

RESEARCHING THE RESEARCHER

Noticing why it wanders

READ (Research Ecologies & Archival Development) Lab at the School of Commons develops, presents and collects theory within the broader field of knowledge production. Over the 10-months spent together, the 5 READ researchers met bi-weekly, initially, and slightly more sporadically thereafter, to discuss their research and projects and present updates, questions, concerns, challenges, and anything else they felt necessary or relevant. The sessions grew into a support system, and has resulted in a series of postings published directly on the School of Commons website, regarding each individual research, as well as this collective publication, put together by: Band of Burnouts, Amy Gowen, Betül Aksu, Charlotte Friedli, Sid Smith, which focuses on their roles as researchers.

This is a short, introductory glimpse into their processes.

Question: What were your expectations/anticipations when you first set out as part of READ (Research Ecologies & Archival Development) at School of Commons?

To write with a focused mind and a healthy body. I was expecting my role to be the role of a somewhat lonely researcher doing literature reviews, sharing the process from time to time and publishing parts of the literature in forms of 1-2 essays online. However, meeting regularly with READ fellows and opening up about what was happening in my personal life have changed how I researched and how I shared the process of my research. It was no longer fixated on the forms of essays or any outcome, but transformed into chats, creating visuals, having short and long conversations, complaints, discussions, structured interviews and not structured happenings. Texts, speeches, and movements that all appeared around commoning.

I expected these definitive roles of 'mediator' and 'editor' would be central to the time together. I also took very seriously the publishing part of the project, to post a series of online 'mediations.' What surprised me the most was how we came together as a group and provided an infrastructure to support each other's work. The closeness we have grown over our time together has been the pleasant-est of surprises. It's a very different and rare way of working to have all these individual projects going on but to still be invested in one another's work voluntarily, this is also something that surprises me. There were no 'instructions' to do so yet we all invested in other works, and there was a sounding board for any questions or uncertainties.

To find courage to think and write and theorize in a group without the pressure of traditional academic environments yes!. And to find a community in this particular time during the pandemic. I didn't expect a group of people that felt so familiar since the only point of connection was our interest in research and the School of Commons. But it turns out that we have very similar ways of thinking, feeling and speaking. Anyway the different experiences and perspectives were very inspiring for me. This was something that was missing during my studies.

My initial expectations were to use School of Commons, and the READ trajectory, as a framework to give time and space to develop ideas I had been thinking around for a while, and to find new and interesting ways to explore them, that I wouldn't necessarily have done or found if I was doing this research as a solo, independent endeavour. I was really happy, and frankly relieved when the option was given to the READS to come together and meet regularly one of the best decisions of 2021 to discuss our projects, exchange ideas, and just generally support one another voluntarily. One of my biggest wishes for researching as part of the School of Commons was to do so within a community/

collective, but the essence of the READ was that of an individual researcher/research project, so it was great to have the opportunity to come together as individuals, collectively. I was initially quite nervous to present my ideas and research to a group of people on a regular basis. I wasn't sure how the dynamic or the flow would work between us, or of our different capacities or levels of commitment. It presented the opportunity for structure and support that I definitely needed, but I was already setting very high expectations for myself that I knew I was unlikely to meet (or would stress myself out in the process of doing so).

Question: How has the READ journey/process been for you?

... a roller coaster! It has been a transformational time for both myself and this specific project over what has been only a few months - though it feels much longer? Definitely! I've seen what I can do when I am given a place without boundaries to do it with surrounding infrastructure and resources. It felt good to really run with any idea I had and bring them all to life under this one umbrella-home. My ambition tends to get the better of me, and I perhaps pushed it too hard at certain points. However, with the power of hindsight, I can now sit here and say I feel proud of all I've managed to do with my Lab, and all I've learnt from being part of READ.<3

Unexpected. It started more like having a somehow fixed agenda to research a topic, and turned into self-revelation by sharing and collecting and sharing and finally putting things into words. It made me feel part of a group, realise what happens when I feel free to share within a group and how that sharing opens up new ways of learning and knowledge production. I've been holding myself, not paying enough attention to my words, at times writing and tearing them. Sharing the personal side of the researcher opened up things where they were stuck.

Peaks and valleys. Peaks because I learned to open up, to be brave in sharing my vulnerabilities with a group of almost strangers, to feel thankful for inputs without stressing out about not knowing something. Valleys because it made me question the traditional institutions and paths even more.

The READ journey has taken a few different trajectories. It encompassed my individual research project I've been working on which admittedly has really only gathered momentum over the last months of the fellowship (which is not as I had planned, but is certainly characteristic to my way of working). But when I think back to my time as a READ, I think and focus much more on the collective meetings we have been having as collective READS, as this is what has really defined the READ journey for me. More than anything, it has been a huge support system. A place to check-in but also chuck in ideas, share confusions, stuckness and vulnerabilities that aren't always necessarily tied to our own projects, but in relation to external factors (which definitely affect our research). It's also led to discussions around things we can do or create together outside of our individual research frameworks. Initially in the meetings I wanted to (and I think maybe we all wanted to) focus on our projects. Through using our research as a vehicle it was a way to get to know one another, and feel comfortable around one another, but it has really expanded beyond that, and in our past meetings we've barely even mentioned our individual research, other than to congratulate or support one another with small or large progresses being made. Instead it has expanded into other projects and trajectories, sharing details of what is happening in our lives, and finding different ways to connect, share and develop our skills and interests. (Agree and I LOVE this development)

Question: The exchanges between READ members have been ...

like big warm hugs, everytime. I feel such a sense of safety and comfort with you all - like... is this how researching in company is meant to feel?! Why does it never feel this good at university?? lol. Now I'm imagining working in this environment my entire work life. It's delicious.

I couldn't imagine that working with people who are kind and willing to listen would change the process of researching this much. First words that come to my mind to describe this environment is, safe and non-judgemental. By judgemental I don't only refer to judgements of knowledge, as it is more common in academic circles, but also judgements of behaviour. I felt that I was welcome to behave as myself, no need to hide my introverted side, which made speaking and sharing easier. Same :) It also felt like a testing ground - but now I wonder - for what am I practicing? For the "real" world? It should feel like this in every world. It almost felt like an illusion, a world where I am not silent, a world in which people like me speak and share and support. What are the ways to turn this into after-SoC, into what-is-next-real? Such a great question!

Organic, supportive - always. Cute and awkward sometimes, fun and flowing others. It's been so lovely to see the different points that connect us and how through having regularly planned contact, our relationships and dynamics have grown and evolved. It feels like such a wonderful lil research family.

These exchanges have been much more about the humans behind these projects and ideas. Of course we shared theories, texts and thoughts but the trajectories that led to these projects taught me even more. It also felt like having four mirrors that reflected parts of me, in some way or another I recognized myself in all of you. Feeling familiar in an unfamiliar environment is beautiful.

Question: How has your view of yourself as a researcher changed through our READ time together?

It's totally changed, but I think I am still reflecting (maybe processing) this process. Before I understood being a researcher as a very singular, isolated, and often a competitive role. A cog in a chain or system, with only really the other parts of that chain or system (say a mentor or an editor) that you have any correspondence with, strictly about the topic at hand. Periods of stuckness and periods of breakthrough, but always with the mentality of pushing on relentlessly. Seeing how much sharing, being social, engaging and listening to others,(listening is important, productive and hard work) and taking solid time away from my research to explore other things (that have eventually circled back, or renewed my inspiration) has really expanded what being a researcher means, and what research is and the forms it can take. But it's about finding balance, I still search for a lot of answers in theories, or in people in higher more official positions, as well as through formal validation and critique processes, but I am so aware now that there are other ways of researching and embodying this role so it's trying to work these in on a longer-term level.

It's given me a lot more confidence in my work, and also kind of 'proven' that the ways and types of research I hold interest in do have a place somewhere. It has also allowed me to further expand my considerations of research and doing research into directions that feel natural and ones I want to keep going forth with.

I was harshly criticising myself as a 'bad researcher' because although I spent a lot of time in different universities, I don't have a list of peer-reviewed publications - as if the outcome says it all. Discussing the processes of researching and subjectivity made me realise what was holding me

back. I was living in a positivist school of thought and defining 'bad' in terms of the objectivity imposed on me as a researcher, as there was no space for subjectivity and outcome was the only determiner of success. After months of hearing other perspectives and experiencing different ways of researching, I feel good, the opposite of bad-good. I realise that I was asking questions asked by many researcher who use feminist methodologies, I was asking good questions but in the wrong place. In a way realising the differences in perspectives is marking the end of harsh criticism - or self sabotage - for me.

I still struggle with the idea of being a good researcher that can quote certain things, has a list of publications, can share interesting references to whatever and write and speak with a nonchalance about complex topics. But my goal definitely changed. I don't want to be this perfect researcher but be confident with my set of skills and most importantly I don't want to reproduce this pressure to perform with phoney professionalism and by hiding my insecurities, flaws and lacks. I want to create parallels and not hierarchies. I want to focus more on the personal connection to theory, the situated I within a community, a time, a space and the paths that brought me to a certain question.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Band of Burnouts, <i>Eclectic Lowway</i>	8 – 12
Amy Gowen, <i>The Positive Researcher</i>	13 – 20
Betül Aksu, <i>Reason: Other personal</i>	21 – 29
Charlotte Friedli , <i>Tangled in my web</i>	30 – 38
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Band of Burnouts

ECLECTIC LOWWAY



THEMES

- Low
- Theory
- Hapticality
- Sick Time, Sleepy Time, Crip Time
- Cathedral Thinking
- Critical Healing
- I is for Impasse
- Feelings
- Guilt & Shame

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METHODS

- Anecdote
- Artistic Research
- Study & Planning
- Coping

ENVIRONMENTS

- Figuring It Out
- Deep Hanging Out

These themes, methods, and environments illustrate the 'Ways & Workings' of the *Band of Burnouts* research lab. They assembled together along the way. Some laid out knowingly from the beginning, others becoming apparent further down the path. With hindsight, I see that their eclecticism and interests paint a picture of myself as a researcher – perhaps not so specific to this project – and my personal ways and workings in researching on the whole.

