

Do we drown in the same clouds?

connectedness in the non-space

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Abstract

I am intrigued by the uniqueness of a space, by in-between and invisible spaces, by site-specificity. I like to manipulate materials to trace a precise moment in time and place, triggered by incidental movements and lights.

I strive to stimulate feelings in my work. I reflect on concepts such as vulnerability and desires, externalizing my own longing for connection and simultaneously seeking and trying to facilitate refuge. Drawing people in with an invitation for mutual intimacy, I believe we can confide in inter-reliance.

My research has always been driven by my profound interest in the relation between artwork and viewer. It fascinates me how bodily interaction influences the way we perceive a space. How can a shadow capture a moment in space? How can my entrustment become your safe place? I find answers in spaces that are in-between, immaterial, moments that seem coincidental. The core of my research is connectedness in the non-space, which I will discuss along concepts of collectivity, performative curating, and spatiotemporal installations.

Practice-led research has led me to embrace introspection into not just why I make art but also that I see the language of art as meaningful for human relations. In this thesis, I draw from the positions I take as artist, curator, and viewer, allowing their assimilation. Along a personal glossary, I introduce my own terminology that forms a guide through my research. Next to theoretic sources, all the examples I give and artworks I reference, are ones that I have experienced myself. To me, this is an instinctive tool to elevate the viewer, accentuate spatial awareness and emphasize physical exchange.

Giving my thesis a personal and poetic tone reflects the intimacy that I seek in exhibition making. This is how I propose to create connectedness not just between artist and viewer but equally between writer and reader.

Table of contents

Thesis Body

Becoming relational	7
Feeling viewing	8
Believing you	9
Releasing control	11
Shifting power	13
Finding intimacy	14
Shaping non-space	15
Curating performatively	19
Sensing connectedness	22

References

List of relevant sources	26
List of images	28

Appendix

Materializing connectedness	30
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Last summer, I spent a day at the Kröller-Müller-Museum and surrounding park, visiting a solo exhibition of Marinus Boezem (2021). His installations are playful and interactive, integrating the viewer physically. Directly from there, we went onto cycling through the park and stopped at a swing set. The connection of experiencing Boezem's work and swinging made so much sense to me. The joy I felt from this small, somewhat random moment was overwhelming. I was reminded how swinging makes me feel better, that it gives me this prickling feeling in my lower belly when I go high and up and down. I feel like experiencing connectedness with an artwork is an echo of that feeling.

One of the first times I consciously experienced connectedness, was at the Venice Biennale 2017 (Verwoert, 2017). I felt drawn to the pastel colour pallet of paintings by Polys Peslikas and to something in them that screamed movement and was yet so calming. On the space's brick walls

that had once been painted white was a slight, subtle pink shadow that seemed like a continuation of the paintings. It was barely visible and from what I understood, they just came with the space and were not part of the painter's or curator's interaction with it. The canal outside was visible through big windows that seemed to have as much room in the space as the paintings did. The water flowed almost on ground-level and the whole composition made me feel immersed in the space, leaving me with a vivid memory, still as alive now five years later.



Did Verwoert or Peslikas plan for me to have such an experience? I do not think they could have. That sensation of connectedness is so personal, so intimate that it can overcome one person, touch them deeply and leave another unimpressed or trigger a completely different emotion. I would go as far as saying that these types of experiences

are coincidental. So, in my practice, I have been wondering; How can I facilitate coincidence? The question of course is paradoxical, but I am starting to presume that connectedness lies within coincidence, in moments that are just one viewer's own. It is impossible to predict them. Nevertheless, I tend to find them often in spaces that are no real spaces. I will expand on their construction later referring to them here as non-spaces. Incidental moments do not come displayed on a pedestal. The art object might, similarly to the painting on the wall in my example. Still, connectedness emerges in the in-between-space.

John Dewey calls this a 'rarefied aesthetic experience', an experience with an artwork that is encompassing, making the viewer *feel* something, become *aware* of something within themselves and relating it back to the world, drawing connections between art and life this way (in Jacob, 2018). His research on the aesthetic experience even goes down to understanding art (works) as experience (p.41). I argue that it is the immaterial that makes the experience. Because it is there where viewers find their own moments of relation and intimate reflections. From my position as an artist, I aspire to facilitate such moments of connectedness for the viewer. For this reason, I choose to research connectedness in the non-space.

