 1969.

THE POLITICS OF LISTENING. Why is it not acceptable to some people, to listen to voices that contradict their own? It seems that the problem lies not in what others are saying, but in the inability of some to be humble listeners. To hear outside the paradigms which they are so bound by. It is a different dynamic when one simply has to listen without thinking of defending their opinion, their voice. However, it does mean giving up one's position of power when those in less dominant positions want to speak up and want to be listened to. How do we learn this? How do we create the conditions for listening, for understanding one's own limits to render others audible?

I believe silence is crucial in listening. Staying quiet and letting the other speak even if one disagrees, suspending one's right to be right. Social scientist Leah Basel in the article *Speaking and Listening: The 2011 English Riots* talks about the shift from speaking to listening, she points out the urgency of it "our capacity to hear is damaged in the clamour to be heard, to narrate and gain attention" (Basel, 2013, p. 4). Perhaps, it is a matter of scale – why do we want to be listened to by everyone? Is one's voice of value, only when it's been validated by many, by those in power?

Who do we listen to and how do we choose to listen to them? Whose voices do we consider to be of importance? Who decides what we ought to hear and what we ought not to? And how does that influence our own voice? I believe, the choices we make regarding these questions tell a lot about ourselves. In listening to others, we may find ourselves. And the other way around – through listening in, we become better listeners to others.

IN DIALOGUE WITH ONESELF. I keep fighting with the thought that no one is going to take me seriously, because I have chosen to practice on a small scale, away from an institution and the security of having it second my voice. What if no one is going to listen? I keep questioning the relevance of my project and the value of what I am doing. Poetically speaking, I have decided to use my voice without an amplifier, which comes with a lot of self-doubt. And the realization of how dominant the power structures, within which I am trying to manoeuvre my practice, are. However, as my friend Marleen once pointed out, if I succumb to these doubts, I will be giving power to the status quo, I will lose my own voice.

How does one find their voice? How do you know when it is you who is speaking? I think this also requires silence and genuine listening. To the voices surrounding you, but first and foremost to the one within. The voice that is made of one's experiences, beliefs, and knowledge. That most honest voice, the one which constitutes who one is. If one engages in an inner dialogue with that voice, I believe, a lot of change can potentially happen. Of course, that would only be the case if that inner inquiry stays self-censorship free, and if questions are being asked and answered, also the uncomfortable ones.

I believe our bodies are present and very much involved in this dialogue as well. In yoga practice, it is believed that our bodies experience physical discomfort when we avoid our inner voice. How often do we listen to the physical voice of ourselves? That fleshy part of our being that itches, aches, tickles. That heartbeat of ours, breath going in and out of the body and how it all works in convergence with the mind.

Psychologist Russel Hulburt (Oakes, 2019) has spent decades researching the inner workings of people's minds, namely the inner voice and the forms it can take. He has come to the conclusion that there are five categories of inner experience:

Inner seeing, which could feature images of things you've seen in real life or imaginary visuals; feelings, such as anger or happiness; sensory awareness, like being aware of the scratchiness of the carpet under your feet; and unsymbolised thinking (...). Essentially thought that doesn't manifest as words or images, but is undoubtedly present in your mind.

His findings make me think that what constitutes one's voice is a constellation of many things and aspects of being – rational, articulate thought, just as much as a feeling or sensation in one's body, and so forth.

THE SUBSEQUENT CHAPTERS ARE AN INSIGHT INTO THE PROCESS OF MAKING AND EXECUTING MY RE-SEARCH PROJECT: THE TOUR INTIMATE MUSEUM.

IN CHAPTER GUIDED- BODY FOCUSED- VIEWING AS- SISTANCE I TALK ABOUT TRACKS SENSUOUS VIEWING AND TURN YOUR GAZE INWARD IN WHICH I FOCUS ON SOMATIC AND EMBODIED WAYS OF LEARNING AND MEANING-MAKING. IN CHAPTER THOSE SILENT VOICES I REFLECT ON TRACKS BEFORE YOU ENTER THE ROOM AND PUTTING THE WORDS OF STRANGERS IN MY MOUTH / COMMENT SECTION – BOTH TRACKS EXPLORE THE POLITICS OF LISTENING. I CONCLUDE WITH REFLECTIONS ON TWO SOUNDSCAPES THAT DEAL WITH THE NOTION OF SPACE AND EXPERIENCE– IT’S OH SO QUIET, AND INSIDE OUTSIDE.