Printed below are a selection of 'Ways & Workings'. All definitions and descriptions can be found here:



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THEMES

- CATHEDRAL THINKING
In The Good Ancestor (2020), philosopher Roman Krznaric calmly calls for a reorientation toward the future, not to benefit us (as is typically the pitch of the pop-futurist book), but to benefit our far-off descendants. He uses the term **cathedral thinking** to describe epic projects that will not be completed within our lifetimes, but that are crucial to start now — similar to the work of generations who built medieval cathedrals that only their great-grandchildren would see finished.¹
- CRITICAL HEALING (excerpt)
Critical Healing draws on queer theory, disability studies, postcolonial theory, and literary studies to theorise productive engagements between the clinical and cultural aspects of biomedical knowledge and practice.
→ Critical healing creates space in the margins for alternatives to normalcy and health, spaces where those

¹Culp, Samantha. "The Library of Possible Futures." *The Atlantic*. Last modified February 1, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2021/02/future-shock-pop-futurism-pandemic/617867/>.

²Garden, Rebecca. "Critical Healing: Queering Diagnosis and Public Health Through the Health Humanities." *Journal of Medical Humanities*. Last modified August 9, 2018. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10912-018-9533-1>.

³Lury, Celia, and Nina Wakeford. *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social*. London: Routledge, 2012.

deemed misfits are able to flourish. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson theorizes misfitting as the “*disjunctures that occur in the interactive dynamism of becoming*” in a world that is both material and constructed by discourse.

Misfitting creates an outcast status that occurs when there is a “discrepancy between body and world, between that which is expected and that which is,” leading to injustice and discrimination through the materiality of the world as well as through social attitudes and representational practices.²

METHODS

- ANECDOTE

At first glance, the method and device of anecdote may not seem ‘to belong to an academic repertoire of methods at all.’³

In the book *Inventive Methods: The Happening of the Social* (2012), Mike Michaels describes the method and device of the anecdote as ‘the way in which the telling of an anecdote sets up a relation to a specific context that enables anecdotalization to make a difference, and making this difference is what gives the anecdote both relevance and efficacy - it is what enables the anecdote to circulate. In the telling of an anecdote as a device or method, it is not that the researcher is made to accommodate the anecdote to the problem researched, or that the problem to be researched is cut down in size or complexity by the anecdote, but that they are defined anew in relation to each other, and in the process the relation of researcher to researched is transformed.’

‘The anecdote not only reports events, but acts on them.’



Edited from original via a tweet by @GreggorMattson

• ARTISTIC RESEARCH ENVIRONMENTS

• DEEP HANGING OUT

'Coined by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz in 1998 "deep hanging out" is unique to anthropology, Geertz describes it as "localized, long-term, close-in, vernacular field research."

The idea is to show up and hang out. Deeply.

With the researcher becoming an active participant, while also taking part, being a member, observer, and analyzer all at once. This approach is foundational to what Tim Ingold means when he speaks of studying with people, not solely making studies of them.⁴

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⁴Peter Wogan (2004) Deep Hanging Out: Reflections on Fieldwork and Multisited Andean Ethnography, *Identities*, 11:1, 129-139, DOI: 10.1080/725289021

Band of Burnouts undertakes a transdisciplinary study of the burnout in a multi-perspective, multi-voiced exploration of experiences. The research lab is interested in accounting for the unaccounted details, considering the burnout as a collective rather than individual experience, and taking seriously the body as a producer of knowledge.

Jess Henderson is a researcher, writer and initiator of the Band of Burnouts lab. She is the author of Offline Matters (Amsterdam: BIS Publishers, 2020) and founder of No Fun Magazine. Her work explores exhaustion and illness narratives, the social effects of technology, ideologies around 'work' and productivity, and experimental forms of publishing.

Amy Gowen

THE ✨ POSITIVE ✨ RESEARCHER

I've always considered myself a positive person. A cup half-full, always look on the bright side, see the best in everything, person. What I didn't realise was that this positive outlook had also infiltrated my methods of research, and the ways in which I understood and interacted with knowledge. By which, I mean, I was a ✨ positive researcher ✨ . A researcher defined by and, as I now understand, very much limited to a "positivist" philosophy towards my research methods, ways of working, and overall approach towards the acquisition and recognition of information.

To rewind slightly, when I say **positivist**, also known as **positivism**, I am referring to the research philosophy that sees "**factual**", **observable evidence as the only form of defensible research finding**. Positivism assumes that the researcher is **separate from, and not affecting/affected by the outcomes of research**. This means that there are no provisions for human interests within the scope of the study. As a philosophy, positivism adheres to the view that **the researcher is limited to data collection and interpretation alone**, and this must be overseen in an objective manner. From a more practical approach, this then also determines that **only minimal interaction with selected research participants** is allowed when carrying out research.¹

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This now seems such an odd ethos to be beholden to, when my research stems from and continues to be, very much rooted in personal experience. However, the journey behind my positivism can be quite clearly tracked. My initial encounter with the topic of my research - **understanding the invisible systems and structures that underlie our cultural institutions, and attempting to find alternatives to institute with** - was borne from my first encounter with the concept of "commons" and "commoning" when visiting CASCO Art Institute Working for the Commons in Utrecht in 2018, which then led to a thesis on commoning as an institutional practice.

¹The basis for the definition and information used on positivism here, is the following article: <https://research-methodology.net/research-philosophy/positivism/>, accessed on 20/10/2021

At the time, I was a somewhat aspiring baby academic, embarking on a Masters in Arts and Society at Utrecht University. At that particular moment, I had very little experience in the artworld under my belt, but I'd always been a stickler for organising, getting a kick out of making detailed schedules, lists, taking on the role of distributing tasks and roles, and finding new and innovative ways to organise people and places. So, when I discovered an entire body of research dedicating itself to the critiquing, dismantling, and envisioning of new ways of organising, or "instituting", under the guise of institutional critique, this was nothing short of a goldmine. Looking back, this time almost feels like a trap. The dominant voices in the field of institutional critique that I was encountering always spoke or wrote in a way that felt, well, exactly that, dominant. All-knowing, all-seeing, and highly specialised, despite the fact that most of these writers were spending their time diagnosing problems, or finding alternative terms for the same issues, as opposed to envisioning active solutions. This being the basis for my first encounter with institutional critique, and also my first steps into the artworld, led me to believe that it was only when this level of "excellence" was reached, or amount of knowledge acquired, that one could have any authority or agency in such a conversation.

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Time passed, and I completed my thesis and MA, and though I was no longer enrolled in a research programme, or in any way connected to an academic institution, my love and fascination for researching institutions was still very much present. This meant I would grab any opportunity I could to speak or write about organisational methods, usually attempting to write for academic journals, or to participate in talks, or workshops, as these seemed to be the only platforms interested in such topics. And though my methods of researching and thinking stayed the same whilst embarking on these opportunities, my actual life and lived experience was changing exponentially around me. Shortly after finishing my MA, I took on a senior role in an arts organisation in the Netherlands, meaning that not only was I now very much directly in an arts institution setting, but I was also instituting in my day to day life, and had, at least what appeared on the surface, a pivotal role in the making of institutional decisions. However, it was whilst I was in this same role that I became totally disillusioned and disenfranchised with the ways in which institutions are run, and how those within them, or connected to them, are treated. This was not only the case where I was working, but was also reflected in the surrounding institutions

I had contact with, either personally or professionally. Poor working habits, toxic professional relationships, overwork, underpay, the merging of professional and private lives, and intimating and manipulative behaviours seemed to riddle (almost) every level of the art institution hierarchy. It lay the basis for a general feeling of discontent in the artworld, here in the Netherlands but also further afield. As scandal after scandal emerged, it felt as though we were approaching an institutional crisis. These feelings were only further exacerbated when I began confiding in friends, colleagues, other professionals, and even strangers about my experiences, who then, in turn, mirrored, matched, or exceeded it with their own.

This is why it is then so fascinating to me that at no point did I think to seriously begin to collect and map these conversations, experiences, and anecdotes. Fascinating, not only because I was already surrounded by a rich body of information and insight, easily at my disposal, but because I am certainly not the first person to be making these discoveries or doing this kind of work, with many Instagram pages, magazine columns, DIY platforms, and zines dedicating themselves to these kinds of conversations and critiques. Yet I stuck to my big theories, my expensive, institutionally-backed books, and academic papers. It is not then surprising, when looking back on my initial correspondence with School of Commons, ie. my application form, that I can identify some very clear, and, frankly, concerning ✨ positive ✨ connections:

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ABSTRACT TAKEN FROM MY READ RESEARCH PROPOSAL:

"I will mediate my research by, quite literally, dissecting organisational anatomies. First by leading an introductory explanation into the visible and invisible infrastructural layers that form organisations and methods of self-organising, before then focussing on specialised lines of inquiry based on the theoretical lenses of affect, emotion and care. The final study group will culminate in linking together these infrastructural model examples to investigate the importance of invisible infrastructure in determining an organisation's anatomy: its identity, modus operandi and internal and external wellbeing and informing self-organising practices."