Becoming relational

What if we would perceive the (contemporary) artwork as a sphere? Its scope goes beyond the material art object - if there is one. In my understanding of the term *artwork*, I find it hard to outline where the boundaries between the work itself and its curation lie, since I am responsive to the curation of the work.

Moreover, a performance as an artwork can barely be pinned down to one specific moment, or spatial definition. I see this quality equally relevant for more 'material' artworks. When the art object is a sculpture on a pedestal, I do not regard the sculpture alone as the artwork but the accompanying space as well. Perhaps this can be better understood when thinking of land art, the category term itself presupposes that the land is part of the art, when taking away the land, the work is left without its context, its essence of life and trimmed down to just being an

object, whereas the land is clearly a part of it and its entire existence.

My awareness of the artwork is thus spatiotemporal, closely related to concepts around the aesthetics of both affect and relational. Bourriaud (2002) suggests that the contemporary artwork is to be more perceived as “a period of time to be lived through” (p.15). In the context of affect theory, O’Sullivan (2001) describes art as an event and the artwork as a space (p.127). Therefore, I suggest perceiving the artwork as a sphere, allowing it to be shaped by time and space.

Naturally, the artwork is likewise undeniably shaped by the artist. When I speak of the relationship between artist and viewer, we situate ourselves in a sphere that has been shaped by artist and curator. The artwork-viewer relationship is complex, it is also a relationship between artist and viewer, curator and artwork, artist and curator, and so forth. And lastly, all these instances relate back to the space. Consequently, I suggest the encompassing interpretation of the term *artwork* as a sphere of relations.

Feeling viewing

Drawing from my own experiences as a viewer, I state that the act of viewing an artwork should eventually lead to *feeling*. The words *viewer* and *spectator* seem to limit their function onto one sense: seeing. Rancière (2009) makes clear that the viewer’s position and their ability entails much more than that, reaching beyond not only sensory receptivity but presupposing their intellectual and sentimental emancipation. Now, especially in the context of connectedness, the viewer’s capability is much more about perceiving, experiencing, sensing the artwork. Not all artworks to be discussed in the following text are to be found in an exhibition, thus accordingly, the term ‘exhibition visitor’, does not suffice either. For the lack of a better word and since we are in the realm of *visual* art, I will name them a viewer.

In my understanding of the viewer’s role for the artwork-viewer relationship, I relate to Duchampian ideas.¹ I

1 see Duchamp (1961)

am intrigued by his propositions that it is the act of onlooking and of attention that makes the artwork. McIlvven (2005) equally considers the viewer's presence as essential for the artwork's completeness (p.179), hence I argue that it might in fact be a social sculpture. Through interaction, viewers can shape the artwork's capability individually. Consequently, the mere presence of artwork and viewer form a potential for connectedness.

Believing in you

I believe you, I believe in you was not only the title, concept and ethos of our project, it became something like a mantra. Bilin saw me rushing from one place to another, stressed, full of thoughts and to-do-lists during the preparation process, she looked at me and smiled and said: "I believe in you, Alicia." Hussel said the same in another moment and we kept saying it to each other during the exhibition set-up. It became a promise of trust, a mutual understanding of a collective exhibition that was meaningful to us all. Believing in each other became the spiritual manifest of our collectivity.

In this thesis, I will discuss my research along the case study of the exhibition project *I believe you, I believe in you*. The concept, past exhibition and ongoing series combine central aspects of my research such as interaction with a space, collective making, performativity, intimacy and the notion of belief. Additionally, it frames me as both curator

and artist within the same project and functions as a research-in-practice.

I believe you, I believe in you started as a group exhibition that happened in the summer of 2021 and was curated by Xuan Hu and myself. Following an invitation by Galerie SK in my hometown Solingen in Germany, I decided to organise a five-week group show there and reached out to Xuan to curate the exhibition collaboratively.² Uniting our individual research and vision for curation with one another, we came up with the title and exhibition program.

Our concept reflects a need for connection and artistic exposure during an ongoing pandemic as well as an ambition to work not only collectively but also in close relation to the given space, allowing for intimate encounters with both audience and the group itself. Our Open Call to peers therefore entailed the need to be physically present for the setup-week in Germany, where we would respond to the space as well as to each other's works that were partly either developed or adjusted on location. The participating artists were Annie Riga, Andreea Samoila, Robert Lombarts, Hussel Zhu, Rashin Teimouri, Xiangbin Ji and Michele Bazzoli.