IN EACH CHAPTER I ELABORATE ON THE INTENTIONS, GOALS AND PEDAGOGICAL CURIOSITIES OF THE PROJECT ALONG WITH SHARING MY REFLECTIONS OF THE PROCESS, AND THOSE OF MY LISTENERS. INTIMATE MUSEUM WAS A LEARNING PROCESS ALSO FOR ME, IN WHICH FEEDBACK FROM PEOPLE WHO PARTICIPATED IN MY ACTIVITIES PLAYED JUST AS IMPORTANT ROLE AS THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING THE TOUR. IN MY REFLECTION ON THE PROJECT I HAVE CHOSEN TO INCLUDE VOICES AND INSIGHTS THAT ILLUMINATE INTERESTING, SOMETIMES UNEXPECTED EXPERIENCES AND THOUGHTS OF MY LISTENERS WHICH HAVE LED ME TO PERSONAL MOMENTS OF LEARNING.

GUIDED-BODY FOCUSED-VIEWING ASSISTANCE

The first two tracks of the INTIMATE MUSEUM are exercises that I developed at the beginning of my research. Both intended as an invitation to embrace and more consciously involve one's body in the process of perception and cognition of an artwork. The desired goal of these exercises being sensory-based learning and meaning-making, listening to one's body and inner voice to make sense of what one is looking at.

TRACK 1 – SENSUOUS VIEWING The first two tracks of the Intimate Museum emerged out of previous experiments done within the context of the Making Things Public seminar. Initially, I developed an improvised audio tour which consisted of 7 questions intended as an invitation, a gentle push to involve one's body and sensorial experiences into looking at and interpreting an artwork. Initially planned as a group activity due to circumstances (the coronavirus lockdown) it had to be rendered into a remote individual exercise. Hence a 15 min long recording of my voice was made as a substitute for my physical presence. While listening to this recording people were asked to look at an artwork of their own choice in a space they found most suitable for this exercise - whether a gallery or their own living room. Each question was related to using different (sets of) senses in order to come up with an answer.

The feedback I received from my peers after the first attempt was mixed – some thought that the exercise had given them the opportunity to use a more playful approach to art interpretation and that there has been space for subjectivity and emotions due to the intimate form of the exercise. Others found the exercise too superficial. So, for the INTIMATE MUSEUM, I adjusted it by rewriting and editing the questions and adding quotes from philosopher David Abram and writer Rebecca Solnit that seem to relate to the sensations and observations towards which I am guiding my listener.

Listening to the adjusted SENSUOUS VIEWING track happens individually. I ask my friends and a few of my classmates to listen to it in a place and time they find suitable for this activity. Afterwards, I meet with each of my listeners in my home or go for a walk to discuss their experiences.

My friend Sophie listens to this track at home. She texts me that she thinks her experience would have been different if she had been at a museum, among other people. She says that it was a daring and challenging experience for her because doing this exercise asked her to be present, very much in the moment. She explains "It's confronting and open to me in a way 'cause your own experience is the only answer. It can't be wrong or right". Sophie continues by saying that she thought it was very educational as it asked her to think differently. In response to my question what in her opinion would be the usual way of thinking, she replies:

I think, I would not ask questions. I think that makes the difference. The things you asked, made me think of and notice my own feelings, verbalise, and express them. Normally I wouldn't take the time to do that, especially in a museum. I would not get involved to such extent.

Intended as a viewing exercise, I think, it developed into a listening exercise. Not that much to the body of my listener like I would have wanted to, but to my voice. The voice of a teacher, voice of a guide. In teaching I strive for less hierarchical teaching relationships, but is that even possible? With this exercise, I intended to give more agency to my listeners, encourage them to look for answers within themselves, and I think it worked out quite well, but I was still the one guiding them in a very specific direction. I have this feeling that my grip was firmer than I had intended. By guiding the listener through their encounter with an artwork, I was creating a kind of scaffolding so that the entire process would not fall apart, I did not want to control what the listener might experience or learn during this activity. As educator and philosopher Paulo Freire in *A Pedagogy of Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education* makes the argument that it is not possible to completely abolish hierarchy in a teaching-learning environment since each educational activity has a certain framework and goal (Paulo Freire; Ira Shor, 1987, p. 102). I do realise it is necessary to have a structure of educational activity, and it does not necessarily mean taking the agency away from my listeners, but how do I know that I have not crossed the line? That there is still space for voices of others to emerge and be present?