I will mediate = A detached outsider

Leading an introductory explanation = That I have all the clear,

uniform answers

In determining = Same here, again

Specialised lines of inquiry = Only professional, published, or specialist opinions allowed

Based on the theoretical lenses of = Already established theory is the only perspective to understand this research through

For a body of research that is particularly interested in conditions of affect, emotion and care - all very human, open, and subjective concepts - there doesn't seem to be much of the human, the personal, or even the interpersonal involved here. And, for a research project I was so excited to shape as part of the School of Commons' peer-to-peer learning/do-it-with-others environment, I can't quite identify room for openness or collaboration...

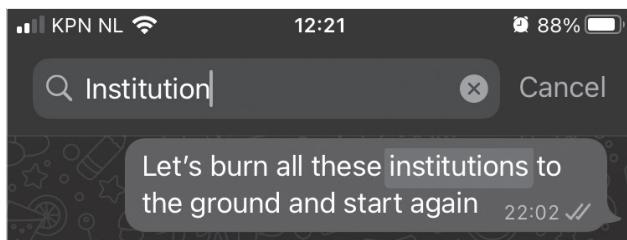
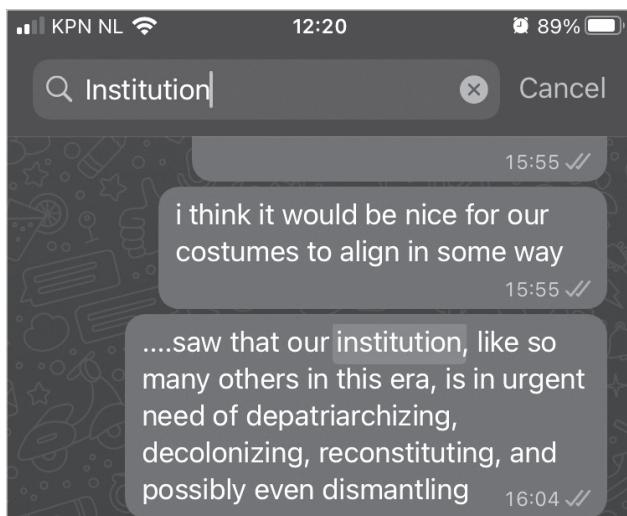
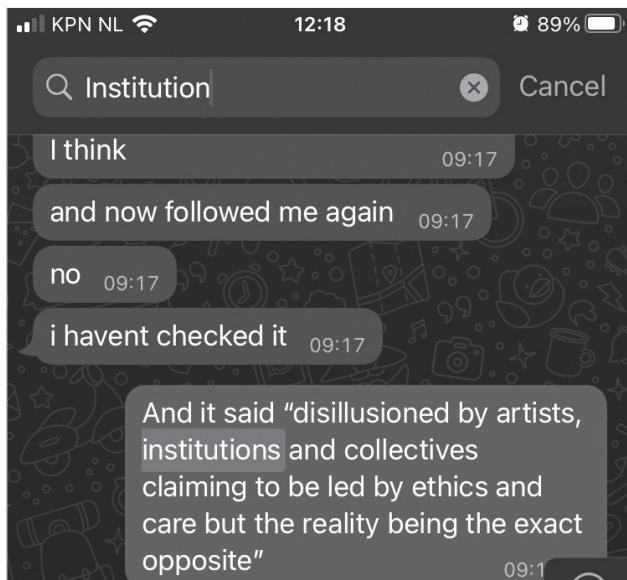
Luckily, although my initial working methods looked somewhat like the following:

- Theoretical research
- Interviews with academics, theorists and specialists in the field
- Academic forms of notation and presentation
- Presentations of completed research with clearly defined answers
- Workshops with little actual input from participants

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The reality of my higgledy-piggledy research journey over the last months (one that is still ongoing, and not complete, because I have now accepted it will never truly be complete), looks more like...

- Personal anecdotes, stories and sharings with friends, professionals, unprofessionals, and strangers alike, developing a sense of trust and comradeship in the process. *It has become increasingly clear that with a research topic that draws so much from own experiences and emotions (many of which are difficult or negative) it is imperative to create a basis of trust and support (and humour!) in order to move forward with the knowledge gained and be able to continue progressing these conversations and findings.*
- Informal Confidings/Conversations/Gossip (“Institution” has now been mentioned 52 times (and counting) in my Whatsapp conversations)



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- **Playing board games.** When I hung out with a few SoC peers earlier in the year, we came across an event that was happening where an artist/researcher was presenting a board game she had made about the art world - particularly the careers that are available to women within it (alongside the paradoxes, complexities and traps). This was a key turning point for my research, as it helped me to understand that knowledge and findings can be presented in a variety of ways, none more credible than the other. And, more importantly, ways that can provide forms of fun, conviviality, and laughter, as well as profound and compelling revelations in the process.
- Playing word association/power mapping games with friends to try and make head or tail of the maze that is the artworld and its power relations

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Image taken from @fireiscary Instagram page

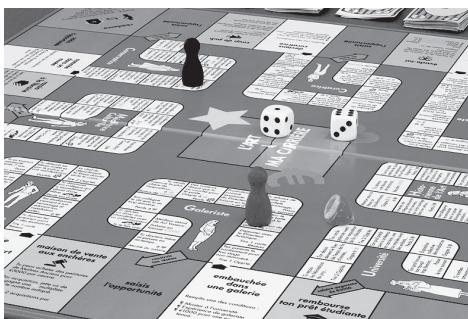
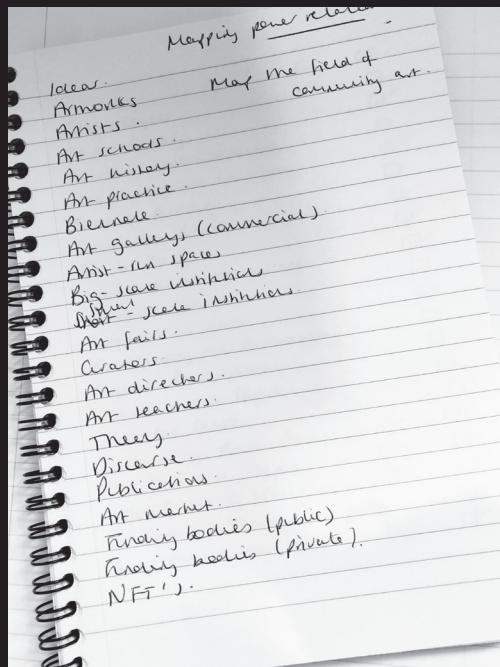
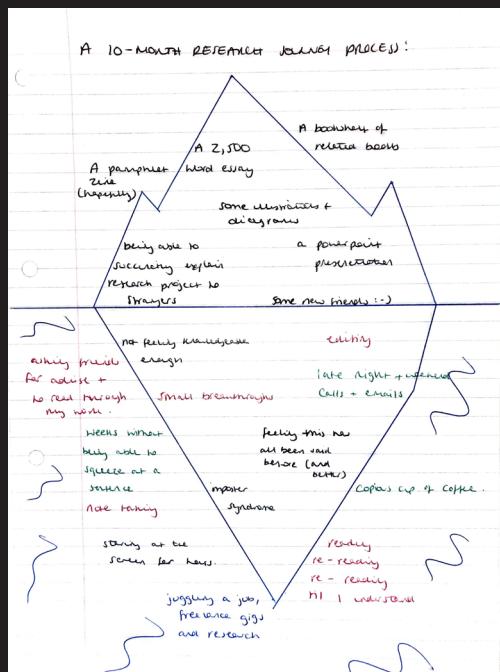


Image by Olivia Hernaiz from <http://www.oliviabernaiz.com/>, depicting the project Art & My Career by Olivia Hernaiz



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- Long-form, fragmentary, ongoing and informal correspondence with friends, colleagues, collaborators, “interviewees” between, or long after, planned discussions have ended. These conversations that have landed in the in-between spaces have by far shaped my approach to this research, and my findings, the most.

So, where do these findings about my research currently position me?

My School of Commons experience has broken me out of the incessant need to always base *everything* on clear, factual, observational, evidence, and on the detached voices and ideas of other professionals and specialists separate from myself and my own realm of thought and experience. Whilst these areas of research are still incredibly important, and, truly, nothing will keep me away from those academic and institutional books, papers and theorists, I have also learned to accept and, more importantly, embrace that I too have authority, agency, knowledge and experience to add to these conversations and findings. Not only my voice, but the voices of my friends, colleagues, family, and of acquaintances and strangers too.

20 Therefore, although I’m likely to remain a positive person - a cup half-full, always look on the bright side, see the best in everything, person - as a researcher, I’ll keep the **positivism** at bay. Instead, I’d like to develop a research methodology that is ✨ personal & interpersonal ✨, ✨ cynical & questioning ✨, ✨ attached & involved, ✨ not-all-knowing & imperfect ✨. And for that, I am very excited.