We have retained impressions, documented the exhibition, and manifested our concept within a publication.³ Now, *I believe you, I believe in you* is an ongoing exhibition series and independent curatorial collective consisting of Xuan and me and additionally of Andreea as our designer. The documentation of the past exhibition in the publication, as well as my referencing these experiences as a case study in this thesis, therefore, function not only as a retrospective but equally as an outlook. In the ongoing series we aim to operate along the existing concept to invite changing groups of international artists into varying spaces, creating exhibitions collectively and space driven.



² The space was provided by VEREIN SOLINGER KÜNSTLER e.V. as part of their annual young artist's promotional programme. I made the link between the association and the MIVC as a collaborator and took on the lead of the project.

³ The *I believe you, I believe in you* publication was written and edited by Xuan Hu and me. Andreea Samoila is responsible for the layout and the MIVC supported us financially.

Releasing control

Often collective making is characterized through shared ownership, but what if we think of collectivity as a more fluid concept?

The initiative *The Land* by Rikrit Tiravanija and Kamin Lertchaiprasert is a piece of ground near the city Chiang Mai in Thailand that functions as a safe space for the artistic community, open to all. The space can be used to visit, to install or make artworks on, plant, grow, inhabit, visit, live or work on. It was important to the initiators not to take on the role of maintainers or owners of the land but that it is for communal use and nobody's own. Free to be entered and left at any time. As a result, there was an ambition to remove any names of actual owners of the property from the contract. They managed to register *The Land* as a foundation, so that ownership can be understood as collective (Hirsch et al., 2015). In this example, collectivity therefore translates into removing ownership.

We took a slightly different approach in *I believe you, I believe in you*: Xuan and I are co-curators, we share curatorial responsibility equally and bring in separate skill sets such as design (Xuan) and project management as well as artistic, practical input (me) to complement each other additionally in our roles. In a collective exhibition, as curators, we do preserve the right for the last call on decisions, yet we decide to give the first call to the artists. Embedded in our existing exhibition concept and selected by us, trust in each artist is self-evident. As a prerequisite, we believe each person involved and what they have to say, and we believe in what they decide to make within the given context. At the same time, we have a strong vision of how we want to bring our concept forward, so of course there must also be dialogue, discussion, and exchange.

Annie Riga's painting became the centrepiece of the exhibition. Its airy construction allows encounter through the piece, meaning to break conventional interpretations of curation. Annie chose an initial hanging that did not match the way Xuan and I aimed to use the space. Considering visitors' walking routes, the influence on other works, and the reassessment of the works' potential, we recommended a more open way to hang the painting. We tried her desired installation first, and then suggested that she give our idea a try. The definite decision was hers. The



final installation made the painting move and flow freely, allowing viewers to walk around it. Annie later told me that this was, compared to previous installations, her favourite hanging of the piece.

We wanted to make sure that our curation was no authoritarian act, and that collectivity would remain key. Most decisions were not only discussed with the artist concerned but with the whole group. A few artworks overlapped but either way we assumed that each installation would concern every artwork, which meant that it required every artist's opinion. We called in several group meetings per day to discuss ideas.

At the same time, it was sometimes difficult not to be determining. It had taken a lot of work to put the exhibition together, it was my pride and joy. Being ambitious, I naturally wanted things to go my way sometimes. With Xuan, collectivity appeared rather naturally; when it comes to curatorial decisions, we happen to often agree or get inspired by one another, there is a somewhat blind trust. To trust the artists equally and from time to time take a step back, was a learning process.

Installing Annie's painting was not the only occasion intrinsic decisions had to be made. During the setup week, we developed a way to redefine what believing in the artist meant.

There was one site-specific artwork-in-progress that was developed on location, which I had been very excited about from the start. Due to time, financial and production

issues, it did not come to a state in which we found it to be of a quality serving its original potential. With too little time to bring it into the desired format, Xuan and I were challenged with the strong feeling that it would not benefit the exhibition. But, believing in the artist, we gave them the chance to defend their concept and discussed with the whole group how to operate. After many attempts for adjustment, Xuan and I decided to handle the final call democratically. Despite doubts that the decision might not go out in our favour, we concluded that in a collective exhibition that is built on trust, we believe in the collective opinion to be erected from an informed artistic opinion supportive of the exhibition. In the case that the artists voted for the installation of the artwork, we would support the common belief in the piece. It turned out as a unanimous decision against its installation, but we still made sure to honour the concept and exhibited sketches as part of the exhibition.