This feeling of uneasiness I had made me think what does it mean to have agency in a learning process? Regarding this I had to think of an aspect of the exercise my friend Marleen found to be of value for her:

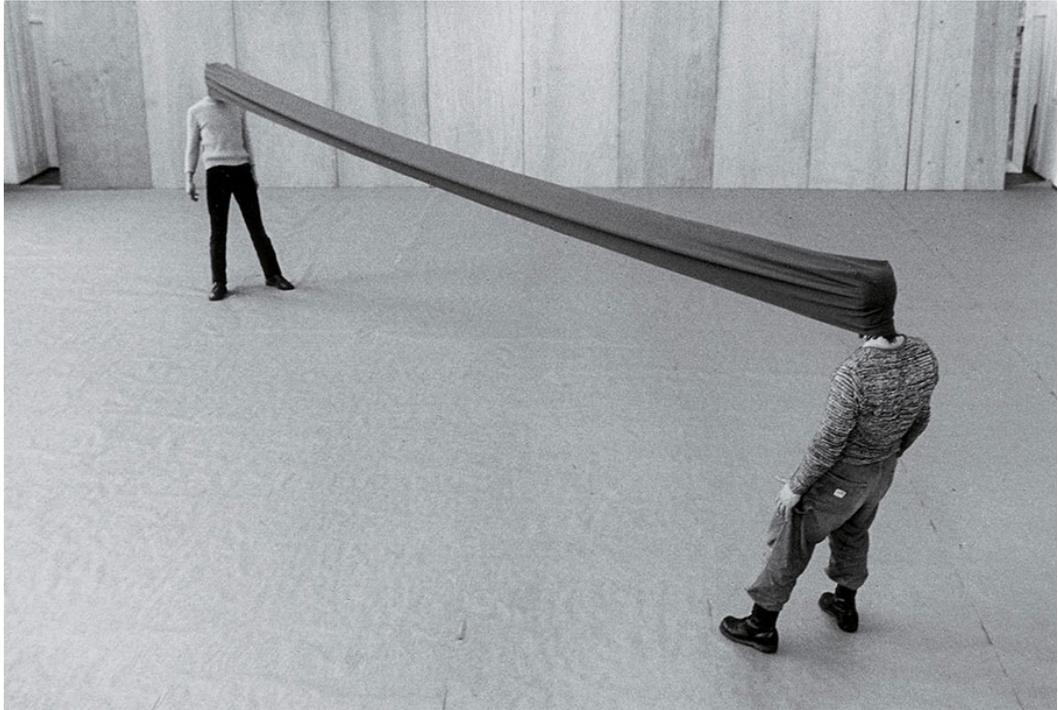
You know, how you look at something and it triggers a new thought. By those quotes you used, and questions, you brought up different ideas, which gave a more complex understanding or way of looking at things beyond the art piece itself.

Perhaps, this is what having agency within learning context means. Being able to move beyond what is asked of you and explore on your own, not only what the teacher is expecting of you. Continuing out of your own motivation for yourself, not to meet the expectations of someone or please someone (an authority figure).



Visvaldas Morkevičius, Portraitzine. Issue Remigijus, 2017

Project in which the artist collects quotidian and intimate details- objects and body postures- or as he calls them souvenirs that seem to outline identities of his peers and contemporaries.



Franz Erhard Walter, Sehkanal (Sight Channel), 1968

Sehkanal (Sight Channel) is slipped over the heads of two people standing about a few meters apart to create a private line of vision.

TRACK 2 – TURN YOUR GAZE INWARD Intended as the sequel to the SENSUOUS VIEWING, this exercise focused on slowing down the act of viewing. I was interested in creating a situation in which my listener is present and aware, open to anything the object they are looking at might evoke. The focus in this track is not on the object or an artwork one is observing, but rather on the observer per se. The listener is asked to find a comfortable place to sit and observe an object or an artwork of their choice. The track starts with an instruction of brief, very simple physical exercises the listener is invited to do. Those are coupled with guided breathing assistance. The second and longest part of the exercise focuses on one's breathing and thought processes as well as emotions, triggered by looking at the chosen subject matter. As the basis for this track, I used the script of a guided meditation, which I then altered for the process of looking at (ideally) an art piece. I chose to use methods from meditation practice to keep the mind of my listener focused and aware, which is the very essence of mindfulness practice. I would call it non-judgemental introspection. Due to the slowness and the intimate scale of this practice, it is more likely for one to notice details or connections, thought patterns, emotions one might not have been aware of before.