Amy Gowen has been researching alternative methods of instituting for a number of years, both personally and professionally, formally and informally. This ongoing research trajectory has manifested in a number of different forms, including her MA thesis for the programme Arts and Society at Utrecht University, an article published for Kunstlicht Journal for art, visual culture and architecture, and a workshop as part of How to Work festival, organised by HFBK Hamburg. Most recently, she has been developing this research within the peer learning environment of the School of Commons, under the title *Infrastructural Undercurrents*. The project seeks to identify the key infrastructural layers that form the basis for contemporary cultural institutions, whilst identifying alternative infrastructures that could be implemented in order to foster better conditions of affect, care, sociality, and the commons.

Betül Aksu

REASON: OTHER PERSONAL

I joined the School of Commons to research how eligibility criteria in art open calls affects the production of new artworks, with a focus on the ways criteria reproduce oppression through bureaucracy. My motivation behind this research has been highly personal.

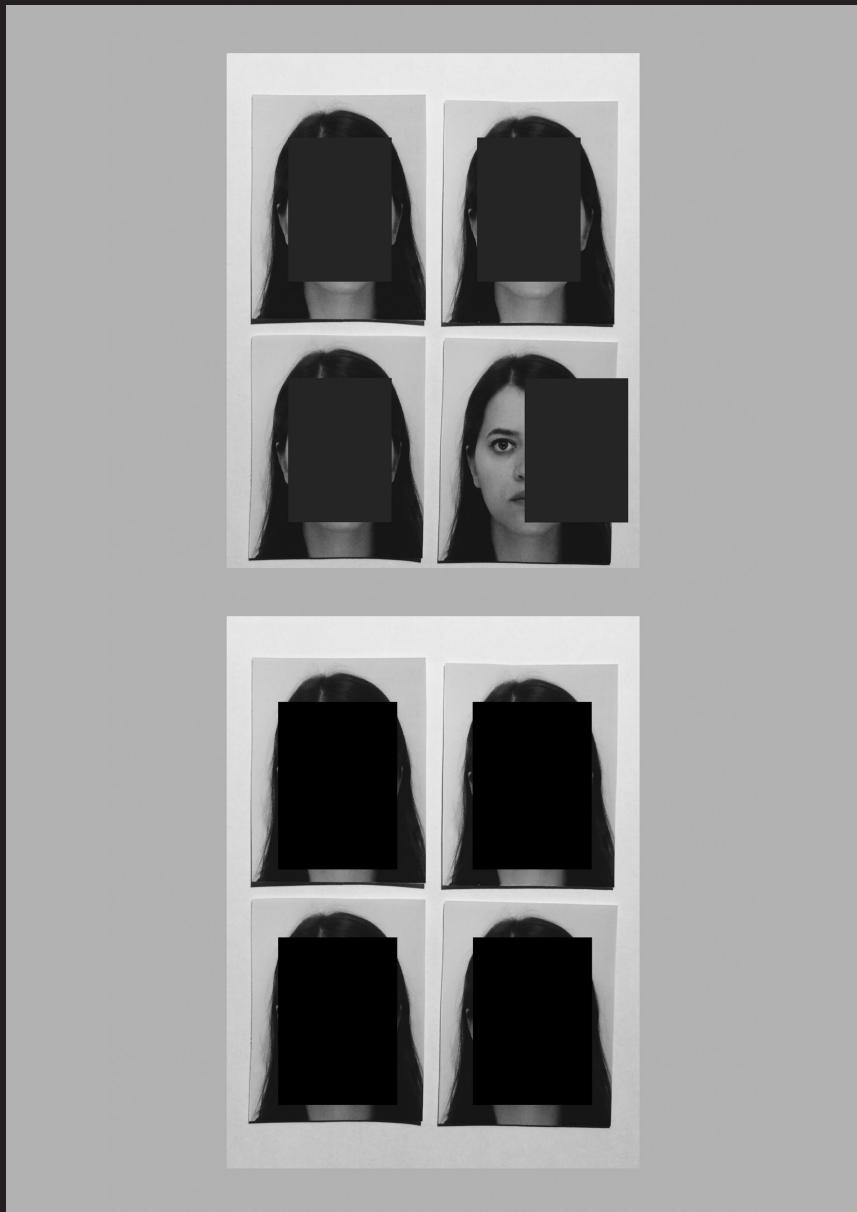
Eligibility criteria, application requirements. I became preoccupied with the ways a set of requirements determined who got access to jobs and fundings shortly after I moved to [REDACTED] in [REDACTED]. As a non-European human being with immigration permission, I was permitted to work part time in certain jobs alongside [REDACTED] [REDACTED] at [REDACTED]. It was ironic to find out how my freedom has been categorised into things I could do and could not do. A very similar feeling to that of the authoritarian culture I left in Turkey, but with much more subtle implementation.

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When Covid-19 hit the world and highlighted systematic inequalities, I was on the lookout for jobs and funding [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. At the same time, I was going through an appeal case against [REDACTED] on the grounds of [REDACTED]. Errors that did not take my earlier complaints into account, errors that neglected the personal of [REDACTED] to maintain the crystal clearness of objectivity. Objectivity that directs people not to blink an eye on the subject. Objectivity that reinforces a one-fit-for-all approach.

Long story short, as the appeal case was taking so long and it wasn't possible to [REDACTED] without the outcome of the appeal, I sold all my houseplants to neighbours, submitted a form to [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and left [REDACTED]. Before [REDACTED], I would give away plants as gifts. In [REDACTED], there was a price even for houseplants.

The request for [REDACTED] was approved by [REDACTED] after I came back [REDACTED]. On the document, the reason for [REDACTED] was listed as *other - personal* ([REDACTED] [REDACTED]). It took me by surprise to realise. The irony of the personal finding itself an eight-character-long space to document the reason



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Am I eligible to apply?

Folders	Documents
06.04.2021_Appeal Casework Summary	i1_[REDACTED].docx
07.04.2020_Appeal_Submission	i3_[REDACTED].docx
Prep for Appeal Submission	
PDF Documents	
Appeal-Regulations-2018-19.pdf	
	07-04-2020_Confirmation of Appeal Submission .pdf
	Betul_Aksu_Appeal_Statement
	Betul_Aksu_Appeal-Form-2018-19
	i1_[REDACTED].pdf
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	i1_[REDACTED].pdf
	i1_[REDACTED].pdf
	i1_E-mail_Request_for_extra_time.pdf
	i1_[REDACTED].pdf
	i1_[REDACTED].pdf
	i1_[REDACTED].pdf
	i2_[REDACTED].pdf
	i3_Concerns-e-mail.pdf
	i3_[REDACTED].pdf

Long story short

for [REDACTED]. Correction, the reason was not personal, it was historical.

23

Around the same time, dealing with the formal language of documents, to describe what I wanted to do at the School of Commons, I wrote;

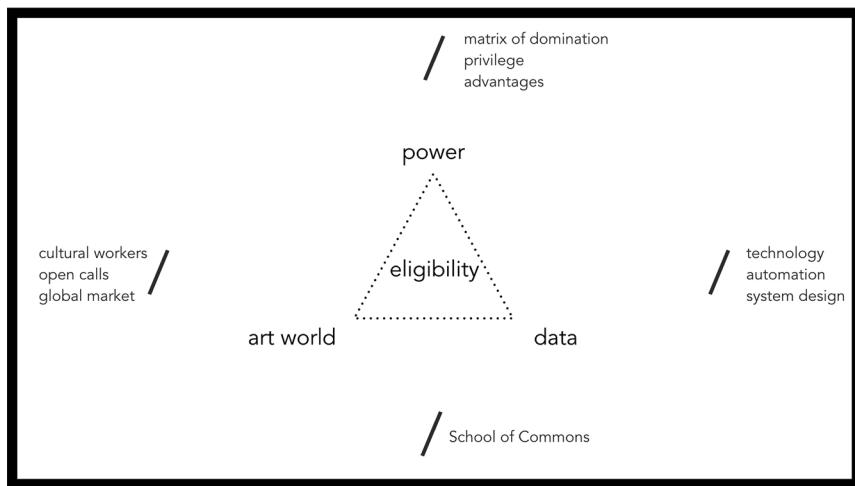
"The project aims to start a dialogue between artists to highlight the need to re-examine application requirements in art open calls and emergency funds."

I can see [REDACTED] in every single word of this description, and the structure, your welcome. I knew that I was not the only non-European human being living in [REDACTED] who faced structural barriers. I knew that [REDACTED] was not the only territory where categorized people had to prove themselves to earn the permit to live and work in that certain territory. I knew that I wanted to talk to other people, to share, to listen, to exchange, to initiate. My initial plan was to conduct semi-structured interviews with artists and ask how their life and work has been negatively influenced by not being eligible to work in a certain territory.

"By conducting a series of interviews with artists, I'll explore how a range of criteria, such as nationality, race, gender, education and age, influence the production of new artworks."

In the beginning of the research, I wrote a call for contributions, to recruit artists for interviews. The text felt like a product of [REDACTED], somehow distant. I wasn't objective in approaching any artist, I was opinionated about who to approach. I cancelled the call, and came up with a list of artists by myself. Artists that I have been following along, whose lives and work have been marked by their passports. Researching their work individually and finding traces of questions around eligibility felt less distant. Was it a feeling, or my intuition? Was it like looking at someone else's work or looking at my own work without the censorship I got used to having?