Shifting power

To think our collective methodology further, I take inspiration from Alex Martinis Roe's research of collectivity within the Milan Women's Bookstore Co-Operative (2018). Since the early 80's, the feminist group operates along relational politics, centred around *affidamento*, which can be understood as entrustment. Their approach is to move away from unifying opinions in a collective, which essentially lead to silencing differing voices and committing to one communal identity. Instead, they affirm each individual subjectivity. This means their collectivity is built on differences, on the differentiation in identity and political stance. Likewise, it means that mutual trust and support are essential (pp. 55-58). A commitment to reciprocal entrustment was also the principle of *I believe you, I believe in you*.

The Milan Women's Bookstore Co-Operative emerged from connection through womanhood which comes with resisting patriarchy and in their case re-defining power structures in a practice of relations (Roe, 2018, p. 59). While the connection through sexual difference is not comparable with a common interest for exhibition making (which motivated collectivity in *I believe you, I believe in you*), I regard

their way of thinking collectivity with valuable potential for implementation in artistic collaboration.

Unlike in the example of *The Land*, in the women's co-operative, roles and positions that hold authority or responsibility within the group are no tabu, instead, power may shift from one person to another (Roe, 2018, p. 63). This quality is one that can in parts already be found in *I believe you, I believe in you*. The co-operative may not allow democratic decision-making as we did. Yet on the other hand, I wonder, did we make the decision not to include the above-mentioned artwork democratically or did we in fact allow a shifting of power from the curators to the artists? Either way, I find the laid-out methodology of the women's co-operative a desirable concept for thinking collectively which I hope to include in our collective methodology for upcoming exhibitions.

Finding intimacy

Still, there is evidence that sometimes magic tricks work, spells are broken, curses lifted, and the load of the unresolved emotions prevented from being tacitly passed on, when the load is cast out from the body, not onto another person, but openly transferred onto objects, pictures, gestures or words, to be arrested by and in them, not so that the load can be cast away and forgotten, no, on the contrary, so that the pain and joy it contains can be avowed and owned, together, by artist and viewer, writer and reader, temporarily sharing an experience, and freely avowing it, like lovers might. (Verwoert, 2010, p. 271)

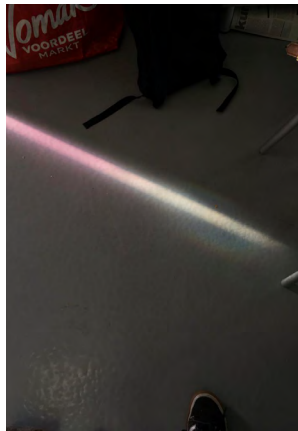
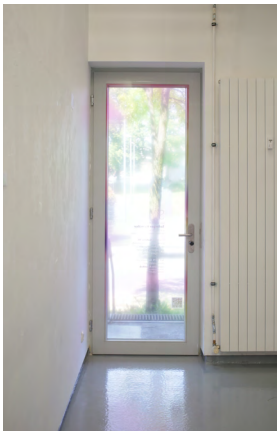
The term 'connection' to me describes something that is to-be-built. I choose to use the word *connectedness* to name the being-connected, a state of being, a condition. I encounter connectedness as bodiless; it is the thing that happens between a subject and another entity that we cannot grasp. A feeling of relation, something rather spiritual, emerged from belief. A viewer that believes what they see or experience, trusting this experience, may enter another layer of the artwork. This is where intimacy can be found.

Perhaps my interpretation of connectedness can be complemented through the concept of affect. Affects in the broader sense mean “moments of intensity”, something that is not knowledge but experience, it is not the meaning of the artwork but its effect on the body (O’Sullivan, 2010, p. 126).

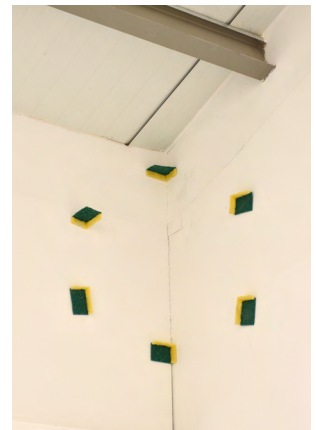
So, for me, feeling connectedness essentially leads to feeling intimacy. This however is subjective and connectedness itself may take many other forms. Yet, at its core is something that goes beyond the physical and possibly also beyond the rational. A viewer that encounters connectedness may in effect experience some notion of intensity.