The first part of the workshop was inspired by the Feldenkrais method which is based on the principle that changing the way we move leads to a change in how we think, observe and feel (Davids, 2020, p. 17). I was curious to see if and how the process of observation and interpretation is informed when it starts with physical movement after which one's body is brought to complete stillness where the mind can get more involved in the process. The first listening session of this track happens with my classmates during the Practice and Research seminar session. Everyone listens to the track individually and after that, we discuss it collectively. While everyone is listening, I am waiting outside – it feels uncomfortable to be in the same room with everyone, I am worried that my presence might be disturbing and awkward. I do manage to get few glimpses of what is going on inside – it seems that no one is doing the physical exercises, but I also cannot see everyone.

During the discussion, the focus is mostly on the tone and rhythm of my voice, which seems to have helped everyone to arrive at a calm and quiet place for introspection. However, Anita points out an interesting observation regarding this part of the track:

In this very simple exercise, all kinds of thoughts can arise, thoughts about you, about your life, all sorts of things can come up. Just allowing these thoughts to arise and pass, without getting drawn in, without focusing on them for too long, without investing in them at all. Just allowing them to pass like clouds in a gentle breeze. Our job is simple – just observing, noticing

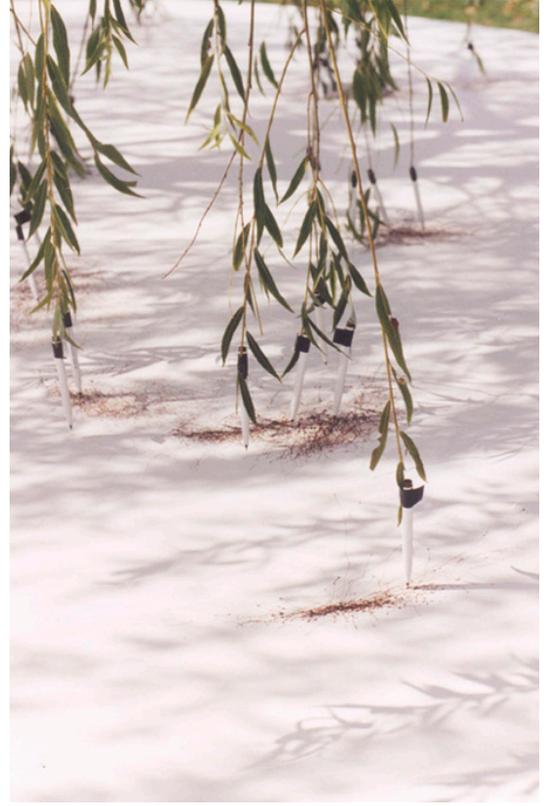
It is emphasized several times how easy this exercise is. For her, it has been a different experience. I am struck by her remark, as it has not crossed my mind that for some people it could actually be very difficult, perhaps even painful. It makes me think of my responsibility – to what degree am I liable for any negative experiences or discomfort? And is one ever going to learn anything, if the process is easy? Of course, I must make sure that my words and actions are not harmful or hostile but growing and learning does entail a certain amount of discomfort. This makes me think that my responsibility is making sure that the discomfort is balanced with care and guidance on my end, not erased completely.

In another, more recent conversation with my classmate, Lianne, we talk about discomfort and education, and this exercise in particular. I mention how in yoga practice holding postures can sometimes be torturous, but if you get through them, you will have learnt something new about yourself. Lianne emphasises how important those moments are when one gives time to themselves to just be, she calls them “small monuments to oneself”. How often do we have those moments in education? Perhaps, a better question is, do we allow ourselves to sit through these moments? To embrace and surrender to the fact that some things take time, some things are complicated, confusing, unpleasant. To stand in front of an artwork or listen to someone’s voice and be completely puzzled or even lost. To take that time to be able to move towards knowing, understanding, to move beyond the discomfort.



Zahid Jiwa, American Apparent 2015

Images captured in New York City and surrounding environs.



Tim Knowles, Tree Drawings- Weeping Willow on circular panel (100 pens) 2005

A series of drawings produced using drawing implements attached to the tips of tree branches.