24



Positioning eligibility

When I presented my research proposal at Kitchen Sessions, I positioned eligibility in relation to power structures, art world and data collection. Soon after, my semi-structured interview questions and the research with its references and terminology was ready to proceed. But not me. I could not contact the artists. Questions continued to cross my head and heart; Who was I to interrupt people's life and collect their stories? What was I going to do with

people's stories? Where was my own story located among other stories? How was my subjective experience affecting the questions I wanted to ask? Me being the researcher asking uncomfortable questions from the other end of the Zoom call didn't feel right at that moment. [REDACTED] I was trying to fit many different individuals' lives into a one-fit-for-all approach. Each artist had a different work that called to me, a different story that gave me different feelings. I felt that I needed to have conversations more than Q&As, and to start sharing what was happening with me.

The following lines are from an interview session where I scatter my story about. It is the raw data from our Zoom call, auto transcribed, perfectly miscapturing my non-standard English. I crossed out obviously wrong letters, words and phrases as I remembered the conversation. I did not double check the rest. It's as raw as a machine translation system could produce.

Bet?l Aksu: yeah, so this is a project that looks at how eligibility criteria, XXXX in open calls. 10_ affect people's production artists production of networks and i'm more interested in how. 11_ His criteria negatively affects which means how it excludes certain people while by by the design of it, it kind of. 12_ gives more advantage to other people. 13_ 14_ 15_ 16_ 17_ 18_ 19_ 20_ And I started this research, because I couldn't continue [REDACTED] anymore. 21_ And there was a sets of things I was facing and the high [REDACTED] I spent there XXXX 22_ 23_ I had a restricted work permit, XXXX 24_ And I had to consult with [REDACTED] for every work. 25_ 26_ XXXX it meant like one person had to always approve or disapprove what I do. 27_ 28_ XXXX I left. 29_ [REDACTED] thinking that. 30_ I wasn't free there and I moved here with hope that I XXXX i'm free year more free in a way which I realized that I wasn't I was again box as one thing which was an [REDACTED] and there were certain things I could do or

not. 31_ And in the last year does also started affecting financially quite a lot because. 32_ Even if I couldn't get the [REDACTED] anymore my work hours for the same basically so I couldn't work more, which means that it's. 33_ impossible. 34_ to live with that amount of money XXXX 35_ 36_ All my art that was coming out of this process was also quite self censored, so I was trying to tell things. 37_ You might wasn't telling them directly. 38_ And I think, because I was scared. 39_ and actually the work I did for [REDACTED] last year XXXX, it was the first time that I. 40_ put myself in the kind of Center of the work. 41_ yeah and I think after that I started to kind of. 42_ say things that I wanted to say in a way. 43_ 44_ 45_ it's not on the me going through the structural barriers. 46_ completed from my it's it's for me it was being [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. 47_ 48_ 49_ 50_ And I think my way out of this was like I wanted to talk to people whose work was affected by barriers, and I think mostly about. 51_ immigration. 52_ And then see how they react to this reality that we live today. 53_ So i'm quite interested in seeing. 54_ Whether this creative output, that you put out there in the world, whether this comes out as a reaction to things you face or more like a meditation that you just want to do, because we want to do you know.

Whether the creative output comes out as a reaction, or as a meditation. This was a question I was asking myself at the time, and here it was, becoming a structured question that I continued asking in the upcoming interviews. I also continued introducing what I do, a bit less scattered each time.

Betül Aksu: XXXX i'm researching how eligibility criteria in art open calls affect people's life. 6_ Work XXXX 7_ After the fact that I realized, while still in [REDACTED], I couldn't even apply to many of the art or ports so called opportunities that I was interested in because I wasn't eligible, but this doesn't only apply to our token calls those applied to job applications. 8_ 9_ XXXX and talking to people, it also brought up. 10_ Many other conversations

And continued sharing how my work was evolving, acknowledging the censorship that shadowed the personal,

185_ To be more free than I was. 186_ 187_ therapy, but then you end up finding yourself censoring yourself. 188_ 189_ yeah trying to be almost this other person who is a researcher. 190_ Any are you have to do certain things to keep on doing it and you don't even have the luxury to interrupt interrupt for [REDACTED] more than [REDACTED], you have to leave the country 191_ Like XXXX i'm still an [REDACTED] and in one of them, XXXX 192_ They were asking me so when are you going to come back cuz I can't decide on that I don't know yeah, we have to write something, and if it's more than [REDACTED], you have to leave the country, as I thank you that's really what I need to hear at the moment, you know.

27

finding ways of uncovering it,

Betül Aksu: XXXX after a period of [REDACTED] where I had no room for the personal. 302_ um hmm now i'm having the opposite, like, I think I interpret everything, based on the individual and the personal life because I because I kind of like. 303_ box to the way

for [REDACTED] for too long, although I was trying to I think that the [REDACTED] [REDACTED], I was trying to bring that back in but I was censoring myself. 304_ Oh let's try it in this way. 305_ No, no, no, I can't do that let's try it's like it was kind of like a constant fight with myself. 306_ That I lost my poetic voice, in my opinion, XXXX right think it's gone.

finding ways of working that welcome the personal and the poetical,

307_ 308_ 309_ 310_ And anyway, with this [REDACTED] and coming back. 311_ Because coming back was [REDACTED], when I was there. 312_ In happening, I was just like. 313_ calming down and actually. 314_ Going and exploring that personal personal side me as a person also researcher as a person. 315_ 316_ 317_

28

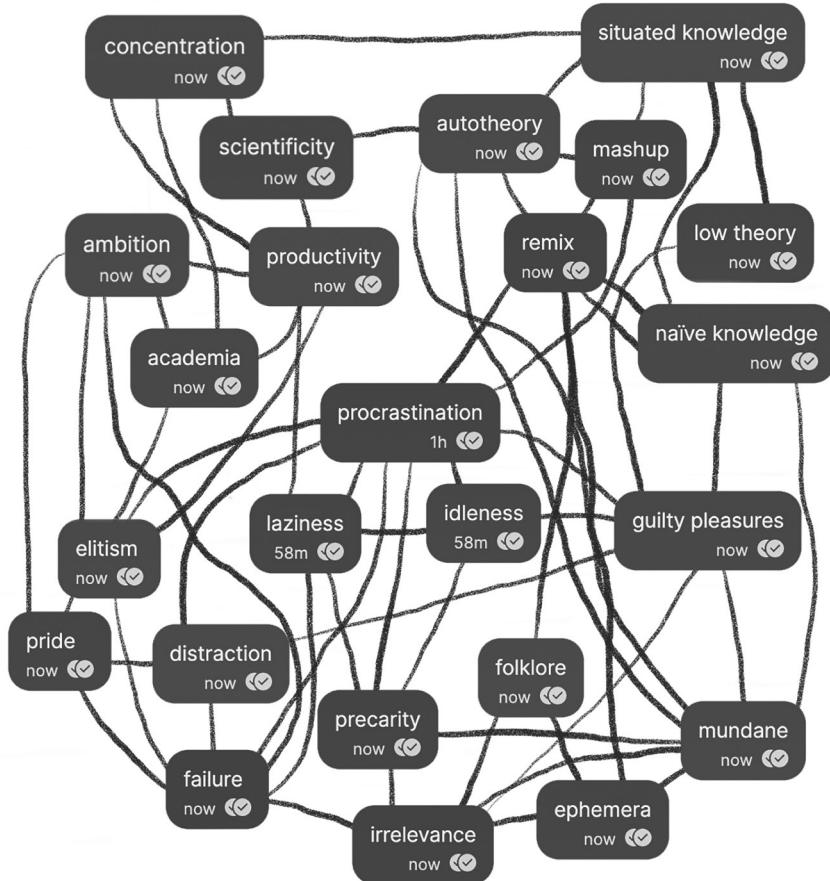
and getting answers to my own questions, one reaction at a time.

318_ Now that i'm out of that. 319_ box i'm all the works I create now is a reaction. 320_321_ And although i'm much more relief and in the past it's still very tiring. 322_ 323_ And I think the next thing I want to do is to find a way to do this works as. 324_ As a form of meditation not a reaction to things because it still requires me to really consume myself. 325_ 326_ 327_ i'm not there yet,

One closing paragraph will follow.

Betül Aksu is an artist and researcher with a background in media arts, cognitive science and linguistics. Her work explores what it means to be permitted to live, work, and breathe in a certain territory. Her School of Commons research titled *Eligibility Criteria (and beyond)* explores the ways in which eligibility criteria create barriers in the lives of artists. This research questions who is neglected in the categorisation of eligibility criteria, and how this neglect affects the production of new art works. Through conversations with artists, *Eligibility Criteria (and beyond)* research looks at how criteria reproduce oppression through bureaucracy and aims to start a dialogue between artists to re-examine application requirements in art open calls.

30



Charlotte Friedli, 2021

Charlotte Friedli

TANGLED IN MY WEB

asdf jklö

My fingers are ready. The two thumbs positioned on the space bar waiting for their moment. The blank word page, the pulsating cursor - so much anticipation, so much potential.

I am writing an essay on the working conditions of academic and cultural workers and the phenomenon of procrastination. My hotspot doesn't connect. I look at my phone to check the connection. I get a message from a friend with an Angela Merkel meme attached. It shows a picture of a screaming Merkel surrounded by parrots, each symbolizing tasks like paying bills, eating healthy or emails. I text my friend back, telling her about my hotspot issue and joking about how this might be the perfect condition for me, since I am writing about being distracted during my research.