Shaping non-space

Galerie SK has an airy and light feel to it. For *I believe you, I believe in you*, Xuan and I decided to accentuate its summery ambience making use of the natural daylight and adding to it with a warm colour palette as part of our exhibition design.



We had an approach not to use the walls in a too conventional way and discovering the gallery’s unique spatial qualities. Annie’s paintings were a suitable match in avoiding walls altogether. Robert is an artist who understands creating coincidental moments with a space very cleverly. His installations in the gallery seemed at the same time well thought-out and impulsively reactive to the architecture.



I, too, developed my own artwork partly on location. A key aspect of my installation *Sky Train*, which exhibition visitors encountered outside the gallery, is text and transparent imagery. Open-ended sentences and intricate textures on glass were then continued in the enclosed gallery space in the form of projections. The site-determined installation felt like a merging of my function of both curator and artist in the exhibition. I wanted my projections to have no designated space, to blend in with a low contrast due to the bright daylight. The projection of a structured and coloured glass seemed to mirror Annie's painting, overlapped with other artworks, merging into one another, and adding to the light mood that we created. My attempt was to build connections by seamlessly layering onto other works, the space and exhibition visitors themselves.



These described facets in the exhibition to me illustrate a reaching for the non-space. Inhabiting the space as we did, I aimed to embed exhibition visitors softly into the space filled with our united complex contemporary practices. I could not presuppose nor verify the visitors' connection with the works or exhibition, but our way of working filled me with the belief that we increased a potential for experiencing connectedness.

In my example, the non-space is illustrated through inhabiting a space that was not supposed to be a space. But the non-space can as well be centred in a room with emptiness around it. The following examples will demonstrate

how I define the non-space and how other artists have made use of it.

Marinus Boezem's *Groene Cathedral* (1996) is a formation of trees; materially speaking, that is all. The artist planted poplar trees on a field in Almere in the shape of a gothic cathedral suggesting that Flevoland, as a newly formed land, needs a cathedral. What looks like an ordinary arrangement of trees from the outside, becomes a graspable space from the inside. As a visitor of his airy church, it was captivating to me that the awestruck, humble feeling a 'real' cathedral holds, was equally immersive in Boezem's inhabited space.



This same quality is to be found in James Turrell's *Celestial Vault* (1996). An artificially constructed crater on a dune in The Hague encloses a stone cot at its centre, inviting people to gaze at the sky. From this position, the sky becomes a vault, and it feels like lying under a dome. Not only does Turrell succeed to construct a roof without material, but he makes viewers - just through perception - find a moment that may transfer them into connectedness. This feeling of an individual discovery, even though it is planned, is a very clever implementation of indeed, facilitating coincidence.



Seeking for artistically created non-spaces in public space, I have been struck by Banksy (2019). *Gross Domestic Product* was a temporary shop in Croydon that displayed many of Banksy's well-known artworks and motifs behind shop windows. I came to what can be best described as a spectacle myself and came upon a long line of visitors in front of the shop. At first encounter, it seemed logical to join the queue and wait for it to move forward but I quickly realized that the queue was leading nowhere. There was no entrance to the shop as in fact it did not exist, only the shop windows did. The sole purpose of the line was to

stand at the window front row for a moment and glance at its display. I am less interested in the commercial strategy behind Banksy's concept or its capitalistic context.⁴ More than anything, it was the performative character of the piece that makes it so brilliant to me. The artist arranged visitors of his odd exhibition like puppets on a stage that was a public street corner in Croydon, directing them to visit a space that did not exist, making the pavement into the material of his performative installation.



Non-spaces can as well be constructed in the museum. At Gropius Bau in Berlin, I had the pleasure of working on the production team for the exhibition *Down to Earth* (Badaljan et al., 2020). I heard that the artist Tomás Saraceno was invited to the space months in advance, where he came across a spider web, which became the material of his contribution to the exhibition (2020). Saraceno has a profound interest in spiders and their webs and has made them subject of his work many times. After preserving web and spiders until the exhibition opening, he added only one object to the spacious room: a mirror. When looked at from a certain angle, the mirror would show the spider web in the top corner of the room. Rather than appearing still or archival, the artist displays an ever-changing, fluid piece of work by framing a living organism. Flux is caused not only by the spider building its web but also by how the installation setup affects viewers' gaze and movement in the space.