THOSE SILENT VOICES

These two tracks address the politics of listening and listening per se. I was curious to see how listening to voices and sounds which are usually left somewhere in the background hardly noticed, which do not really get listened to, are perceived if I put them in the spotlight so to say. My goal was again to draw the attention of my listener inwards, to invite them to notice how what they hear makes them feel, what thoughts come up. Does it feel silly to do the things I ask them to do? Perhaps, the things I am saying in the recording are strange?

TRACK 4 – PUTTING THE WORDS OF STRANGERS IN MY MOUTH /COMMENT SECTION this track came about partly as an accident. I stumbled upon an article *Why does contemporary art look so simple? You asked Google – here's the answer* by Jonathan Jones. Its content left me slightly confused and thinking about my own opinion regarding the topic, I became curious about what other readers have thought about it, so I opened the comment section. I discovered a 749 comments long discussion on contemporary art and got lost in it for hours. I found myself disagreeing with some of the opinions people were expressing, but with a lot of them, surprisingly, I could relate very easily. The language was sometimes rough, but most opinions were well put and articulate. However, what struck me the most is that such an interesting and meaningful conversation on art is going on in a section that will probably not ever be looked at by most readers. Why do we pretend that these voices do not exist? Why regular folk are given voice in a comment section, but those who have status and titles get to write an article about the same topic? Why is one taken seriously, but the other one is not when they are discussing the same thing?

I copy some of the comments, continue my research online and discover a few interesting blogposts on the same topic. I borrow words from those as well, and I put all of that together in one text. I add a few lines from the article mentioned already and a few from a book on how to visit a museum. I mix and mash together the voices of *professionals* and *ordinary people*, constructing an inner monologue, we often avoid listening to. I read the text out loud and record it. In some parts of the text I am whispering. I am using the pronoun 'I' as if I was the one who is having these thoughts and questions. When in the editing process, I add an echo to my voice.

After listening to the track, Marleen and I talk about the urge to silence uncomfortable things, but how we should listen to them anyway. She continues by explaining why she finds it to be of value:

The first instinct might be to dismiss and to say to yourself 'oh, this does not apply to me' or 'I don't agree with this', but if you actually take that extra step and just consider those things for yourself it has this weird way of leading you to more questions or more ideas, which then open again your understanding of yourself.

Lisanne mentions the form I have used, how my whispering and the echo in the recording has made her think about silencing of voice "something you don't want to hear, something you want to push away, but it keeps coming back".

In this track the things I say, the voice I have given to the silent voices seems to have created some kind of tension. It makes me wonder, why do we find this to be uncomfortable? Does one recognize themselves in the things that are being said? Does it point out how we make decisions about what is and what is not of value? Have I made my listener listen to things they do not want to hear? Marleen says that she felt empowered to think whatever she wants. Perhaps, what one can learn from this is an awareness of the filters we apply to our own voice. The reasoning behind which opinions we decide to follow, which voices we choose to echo within our own speech and believes, and which ones we tend to ignore.

Track 5 – BEFORE YOU ENTER THE ROOM. with this track, I wanted to expand the notion of listening a bit more. I was curious to what extent does one allow themselves to listen to their own voice. How does this voice sound like? It is a small exercise again, made for a museum visit. In it, I am inviting the listener to take off their headphones and listen to the room they are in.

This exercise was prompted by a visit to the contemporary art institute Melly last autumn. I had gone there to record a soundscape of a museum building. To my surprise, even though I was one of few visitors in the building, it was probably the loudest gallery visit in my entire life. Focusing on the sonic environment made me realize how many sounds I normally do not notice. How superficial my listening has been thus far. Also, I was surprised how different this visit felt because my attention was focused on a different set of senses this time. The vastness of sounds I all of a sudden could hear so clearly made it very hard to look at things. However, I seemed to be more aware of my movements within the building, how I relate to it and things within it. I could hear noises coming in from the street, from the building next door. My attention at first was drawn to myself, very into my body, and from there it spread, in a manner of speaking, beyond the building I was in.

While pursuing interesting sounds I wished to record, I kept finding myself walking in different directions throughout the building than I normally would. It made me very self-conscious as if I were doing something illegal. As if there were only one way how to use this space and I was breaking the norm. I had to think of preconceived ideas, choreographies of how one moves within certain structures. My physical and emotional discomfort during the visit made it very clear that I am giving power to the notion of what is right and wrong, what is expected of me. I was adjusting my inner voice to what I thought is expected of me instead of listening to where my body and the sound I am after is taking me.