31



ditto

Mein hotspot funktioniert nicht

Lauft nöd guet

Allerdings schreib ich grad wie
distracted ich bin beim Researchen
weil ich immer stuff google

Vielleicht also perfect conditions

14:36

Field research

Case study

▼

*Screenshot conversation with Corinne Estermann,
meme by @AnnaDushime Twitter, 24.10.2021*

I reflect a lot on the working conditions of academic and cultural workers and how our relationship with screens, platforms, and our presence (and our avatars) in these spaces influence our way of working. Discussions with people about distractions and procrastination are omnipresent in my life. Everyone constantly talks about it. “Shit, I got nothing done today. I read four articles on Game of Thrones and repotted my plants.”

After taking care of the hotspot issue, I wanted to look up the origin of the word procrastination again. I thought I could start with a nice definition as an introduction. As I copy-paste the merriam-webster origin of the verb procrastinate, I notice that my quote-signs are still set in the German way. My cursor wanders to the menu bar and gets lost in the Word Preference menu. After all, using the correct quotes is an important aspect of academic writing. But that's not the point. I interrupted my writing and thinking process to carry out a formal task, to fix something minor and got distracted. It wasn't crucial for my work, but I had an urge to fix it now. Even though the quotes have been wrong for the last 6 months. It was impulsive. I had no control over it. Do I get distracted easily or is this just due to the condition of this kind of work?

32

Do I procrastinate because I am afraid to fail at my task?

Do I procrastinate because my task is a bit tedious?

Do I procrastinate because my physical and digital environments are too distracting?

Do I procrastinate because I am physically not able to concentrate for more than 20 minutes?

This situation above shows how tangled these strings of focus are. I use the word string because there are a lot of them at the same time, that pull me or that I could pull. These different strings of focus get tangled into a messy web. In this text I want to look at this web without detangling or solving it. I want to reflect on it properly instead of just getting frustrated with my unproductivity.

THE RESEARCHER, THE LOVER, AND THE SLOTH

On my computer there is almost my whole life waiting for me to tackle. On Word there is an unwritten essay, on my e-banking account I should pay the gynecologists bill, on WhatsApp a group of friends waits for my answer about what they can bring for dinner, and on iMessage I should confirm a lunch meeting with a work colleague.

It is a particular condition because workspaces, private spaces and different time-space scenarios are combined in one. I can access past projects, get emails about future events and deadlines, and I get direct messages and calls that ask for my immediate attention. This all happens in these different social spaces but the same physical space (the screen) where I fluctuate between the role of an employee, a citizen with duties, a lover, a researcher, an artist, a daughter, or a sloth.

The media theorist Ksenia Fedorova uses the term “metastability” to describe this state of constant “oscillation”.¹ Within this state lies the potential of constant interconnectedness. It represents our situatedness within these different roles, desires, experiences, and tasks.²

I want to sketch out the topics of my work to look at how the strings get tangled in my specific situation. I spend a lot of my time on social platforms to study peoples’ activities, behaviors, and manifestations online. So, I am interested in the way users share their experience with procrastination and what linguistic and visual vernacular they use to describe how they deal with it.

33

I employ aspects of Cultural Studies by appreciating and analyzing online culture and folklore and their impact. I take them seriously and see them as an equally important part of discourse and culture as a whole. But I struggle with these circumstances since the line between researching and indulging is very fine. When it comes to the platforms I am investigating, I must consider the addictive effects they have on me and others. I am fascinated by what people do online, I like the flow, the silliness, the banal, the ugliness, the absurd – and I despise the consumerist and exploitative foundation they are built on.

¹Fedorova Tiziana, Tactics of Interfacing, Encoding Affect in Art and Technology, P.11, 2020.

²Haraway Donna, Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective, 1988.

Tangled in my web



Screenshot with posts by: @freeze_magazin Instagram 5.10.2021, @brave.like.eve Instagram 12.10.2021, @writersdoing (originally on Twitter, but their page is offline at the moment), @philosophy_lol Instagram 30.10.2021, @rakhibeekrum Instagram 3.10.2021.



writers doing normal shit
@writersdoing

The Isolator was a helmet designed in 1925 to help improve writing productivity by blocking noise from your surrounding environment and limiting your vision to what's in front of you.



21:16 · 28.04.21 · Twitter Web App

Tweet your reply

Google Rakhi Beekrum - Psychologist

ON PROCRASTINATION

Did you know that avoiding a task takes up as much mental energy than doing the task - perhaps even more?

Rakhi Beekrum

282 likes

rakhibeekrum The same mental energy it takes to avoid a task could be used to get through task done.

18 hours ago

Saved

14:51

Wi-Fi Calling

18 hours ago

philosophy_lol · Following

Dad

How's the job search going?

Debate Noam Chomsky & Michel Foucault - On human nature [Subtitled]

1742 likes

6 days ago

Ae Pr Id L C N S M P D T F G

I WANT TO BE A GILMORE GIRL

I came across a text on *Autotheory* by the nonfiction author and poet Arianne Zwartjes.³ There is one part where she writes about the body experience or the “mundane details of life” that lead to an idea, a concept, or a theory. Zwartjes and other representatives of *Autotheory* criticize the facade built up by academics by only presenting final, complex, glossy thoughts. Zwartjes argues for a method where “personal narratives” and theory are woven together to represent the intra-action⁴ between the subjective self and the broader context of philosophy, politics, and critical theory. This beautiful approach is mainly shaped by Black Studies, Queer Theory, Disability Studies and Intersectional Feminist Theory. My own *Autotheory* revolves around the conflict of being a critic, an idler, a naïve user, a sceptic – tangled in the web.

“[...] theory has long been a perfect, elite curation of the finest moments of the function of a brain, while hiding all the real lived experience of one particular set of causes and conditions which created that brain’s patterns of thinking — thus both disingenuously disguising the origins of the theorizing, but also creating an exclusive facade that tells those outsiderized by academia, you can’t do this kind of work.”⁵

36

When I try to inquire and reveal the origins of my theorizing, I find myself thinking of my high school years. At fourteen, in the year 2006, TV was my vice and guilty pleasure. I wasn't yet spending a lot of time on the internet. Instead, I came home from school with a ton of French vocabulary and the history of Enlightenment to study. But I was more delighted by the Gilmore Girls.⁶ The deal with myself was that I would do my homework during the ad breaks, watch

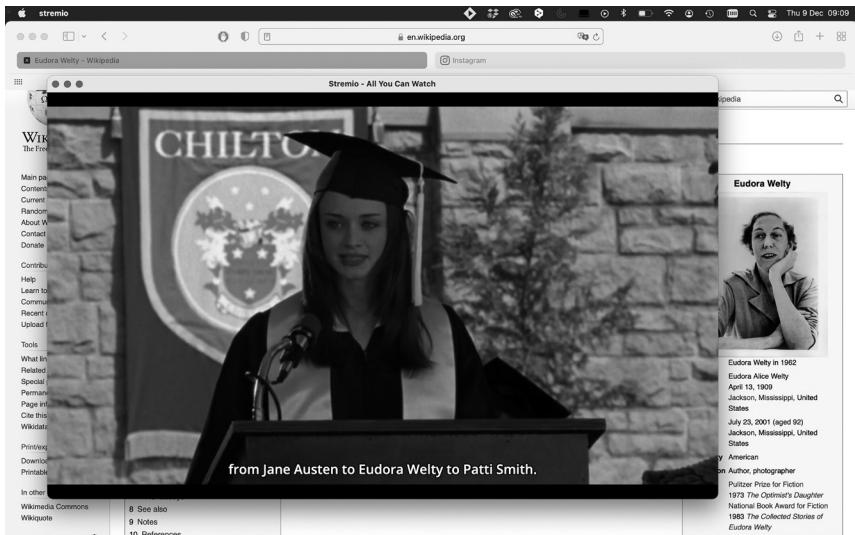
³Zwartjes Arianne, Under the skin: An Exploration of Autotheory, ASSAY: A JOURNAL OF NON-FICTION STUDIES, <https://www.assayjournal.com/61-fall-2019.html>, Fall 2019. (14.11.2021).

⁴Barad Karen, On Touching – The Inhuman That Therefore I Am, Forthcoming in The Politics of Materiality edited by Susanne Wittgall (revision of differences article published in 2012).

⁵Zwartjes Arianne, Under the skin: An Exploration of Autotheory, ASSAY: A JOURNAL OF NON-FICTION STUDIES, <https://www.assayjournal.com/61-fall-2019.html>, Fall 2019. (14.11.2021).

⁶The TV show Gilmore Girls (2000-2007) is on Netflix, you should watch it. Or you can read up on the synopsis and other information on this fanpage: <https://home.adelphi.edu/~as21389/PilotSummary.html>, (14.11.2021).

Malcolm in the Middle and start soft studying during my mom's soap opera. Probably most people would agree that this is not a good way to study (It really wasn't since I failed and had to repeat a class. I then learned how to study properly, but it was hard to get out of these patterns). I've always wanted to be a Gilmore Girl. I wanted to be a studious, kind, and intellectual Rory, a witty and fast-talking Lorelai and a nerdy and self-ruling Lane. I wanted to proficiently quote Puschkin and Destiny's Child in the same sentence. The Film & Media theorist Jane Hu wrote a great piece on the parallels between "academic cultural studies" and the way the TV-show "tests the line between serious art and entertainment, the avant-garde and the popular".⁷



Screenshot with Gilmore Girls Episode S3E22 Those Are Strings, Pinocchio

*"So one thrill of watching "Gilmore Girls [...] comes not from registering the breadth of the characters' cultural knowledge, but in their ability to weave the high and the low—obscure cinema and popular culture—together."*⁸

⁷Hu Jane, A Fan's Notes On "Gilmore Girls", <https://www.theawl.com/2013/03/a-fans-notes-on-gilmore-girls/>, 4.3.2013, (14.11.2021).