⁴ After all, *Gross Domestic Product* was indeed a shop, an online shop in which all the objects on display could be acquired through an auction.

Saraceno's work is a good example of *site-specific* as opposed to *site-determined* work. His piece is precisely specific to this exact space, whereas site-determined work may be shaped by its arena but could (with minor adjustments) still be set up at another place. I refer to my own works and the methodology of *I believe you, I believe in you* as site-determined.

Curating performatively

The non-spatial practice is a social one. Instants of curiosity and discovery spark instincts to share the experience with others. As much as connectedness is a highly subjective sensation, the act of experiencing is a uniting one.

Next to a quality of shaping spaces, what all the above-referenced artworks have in common is a performative character. The infrastructure of the arranged spaces organizes viewers in them as with invisible stage directions. Yet to the viewer it feels like a curious journey, making a discovery of their own. I see these works as interactive, as participatory. Even when entered alone, the spaces hold a facility for exchange: the viewer shapes the work through their own angle of perception and is rewarded by experiencing what the artist laid out for them.



There are many parallels to be drawn between theatre and art, as Rancière (2009) does in his study on the spectator. However, the performative shall not falsely be categorized solely within the performing arts. I argue that performativity enables valuable potential for exhibition making to be accessible and interactive, if not immersive. Malzacher and Warsza (2017) suggest the term 'performative curating', it "highlights liveliness, the co-presence of all participants, the (temporary) community – all this being core aspects of most definitions of theatre and performance" (p. 31). Understanding performativity as a curatorial strategy, is an aspiration to creating an environment within the exhibition. Very simply put, the performative is a "reality-making capacity" (p.30), here the editor refers to Judith Butler's interpretation of performance, not as the theatre-like but the ability to shape a reality.⁵

5 see Butler (1990)

Performative curating contains framed social situations, hybrid exhibition spaces, relational practices, audience interaction and an approach to collectivity. The practice is performative because the space has been inhabited in such a way that intimacy can be physically perceived by the viewer, so that the exhibit becomes accessible. And a notion of accessibility is necessary for the viewer's ability to interact, to find connectedness in the work. Performativity offers fluidity, leaving room for the viewer to unfold within a space that has been embodied by the artist. Therefore, the viewer relates to the artist and all other participants and all other viewers. The viewers' act of inhabiting the space by physically and mentally being in the exhibition is their contribution to the performative quality of the exhibition. Performativity simultaneously unites all participants with one another, making the interaction with the work human and connectedness possible.

Thomas Oberender (2021) manifests a very similar methodology for exhibition making and titles it *The Living Exhibition*. Oberender was the initiator and artistic director of the five-year program series *Immersion* which brought to life performative exhibitions. The afore mentioned exhibition *Down to Earth* is one of them (Badaljan et al., 2020).

An exhibition that is alive, in his eyes, is often time-based: it does not look the same every day because it is reactive to audience and space, it exhibits time-based and live artworks like performances and films, it is its own organism. Oberender (2021) points out that in a time-based exhibition, artworks may appear and disappear, it *may* in fact be transforming, he states that a living exhibition is worth coming back to again and again (p.13). Viewers themselves become part of the construct of the exhibition, just like in Tino Sehgal's included performance *This Situation* (2020), where he has his players react to each viewer entering the room. Sehgal is at the same time co-curator of the exhibition. Besides, his name is unavoidable in the context of contemporary performative practices and curating, as he critically researches subject relations and temporality in his work. With *Down to Earth*, Oberender, Sehgal, and their curatorial team created an exhibition that minimizes the viewer's distance to the exhibits, making the exhibition feel indeed performative.

One of the key devices of *Down to Earth* was not to use electricity: it contained only analogue and live artworks, which was a proposal towards a more sustainable and lively exhibition-making.⁶



The exhibition was open until 9 pm on weekends, in late summer, the sun already set at that time. The display was not lit electrically, so daylight was the only light source. When I walked through the big rooms of Gropius Bau, I noticed that other visitors had paid the full ticket price and they could see parts of the exhibition only in the dimmed twilight, the streetlights outside the windows and the few bright green emergency exit lights inside the rooms. To me, this did not seem like a disadvantage, it was mesmerizing to chase every ray of light and to see an (open) exhibition in a way that I had never seen it before: lightless. A museum in the dark has a magical quality to it and I appreciate that the exhibition team of *Down to Earth* had the courage to let viewers experience it.