In our conversation about the SENSUOUS VIEWING, Marleen brings up the notion of space. She is referring to the quote by David Abram with which the track starts. In this quote Abram talks about interconnectivity amongst the human and the non-human, and how our senses work in unison to define us and the world we live in; how we and the world exist in convergence (Abram, 2017, p. 125). Regarding that, she recalls another text written by poet David Whyte in which he talks about the conversational nature of things “we have this idea of who we are and what we want to be, but that is not really reality. We can only be truly ourselves once we acknowledge this conversational nature of reality”. What she said made me think of ways how we interact with ourselves and the spaces we end up in. Physical and emotional ones. And how those two are very closely related and define each other. The first thing that comes to mind when thinking of educational spaces is usually the architectural and institutional structures within which education usually takes place. But within and outside of those exist more subtle, more intimate learning spaces.



Ettore Sottsass Jr. Metaphors (1972- 1979)

Design Metaphors is a sequence of photographs taken by Ettore Sottsass Jr. during his journeys to the deserts of Spain (Barcelona, Madrid, Almeria, Grenade) and the Pyrenees. The Metaphors are temporary land-art or pseudo architectural constructions created in the landscape, made of poor and fragile items, pieces of string, wood, ribbons, leaves, stones, pieces of clothing, etc

SOUNDSCAPES

Both soundscapes are made by putting together layers of different sounds from different places, recorded by different people. I borrow sounds from two online sites where people can share their recordings and experiments in sound. I borrow from users who have given their permission to others to use their audio files for learning or artistic projects. When working on soundscapes, I allow myself to be led purely by the process. There is only one question that lingers in the back of my mind – I wonder, what people are going to hear when listening to these tracks. Where will they be taken to?

TRACK 3 – IT'S OH SO QUIET is also prompted by my visit to Melly. I go online to look for attempts to record a museum by other people. I am surprised to notice that all of my findings are somewhat similar – the same noises keep coming up in all soundscapes I discover. I embark on an attempt to create museum space by using these recordings. I layer them over each other, and quite quickly arrive at a point where my interest from building, recreating a space, shifts to listening to the noise I have created. A rhythm seems to have emerged. By adding new layers, the volume and intensity of the track has increased. It seems almost like a metaphor for listening. When one is utterly in the process, more and more gets heard, connections are made with whatever is being listened to, eventually it starts to make sense, and it gains meaning.

Lisanne and Marleen both associate the track with noisy spaces they dislike – for one of them, it is a swimming pool, for the other one – a crowded city. Their responses make me think of context when there is none provided, the thing one is listening to turns into something else. It becomes something like a mirror that tells you about the listener more than about the thing one is listening to. Marleen mentions that she had to think that for some people silence might be just as disturbing as listening to this track was for her “Museums are so quiet and for some, it might be suffocating, and to kind of break that up and to take the formalness out of it you made it so loud and noisy.”

I have to wonder, why would silence become an obstacle for someone? Is it because it forces one to listen to one's own inner voice? To nuances and undertones, one is constantly surrounded by? What one might not want to hear?

In another conversation, silence comes up again. We talk about the importance of being quiet and how it affects what we hear, how it makes one listen deeply. It makes me think of school and how when I know that I am going to be the next one teacher asks to express their thoughts on something, I completely zone out of the discussion. My focus is merely on my notes, what I am going to say, which words I will use. Will I have enough time to scramble together something meaningful, something worth saying out loud? All ears are going to be on me. This is my moment. In those minutes of utter panic, I have not listened to a single word of what my peers have been saying. That makes me think, how much of what I am about to say is actually going to be heard and listened to by others? In education so much focus is on articulation, but can we listen?

Another thing that comes up - who is one listening for. This soundscape is quite long, approximately 15 minutes. Lianne mentions that she kept on listening even though it was very overwhelming for her because she knew she is doing it for someone's process. Marleen reveals that she got very curious about what was my idea behind this soundscape, this curiosity for her became the reason to continue listening to it.

When one is truly determined and willing to listen, there seems to be more resilience, more patience to listen to things one does not like. That is again the question of who we choose to listen to. In this case, I received a gift from my friends – they listened out of respect and care. I wonder, what would have been their reaction if I was a stranger?