⁸Hu Jane, A Fan's Notes On "Gilmore Girls", <https://www.theawl.com/2013/03/a-fans-notes-on-gilmore-girls/>, 4.3.2013, (14.11.2021).

There was a time where I felt very frustrated with my parents for letting me get so addicted to TV. But now I have reconciled myself with it. In a way my brother and I grew up in a similar household where we were influenced by different kinds of references and knowledge. It wasn't Puschkin and Destiny's Child but early 2000 German TV-melodramas and Erik Satie.

This conflict – or more positively, these entanglements - shaped my relationship with culture and with theory. It makes sense that I find myself in a similar conflict now within my research on procrastination. I'm trying to withstand this ambivalence and examine it like a case study. Being part of School of Commons brought me closer to a form of theorizing and doing research that not only considers but sees the self and the personal experiences as inherent parts of our work. The strings come from different directions – at times one string pulls harder, then at times another. I want to hang in there and carefully observe my tangled web.

38

Charlotte Friedli, likes to zoom in too closely and is fascinated by stuff she finds online. She teaches, writes, reads and scrolls in Zürich. The research around Profound Procrastination mutated into an investigation of the canons, conditions and cultures of Academia online. The project investigates how scientific theories and texts are used on social media platforms #theorygram. There is an active community that engages online with theory and discusses it in the form of memes, tweets and in forums. The humorous appropriation challenges the sovereignty of classic academic discourse. This encourages discussions about accessibility of scientific texts and the role of researchers.

Sid Smith

INTERVIEW WITH JAMES

27 October 2021

In 2020 I rented a room in an old house in Margate. My landlord had been a popstar ten years ago and now works as a tv presenter. Before I moved in he rang me and said that he had forgotten to mention when emailing me that the bathroom was being re-done, but it should be finished shortly.

I met James, the plumber, soon after moving in. The bathroom became one of James' many daily activities, which also included making adjustments and repairs to the house, giving lifts to the station, and making a series of paper clothes that were strung up on the washing line. The year I lived in that house, James was constantly battling with different areas of the house. No-one really knew what he was doing, only that he worked furiously.

The bathroom is now pretty much finished. It recently starred as the set for an ad campaign starring my old landlord. 39

Below are some excerpts from a conversation I had with James last week.

Okay, so the first part of the process is finding out what the client wants. Obviously, with a bathroom, it's going to be fairly similar each time. It's going to be a toilet, a bath, a shower, a basin, etc. But then you can start to go into a little bit more detail. With Jordan for instance, it was a large showering area, a big bath, and then a basin and a loo. It's then for me to delve a little bit more deeply into that and find out if there are things that... additional bits that he would be interested in. And for Jordan, one of the things he was really interested in, was the pink ceiling, he wanted to keep the pink. But as far as anything else went, he didn't have any preconceptions. He just wanted a large shower, really. But for me, because the room was so large, unusually large for a bathroom, I thought, well, we can have two basins. A his and hers basin. There's also the age of the building; the building is a late Victorian water pumping station. So originally, it would have held two massive pumps that would have pumped water in and out of Margate. It wouldn't really have had

40

GANT

in places where others aren't
looking, you know?

Image courtesy of Jordan Stephens

Sid Smith

a bathroom in it, because it really just would have been a building with machines. But because it looks like a mini Hogwarts, I thought it would be fun to go look back to the past and give the house some definition. Because it really lacks definition. There's no old detail in there. It has no recognizable style.

So I looked at Victorian bathrooms, Edwardian bathrooms, Victorian houses. I looked at tiles. So for instance, tiles were a fairly new introduction into the UK, you'll find them on the outside of pubs and in butchers, and they were thought to be very hygienic, and that you could wash them down. So they then started to be used in bathrooms. But the thing was with early tiles, usually there wasn't a lot of color. And because they had no large scale tile manufacturers, the fixing of the tiles was very haphazard. So if you go into old houses with old tiles, the tiles discolor. There's a variation of color. And I quite like the idea of getting a variation of color in the tiles. I wanted to use lots of pipes and valves to reflect the building's early use. I wanted to try and try and bring some of the outside in. So I made some false windows or false indents that you would imagine would be windows. I kept trying to think of it as an industrial area. And really, that all adds up to if anybody that comes into the house has never been there before, when they get to the bathroom, they ask themselves is that original? And if they say that, then, you know, yeah, I'm really pleased. If they believe it, if they're confused by it.

41

We kept the pink ceiling, which kind of clashed with the green but again, if you go back in time, people weren't really good at putting colors together, not the way they are now, we're far more sophisticated. Back then people would have used bright color, and it wouldn't have necessarily gone with the next thing. But that wouldn't have mattered. So the fact that the tiles are green and ceilings pink, it clashes, but it kind of clashes in a good light.

With these alcoves, I mean, because the room was a cube, it had no architectural detail. And again, because of the size, it dawned on me that I could build a false wall that could come out, say, nine or 10 inches, and create these small cathedral type windows, which I could then sink mirrors into. And so as you stood at each basin you would have your own mirror. And that would mean as you walked in, that's one of the first things you see. There are a lot of big windows downstairs that you can see from outside. The alcoves are a smaller copy of them. So when you walk into the room, and you see those

shapes again, you're kind of subconsciously reminded of what you already know about the house.

Is it important to you that people clock that?

No, it's not that important. If I confuse people, I like that idea. People not being sure. Because we can all tell you with a newly decorated room, someone's done this, or someone's done that. I like a bathroom or a kitchen that won't necessarily jump out and say 'Oh, I'm brand new'. Because we're spending so much money on those things. Everybody wants it to shout out 'I'm brand new, this cost a lot of money'.

Living with you doing the bathroom, I guess, until the point where it all started to come together, it was very difficult to get a grasp on what was being done.

Yeah. In that instance, one of the things I did with that bathroom that I haven't done before is to age the tiles. So each tile had to have various coats of stuff put on it. So there was a variance and they were all slightly different. There was space there for me to lay the tiles out, so the first thing I'd do was kind of, yeah, put a lot of gunk on lots of tiles and then get to do some work in the bathroom and then go back in the afternoon if they had dried and give them another coat because they needed between five and eight coats to get a better color and to get that variance.

42 Yeah, there was quite a lot going on in the bathroom with that false wall. And I find customers or clients, even though you've drawn a little sketch, even though you wave your arms, so that's going to go there that's going to go there, I can spot that - you're looking in their eyes, and it's just glazed over. And they really don't know what you mean. And they just go oh, that sounds good. But they're really not sure what you're talking about. So I'm used to that... that's my lack of belief showing itself.

I will say that there are some givens - so pipework drainage. You can do an awful lot. If someone wants a new bathroom, I think it seems daft to put everything back where it came out. Because normally bathrooms aren't that well laid out. They're not that functional. But sometimes you are governed by where things are, as to where can I move it to. So that has a big part to play in any plan.

Or if I'm really, really keen on moving something, then quite a lot of thought will go into, well, how can I achieve that? How can I get the pipes over there?

I've worked for lots of builders who do the same thing for all of their clients. All their clients have exactly the same houses. And it's a very, very good way for a builder knowing what something is going to cost them to do and how quickly they can do it. I admire that kind of thinking about the bottom line, thinking about their profit. The business acumen of it. But it's just I'd find that deadly dull. To do the same thing again would be quite boring.

In plumbing, water only goes down. It won't go up unless it's pushed. So plumbing is all about logic really. But the least amount of time... that's never been a constraint with me. I guess early in my career, you wanted to get in, get paid, and get on with it. I had a young family, bills. But now I'm kind of coming towards the end of my career. My thoughts are much more about doing interesting work, and things that I'll look back on and think I'm really proud of that. Or I'm really pleased I overcame that problem.

I know that before someone has described you as a holistic plumber?

43

Oh, God. Batty woman... I think in that instance, I think what she was talking about was that I was... she had a peculiar...she lived in a very old cottage, so the plumbing was quite peculiar. So in that instance, I kind of had to get my mind into it and think about the way that the original plumber had gone about the work, instead of just thinking, well, I would have done it this way. So I was trying to imagine how his process would have been, trying to figure out why he had done it that way. Because that's really the quickest way to find the solution or find the problem. And she was, what can I say, she was a bit holistic herself in a way, in her outlook, that everything was individualized, and so you must approach it in that way. So I think she just saw a kindred spirit and just made the connection. She said I should put it on business cards. But I do get more involved in houses, and the people in the houses.

If I'm doing something that is, let's call it historic, if I'm creating a bathroom that would have been in that house when it had first been built. First off, it wouldn't have been the bathroom that was in that house when it was first built. We have kind of a bit of a twisted view

Interview with James



44



Image courtesy of James Brown

Sid Smith

historically on the way people lived, simply because our only access points are usually wealthy people. So their lifestyles would have been totally different to the kind of houses I'm working in. I mean, most really, up until the 50s, in quite a few simple houses, there would have been room for a toilet, but the bath would have been a tin bath for a lot of people. So bathrooms are quite a new thing. But we have this vision that this is what this looked like. But the pictures we see are usually grand hotels, or very rich houses. So what I do then, isn't true historically. I don't want to call it a pastiche because that sounds Mickey Mouse. But I try and produce something that we imagine that we would have seen. And then that gives me some latitude as well, because the product isn't available anymore. What things were made from - lead pipes and so on, they are not available anymore. So it's yeah, it's kind of unlikely, but enough so that it will fall somewhere. But what's very important to me - it's got to be comfortable, it's got to be warm.