Taking *I believe you, I believe in you* as an example, I introduce a tool aiming to apply the methodology of performative curating: To get acquainted with the space, in the empty gallery, we invited all artists to practice performance research with us. This was a curatorial strategy

chosen to get to know the arena we were working in, welcoming every little corner of the gallery, and exploring its unique quality. We worked with performative scores, giving simple instructions and a time frame for participants to interact. The objective was to warm up as a group and merge with the space.

The scores were my tool to have the group change perspective, exploring the gallery sensorily, not rationally. I was hoping to spread an understanding that the room did not have to be limited by walls, that we could be imaginative and shape our own intimate reality. Performing can be intimidating - to me it is. But I see it as a way to rediscover one's own position in a space while the collective experience provides assurance and a sense of normality.⁷

I do not know if it was graspable for the viewer, or even the artists, but I feel like I could see that this one hour spent on performance research made an impact on our artistic work in the space and the exhibition as result.

Sensing connectedness

This is art's function: to switch our intensive register, to reconnect us with the world. Art opens us up to the non-human universe that we are part of. Indeed, art might well have a representational function (after all, art objects, like everything else, can be read) but art also operates as a *fissure* in representation. And we, as spectators, as representational creatures, are involved in a dance with art, a dance in which – through careful manoeuvres – the molecular is opened up, the aesthetic is activated, and art does what is its chief *modus operandi*: it transforms, if only for a moment, our sense of our "selves" and our notion of the world.
(O'Sullivan, 2001, p. 128)

Connectedness is a sensitive and intimate sensation, hardly predictable and intangible to anyone other than the individual experiencing it. In trying to facilitate a notion of connectedness in my practice, I have been critically reflecting;

⁷ Scores as performance research were inspired by Phillippine Hoegen's book *ANOTHER VERSION: Thinking Through Performing* (2020) and a module that she gave in the Master program.

what gives me the right to assume that my work makes the viewer feel anything? How do I verify sentience? How do we validate an experience? How do we evaluate something we don't know how to define?

Indeed, I do not know what my viewer expects from viewing. Do they want to feel a connection with my work, my feelings, the space, or other viewers? It is my own need for connectedness that drives me to make work that is intimate and aims for exchange. Reaching out to people, leaving an impression after experiencing the work, giving food for thought, creating dialogue, eventually or initially making some sort of difference through my work, are my self-serving desires as a maker. At the same time, it is this urgency that motivates me as a viewer. Am I my own audience?

Admitting to the introspective cycle, I am left feeling dependent. Dependent not just on the exposure of the work but additionally on the act of experiencing it to spark a feeling. The impossibility of truthful feedback from viewers, of validating exchange has so far often unsatisfied me and the resulting sensation of dependence has made my artistic practice feel incomplete.

Reading Jan Verwoert's text *You make me feel mighty real* (2010) and Susan Sontag's *Against Interpretation* (2001) have led me to indicate that my feeling of dependency is motivated by the desire to add meaning to the work.

The visual display of text equips me to express open-ended thoughts stemming from a personal emotion. In the non-space, I expose sentences like *You were never really here, I believe you, I believe in you* or *text me when you're home*. They are not statements, nor poetry and can be more seen as 'invisible' words, coming out of nowhere and indecisive whether they are directed at you or coming out of your own mouth.





When I placed the words in a space, brought them into relation with a viewer, I concluded that I was not seeking their meaning anymore. Sontag (2001) states that art is not actually about *understanding* it, that reducing it to its content and interpreting it might in fact diminish its autonomous power. Knowing my personal relation to the feeling I am displaying, I have already given the work relevance, and I trust in the viewer to make it relevant for themselves. Meaning of the work does than take a minor role. Perhaps Sontag would construe the correlation of the viewer's sentience with the work still an interpretation, however I realize that this is art's true potential for connectedness.

Beyond meaning lies feeling and feeling someone
feel what you feel makes all the difference.
(Verwoert, 2010, p. 265)

Verwoert suggests that in art, exposing emotions alone is a way to authorize them, to emancipate them. Exhibiting rather fragmented texts, I am seeking to let them unfold their full potential. Their display is about a feeling that the words spark in you, a memory that they remind you of, thinking of a person you know, or opening a discourse. It might not spark anything at all, and the viewer might not be immersed in the work. Yet the sole display of the work is a fulfilment of the artist's urgency.