TRACK 6 – INSIDE OUTSIDE. In this soundscape, I intend to move from thinking through sound about an abstract space to a very personal one. Throughout the entire soundscape, one can hear waves crashing. This is a recording of the Baltic Sea, which has a shoreline with my home country Latvia. My ears cannot hear any significant difference from the same sound recorded in a different geographical location, however, the knowledge of the sound source triggers something very personal. I add other sounds that I associate with a familiar space, with home and being very close to my own being. I am curious if and how listening to this soundscape will feel for someone who does not know the intimate scaffolding of the track. Also, if and how it will change the space where one is listening to it. If IT'S OH SO QUIET is more about dragging the listener to a space, this track is rather about inviting the listener to visit someone else's being or body, or both; be less who the listener is, become someone who one is not.

All my friends who listen to this track give very similar feedback – they have all found it kind of calming and relaxing. When I inquire about that, I get responses about people having perceived the soundscape as *a familiar place*. This comes as no surprise given the shared backgrounds of our lives and somewhat similar personalities. We talk about how it might seem otherwise to those who, for instance, have grown up in a city? Would noises such as the one of digging up soil even make any sense? Would they be recognized?

Regarding that, I have to think about one's responsibility in terms of what is being said. About the form of it, the intention. We all want to be listened to. That requires others to be willing to engage, to open up, to be here and now – listening. But it also requires the one who yearns to be truly heard to do the same thing – to open up for the other.

The goal should not be expressing or merely articulating oneself, one should aim to understand one another. Letting go of being right, simply accepting the voices of others even if they are not understandable, perhaps is the essence, the key to listening. And then taking that step towards acceptance of that otherness with as little judgement as possible. With as little fear as possible of one's own opinion being changed by what one is about to hear.

CONCLUSION

What stemmed from the institutional critique and begun as an attempt to practice more accessible art interpretation by means of sensory-based experiences in a museum setting, in light of the Covid crisis evolved into an intimate journey into one's own body and being. As my graduation project, I developed an approach to practice embodied and somatic learning (about art, oneself and the world one lives in together with others – human and non-human) as an alternative to what formal museum education has to offer. It took the form of an audio tour called INTIMATE MUSEUM. The tour consists of 6 tracks that focus on embodied and somatic learning and meaning-making, the politics of listening and deals with notions of space and experience – the core topics and interests of my research. The tour was a tool to explore the notion of listening as an educational act. It also served as means to find my own voice as a practitioner. Developing and executing the INTIMATE MUSEUM allowed me to explore and traverse the roles of educator, artist, and curator. Due to the pandemic and the restrictions imposed by it, the scale of my project was very small - only friends and classmates partook in it.

In the tour, I explored several approaches to facilitate the act of listening – narrative and non-narrative. From the shared experiences of my listeners, I learnt that both approaches worked as triggers for introspection on personal and global matters, as well as rather bodily aspects, as I had intended. My goal was to invite my listener to actively listen, to look inward, to tune into bodily and emotional knowledge, and then from there to look out at the world again. The medium of sound allowed for intuitive and less guided ways of communication that I found to be of great importance to facilitate embodied and somatic learning.

Listening in my project took different forms ranging from listening to my guiding voice to becoming aware of listener's inner dialogue which could take the form of emotions, bodily sensations, both - visual and articulate memories or experiences. Listening served as a pathway to one's intuitive knowledge, thus accessing rational as well as embodied and somatic insights. My listener was invited to introspect on personal experiences, both emotional and somatic, and to thereby gain a deeper understanding through this intimate lens about the external world, human and non- human, material, and non-material, and themselves in it.

The pedagogy of intimacy which evolved as a by-product due to the Covid crisis, proved to be a very important finding of this research. The intimate scale of the project allowed slowness and care, even tenderness. Things I craved for but was not able to find and realise in my previous practice at the museum. It created space for teaching and learning that goes beyond words, takes place in one's body, and is rooted in mutual trust. Also, during those one-on-one conversations in my living room or when I walked shoulder to shoulder through the city with a friend talking about the tour I learnt as much as they did, and the other way around. Perhaps, we were as close to non-hierarchical teaching, a very important aspect in education for me, as it is possible to be.