When I was about 15, I guess I wasn't - I guess everybody does it... you wonder what you're gonna be like. So I made this collage up of different things, mostly people, because I thought 'I want to be like those'. I wanted to have those qualities. So there was a picture of Clark Gable because he was strong and reliable. When you know, when everything was going mad around him. So I had this above my bed for a couple of years. And then when I was married, we needed some - it was a time when newspapers kind of exploded, and you had all the magazines, and it weighed a ton. And my daughters were quite young. So Emma used to sit on my lap. She used to like looking at the newspaper and remembering the people that were in the newspaper. And we played this game, so she knew who Bill Clinton was and John Major. So we'd turn the page and she'd spot them. And then from that, I kind of thought I want to keep that picture. And it would be a picture of a piece of furniture or a house interior or something. And I started tearing these pictures out. And then I bought loads of these wonderfully great big scrapbooks from Woolies. And so Emma sitting on my lap looking at the Sunday papers then evolved into me cutting up the pictures and Emma putting glue on the back and the pair of us sticking them in scrapbooks. So I found these scrapbooks when my marriage ended, I found these scrapbooks and the first lockdown came along. The scrapbooks gave me a lot of joy because lots of things in those scrapbooks I'd actually got. Some of the furniture, I'd actually got something similar. The style of something, or places I've been there,

I, you know, I'd seen I'd been to various galleries, I'd seen those pictures.

But then lockdown came along, so I couldn't really go to work. And I thought I'll make another collage. But this time they were a little bit more abstract than the previous ones. The previous ones were quite particular, in the scrapbook, things were laid out quite neatly. But this one, it was very haphazard. And obviously perspective goes out of the window. Because the sizes - a bed in one picture doesn't match the bedside table in another picture. So you get all these weird shapes. But I loved doing them. And I've got a real buzz from looking at them, and then realizing something about them. I realized that the big things in them were a bit like naive paintings - naive painters, the big things they paint are the important things. So I realized in some of the collages, some of the things were oversized, and I wondered how I picked those things for that.

I thought after doing the collages, could I do those for work? And no I couldn't because the turnover is too quick. I don't think people would get it, if I showed them this piece of cereal packet with bits of color stuff on and they're just looking as if I was mad. But I think mentally I make them, these collages - I make up in my head. Because one of the things I struggled with early on in my career was if what I was doing wasn't matching, I remember that. So I'd have a vision of the way I'd imagine whatever I was making, the way it was gonna look. And if it wasn't looking that way, I'd just stop. Which was weird. Because it wasn't matching up with the idea I had in my head... which is a really silly thing to do, because the only way you're going to get better at it and get closer to what you imagine is to just keep going. And then when it's finished then okay, well, it's not how I imagined it. Jordan's bathroom has turned out better than I imagined - which was a real surprise.

I think if, if I was to fib, I'd say that the reason I'd spend one day doing this, and one day doing that was because that's the way it had to be done. But if I'm being honest, it's more to do with doubt. So one day, I'd be doing something that wasn't really going the way I expected or the way I wanted. So I'd duck out and do something else. And, and then I could convince myself that 'oh, yeah, but I'm still working'. Quite often, there's an elephant in the room thing, where I'm avoiding something, because it's important, and I'm worried about it not working.

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Is that doubt useful?

Now it's more useful. In the past, I was always thinking I was ducking, I was hiding. Now I'm thinking, all right, well, you want to hide. I don't understand why. But let's just carry on. And that works.



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Image courtesy of James Brown

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This interview was conducted as part of project *After Ending*:

Wharram Percy is a deserted medieval village in North Yorkshire, England. The site has become the most archeologically explored site in Britain. Between 1950 and 1990 hundreds of students, commercial archeologists and academics would descend upon the village for a three week excavation every July. The digs were not only a site of intensive research, but a rite of passage, an epistemological testing ground and a sizable undertaking of group authorship.

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Sid Smith

A collective READ glossary, not in an alphabetical order

anecdote,

glimpses from daily experiences, paying attention to what is left out or not taken into account in traditional researching.

sharing of experiences, stories, contacts, papers, messages snippets from Whatsapp conversations, email correspondence, sketches, doodles

taking seriously the stories told and key moments uttered in an interview or conversation. noticing they are more than ephemera.

finding meaning in something that already happened in our lives and acknowledge and analyze the impact it had on us

anecdotal landscape,

shared anecdotes creating a glossary, mapping the experiences shared collectively

creating a landscape that represents the specific time, the specific spaces we live in

shared experiences and realities across time and space that form the backdrops to our lives

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deep hanging out,

trust that something interesting will happen if you are interested

studying with people, not just making studies of them.

spending time together in socialites is always part of the process.

caring about people throughout, not outcome-oriented hanging out

carving space and time to listen and to share

reveal/revealing,

revealing versus showing off, open door versus spectacle, undress versus dress up

behind-the-scenes,

it is happening whether you show it or not should
the behind-the-scenes be watched at the end or the
beginning of the dvd?

back-end,

make it visible, don't hide the programmability
trouble-shooting from time to time

stopping to recognize the need to look at it again,
then looking at it again

project architecture,

behind every research project are levels and scales
of architectural thought and planning. initial
brainstorming, concept planning, diagramming,
connecting of dots. emails reaching out to people.
searching for books, papers, articles, people who
have had these same thoughts and ideas as you. but
also levels and scales of personal architecture:
personal circumstances, health circumstances,
economic circumstances, work circumstances, all of
which lead to varying abilities for capacity and
commitment. together creating a project architecture
rarely seen in the finished outcome.- the finished
outcome hides privileges
the blueprint keeps changing

personal process,

The personal is deeply embedded in all research, as
all research is conducted by researchers. It's about
deciding whether to embrace and include this, or
distance and emit it

Acknowledging the personal process in research is
also acknowledging personal bias in research

(re)thinking process,

Placing an emphasis on thought rather than action.
Taking time to contemplate and examine which processes are needed, suitable and sustainable for the research, and what other process can be brought in to test for a better fit. Not relying on traditional or standard processes and methodologies.
Challenging existing processes when necessary

honesty,

looking at one and many mirrors
being honest about stuckness, confusion, lack of motivation and interest.

treating it as a rare, precious good

reflexivity,

thinking about your own position in the research,
reflecting on how personal position might affect the planning of the research

thinking about biases, perspective, privileges, our social, economic, geographical, cultural positions in regards to our research

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distraction,

embracing and running with distraction, seeing where it can lead
knowing what distractions are gems and which ones are black holes
noticing where your mind wanders
noticing why it wanders

frustration,

getting close to understanding what is not going well, getting a step closer to taking control of what should go well
frustration is very honest and the way we react to frustration is often censored or hidden because it is considered "emotional" - embrace the emotional, it is productive.

working with frustration,

exploring insecurities, focusing on what frustrates us, what causes anger. Working with fear that brings us strength

noticing when it is time to turn toward discomfort and see what else it might be saying, rather than turning away.

raw data,

welcoming not corrected and sometimes mistaken parts. Recognizing the process of polishing and questioning its necessity

learning with & from community,

learning about other perspectives in a safe space, learning from others about yourself because it is a safe space

establishing parallels and intersections and weaving our net together

keeping spaces open in our research and thinking process for others to suggest, interject, add to, question

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unfinishnedness,

embracing imperfection and unfinishedness in our research and as researchers. perfection and finishedness are not always the goal

not completing the work because it was not the time
For whom do I finish something?

success and failure,

recognizing one's own accomplishments in their own terms. not serving the terms of what is approved or expected of us

excellence,

why do I strive for excellence? why am I scared of mediocrity? how do I measure these two conditions?
do you need to be an excellent researcher to be granted your own lab or funding, to share the knowledge you produce?

SCHOOL OF COMMONS

School of Commons (SoC) is a community-based initiative dedicated to the study and development of self-organized knowledge, located at the Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK). Promoting a broad, integrative understanding of knowledge, we focus on matters surrounding the production and mediation of knowledge with a focus on self-organized practices and knowledge decentralization. The content and position of SoC is defined by our community rather than a predetermined program; research is conducted in our three labs (LEARN, MAPP, and READ), all of which are run as peer-based collaborative endeavours with annually changing members working across different age groups, disciplines, and (educational) backgrounds. Our labs bring together a wide range of participants, guests, and contributors who share their curiosity, skills, and visions. We offer personal support, financial resources, and an active community of peers and experts engaged in a wide range of topics.

SoC represents an international community who focus on matters surrounding the production and mediation of knowledge with a common interest in self-directed practices. Since 2017, SoC continues to host 14-18 projects each year through an open call. The process and outcome of SoC research is shared via open access publications, artistic platforms, workshops, talks, seminars, performances or exhibitions. For the 2021 edition, SoC continued to host 18 projects, mainly digitally, from across the world, through a range of offline and online instances, activities, workshops, meet-ups, presentations and more.

FONTS

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PAPER

Nautilus Classic 300gsm

Nautilus Classic 100gsm

PRINT RUN

150

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