I make art because I feel a need for connectedness, for being understood, for echoing my feelings in others. As much as this might come with dependency, I feel comparatively dependent as a consumer of art, visuals, stories, architecture, writings, music, philosophy, conversation. Everything is inspiration and everything is in flux. Within the context of exposing sentiments in art, I find Verwoert's formulation apt to suggest what I call *inter-dependency*:

Witnesses drawn into the cycles of transference are more than just involuntary accomplices. They rather become co-producers of the feelings that the one who feels them feel. And as co-producers they depend on a production underway.
(Verwoert, 2010, p.294)

As for sentience, I conclude the exchange between artist and viewer to be inter-dependent. *Inter-*, and not co-dependent, because it is not that one sentiment is not valid without the other, but they are stronger together, confiding in each other. Inter-dependency to me describes a reciprocal relationship, a meeting in-between. *Inter-* is what turns dependency into an asset. Inter-dependency encapsulates exhibition participants such as viewers, artist, curator, and institutional chair all together and with that, sends out a deeper invitation for connection among each other.

To finish, what comes closest to the validation of sentimental exchange in art, is belief. In exposing a sentiment, I am filled with belief that what I give is taken, lasting just for a few seconds, or starting a new conversation, reaching many people or just one. Connectedness is not verifiable, it is spiritual. Believing in connectedness is like a faith and faith itself is connecting.

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List of images

<i>The Future of Colour</i> , paintings by Polys Peslikas, curation by Jan Verwoert (2017)	6
Publication <i>I believe you, I believe in you</i> photograph taken by Xiangbilin Ji	10
<i>Dream Cartographies</i> by Annie Riga photograph taken by Xiangbilin Ji	11
<i>I believe you, I believe in you</i> colour design by Xuan Hu photograph (left) taken by Xiangbilin Ji	15
<i>Constellation</i> by Robert Lombarts photograph taken by Xiangbilin Ji	16
<i>Untitled</i> by Alicia Kremser	16
<i>De Groene Kathedraal</i> by Marinus Boezem (1996)	17
<i>Celestial Vault</i> by James Turrell (1996)	17
<i>Gross Domestic Product</i> by Banksy (2019)	18
<i>Invertebrate Rights for "Down to Earth"</i> by Tomás Saraceno (2020)	18
fragment of <i>Untitled</i> by Alicia Kremser photograph taken by Xuan Hu	19
<i>Down to Earth</i> by Julia Badaljan, Thomas Oberender et al. (2020)	21
<i>the moment when</i> by Alicia Kremser	23
<i>Sky Train</i> by Alicia Kremser	24

Appendix

Materializing connectedness

Ever since I was little, my best friend and I would meet at the swings that were between our houses to catch up, confess and connect. We continued doing so in our teenage years, it was a hang-out spot, a place just for us. Situated in public space, the swings provide a space of belonging. You sit not just to sit but to swing. A place of peace and quiet to talk, relax, unwind, and reflect.

This is the kind of thing an art space should have. As part of putting my research into practice, I propose to install a swing in front of the graduation show's building. There, it brings memories of youth and ease into a space, that I feel can sometimes use a little less seriousness. I picture the exhibition visit on a summer day, where visitors spend several moments or hours strolling through the exhibition, taking in impressions, processing so much input and then going outside to catch a breath. Then, there is a swing waiting to be sat on, where all these impressions can sink in a little or be forgotten for a moment, just swinging.

The swing represents an in-between space to me: between sky and ground, between being attached and detached. It is not a very permanent space, but the activity of swinging

feels timeless. The swings' scope is hard to define, is its space the seat or the whole radius taken from the highest point up on each side? It preserves a lot of space, whereas the object itself – the seat and the ropes – is barely the size of a skateboard. I think the swing is not an object, nor a space but it creates a space. Swinging is not a moment, but it creates one.

Most of my recent and present works are placed in non-spaces. They do not necessarily call one spot their own and they are not at every moment visible or tangible. Their presence depends on light, water, a movement, interaction of either a natural element like sunlight or water, or a subtle interaction of viewers themselves. When stepping outside of the building, the swing might not seem immediately obvious as a continuation of the works experienced inside. But the being-on-the swing is a materialization of the being-in-connection with a work, creating that special energy not through a mental state but a physical one.