The educational moments occurred not only when the awareness of one's knowledge carried within the body was activated, but also when listening induced friction, ambiguity, or even discomfort that required one's openness and willingness to surrender to the unfamiliar and the potential transformation it might bring. The feedback from my listeners and my own experience in this project both have shown that in education a certain amount of discomfort is necessary in order to learn and grow.

A lot of things happened during these two years of research. It has not been an easy time, but it has brought me to a calm and hopeful place. The circumstances in which my project was started and developed were very demanding, and I would even say sometimes quite rough – absolutely nothing was certain, there were moments when the world seemed to be literally falling apart. But, as unusual as it might sound, this global confusion and mess sort of helped me re-focus and carry on with my research in the direction which I had been seeking for so long. I remember how quiet the world all of a sudden seemed to have gone during the first weeks of the Covid lockdown. I recall myself thinking – I can finally hear my own thoughts! Those heavy first moments of crisis made me sink deeper and deeper into my own body, and myself. At one point the isolation, the solitude with the focus inward and on the body became a way out, became a wormhole leading back to the outside world and to others.

My attempts to grasp the new world and me in it, proved to be a pivotal moment also for my research as it brought to the horizon new possibilities for my practice. This research of mine shows the path I have walked so far towards what is yet becoming, in the making, and what probably will never be strictly defined. It has been a journey from the museum to myself.

Doing this research has given me the confidence and the much-needed trust in myself to continue the process of developing and further evolving my newfound hybrid practice, which might one day even bring me back to a museum again. At the beginning of this report, I wrote how the emotional and the irrational is often underrated in education, and how I have found it difficult to value and embrace these aspects, which also happen to be an essential part of who I am, into my practice. The content and form of this project has taught me how to incorporate these aspects into my way of working. In my project I sought and managed to find sensuous, embodied ways of interaction. Due to the circumstances – the ongoing lockdown- I chose to use the medium of sound as a tool in my research project. Working with sound and my voice as an instrument has been an important and valuable personal learning moment. I have no background whatsoever in sound art or music. Nor had I ever recorded my voice before. Albeit I was surprised to discover how working in this medium helped me open-up. I had to tap into my own feelings, I had no choice but to trust my intuition, to use my own embodied and somatic knowledge to communicate via this format. The insight into somatic and embodied ways of knowing and learning, into sound and the notion of listening, and the experience I've gained in using them to teach and express myself have grounded me.

As the next step, I would like to bring this project beyond my personal circles by inviting strangers to listen and talk to me afterwards. I am curious how applying the approach, that I have developed in this project, would work in different settings. I wonder, how different the conversations would be from those I had with my friends? How would I reach the participants? Gain their trust? As for the future in a broader sense, I would like to focus more on incorporating elements of physical movement along with sound in my practice. Also, during this research, I noticed how important I find visual means of interaction to fully express myself. It shows also in this report as I have used a lot of visuals to comment on my text and project.

By doing this research, I have gained a sense of clarity, it feels that I am standing firmly on the ground with both feet now. I feel that the distance between who I am and who I want to be as a practitioner has become smaller.

I have realized that sometimes complete honesty with oneself can lead to unexpected discoveries and realisations. Laying out all doubts, hopes, and wishes, and then working with them can take you places. At times I was surprised to see how ideas and references that I had been intuitively collecting for years easily found their way into this research. Things that had spoken to me, had felt important for no obvious reason now started to make sense. Through them I was looking at myself, I began to hear my own voice.

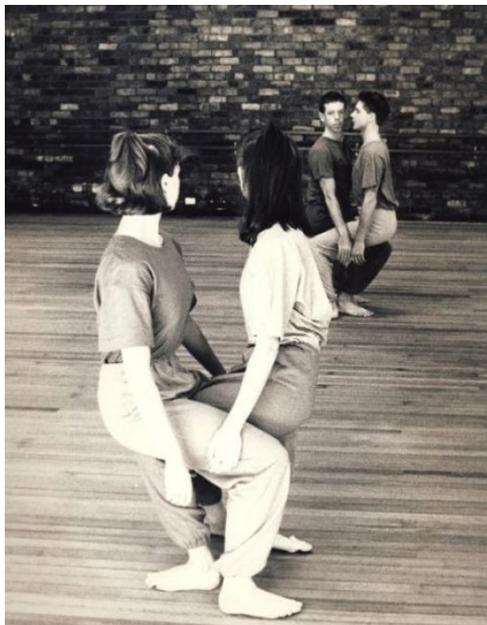
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