

Collaboration and cross-disciplinary work

Projects of togetherness

Two sources of inspirations, when it comes to thinking about ways of being together in this world, and not only us as humans, which is complex enough, but together with all the rest!

Object Oriented Ontology – a school of thought that rejects the privileging of human existence over non-human objects. It focuses on relations between objects in general – objects, or things, such as table, radio, cloud, or humankind, even larger phenomena such as global warming. What I find fascinating in the thought of OOO is how it invites us to rethink our relationships to everything in fact, as parts of a multi-connected existence, as actors in an intimate and complex ecology.

The way of the mushroom.... *“The Mushroom at the End of the World, On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins”* is a greatly stimulating work for the collective artist, written by anthropologist Anna Tsing. My colleagues and I who work together as *Marble Crowd* art collective, we were introduced to Anna Tsing’s work while working on a stage-production that dealt with impossible tasks, collective authorship and strategies for thriving with these.

Anna Tsing observes mushrooms in their talent to create a symbiotic living condition between organisms. The talent of the mushroom is to create through this symbiosis (or co-living) a beneficial and lively condition, not only for itself, but for the other species involved. The mushroom talent makes it more beneficial for other companions to thrive in the symbiosis: A mutually beneficial relationship. While on their own, each species would simply face a much poorer life, even a slow and tragic death.

-Like Anna Tsing puts it, a matter of **collective survival**.

It is not quite a coincidence that this speaks to me as a practicing cross-disciplinary artist. Not only do these motives offer us an alternative to consider collectivity and exchange as important traits in a world we could possibly survive in,

but they also offer us examples for thinking about the artist-the author-the individual in regard to collective and cross-disciplinary work. **Collaboration is a practice in togetherness and survival.**

Like the mushroom, I am not really much without others. We are all doing it pretty much most of the time; existing collectively on one level or another.

The element of *shared hope* in collective processes.

Like another fascinating author, Rebecca Solnit, puts forth in her works – hope is neither optimistic nor pessimistic (because she explains how the optimist and the pessimist are both passive in their view) but hope is what calls for action, without the *certainty* of when/how or what the consequences will unfold.

I would like to state, that the hopeful artist is willing to act and yet, thrive in uncertainty.

My background is in dance and choreography. To this day I have though made work and been involved in collaborations that deffinitely blend disciplines.

Examples of my work could be described as: dance work performed by guitar amps, choreography of sound, singing moving sculpture or dancing choir, object composition or choreographed photography.... To name some.

These entanglements of disciplines have been driven by curiosity and by a certain anarchic excitement about the skills and universes of other artists and their practices. *What could our combined universe, our combined imagination be?*

I have been involved with several collectives and assemblies, where artists have made the choice to work together as authors and explorers, and not under the lead of a single director. I won't say that it has ever been purely easy or completely comfortable. Ever. Some few have even been drastically problematic and painful. But, more of them have been enchanting, exciting, and all of them have brought me beyond myself and to unforeseen discoveries and even bliss.

Working collectively has a lot to do with chemistry, and with strategies about approaching the unknown together. It is also important to understand the insecurities and fears that can be involved in shared processes, just as it is important to nurture a willingness to stay with uncertainties. For that, we need trust.

It is a commitment. It is taking a leap of faith: Trusting the process that you are about to embark.

Marble Crowd Collective

We are five core members in the collective, artists with background in dance, theatre, visual arts, writing, theology, ecology. One of us is also a TV-chef.

In a recent project, MOVING MOUNTAINS (which came to be for the support of K3 Tanzplan Hamburg, 2016-2017), we wanted to go deeper into exploration about ways and strategies of working/creating together as a collective of five different authors. So the project was both an artistic research about staging a practice of togetherness, and a research into collective working structures.

The title of the project, MOVING MOUNTAINS, is a reference to something grand and impossible, something that may be attempted through:

/1. Collective effort /2. A leap of faith /3. Magic

All of which are needed in a collective creative process.

To move a mountain is to attempt the impossible but we find ourselves attracted and perplexed by this provocation as we are increasingly being confronted by the impossibility of sustaining society as we know it.

- Marble Crowd

In this project, our objectives were:

How do we face challenges, together? How do we cope with not knowing?

How do we approach a shared ambition without giving in to a single compromise? Is there space for individuality on a common journey?

In relation to that: As a collective of authors, how can we work with our differences and not against them?

And then there is this one: Are we prepared for not foreseeing a result, while being willing to act in order to approach it?

And how did we approach these objectives?

For one, we found **playing and playfulness** to be greatly beneficial and inspiring tools for training a willing attitude towards the unknown. Playfulness is definitely a crucial habit to be trained for the cross-disciplinary artist.

Playfulness:

An open and willing state of mind, where you allow yourself to be, think and act like the fool - and when I say fool I don't mean ignorant or evil, but like the child, the beginner: to experience things more or less as for the first time. And with that attitude of the fool comes also the foolish confidence that can be so helpful when encountering new things and the unexpected. **To be confident through curiosity, rather than through knowing-it-so-well.**

Leaving what you know, what you know best – in fact we never really leave our knowledge and skills, but we can **relax your ties to it**. Be ready to experience yourself as anything: writer, dancer, designer, singer, magician.....

Enter the blissful being of the amateur:

There is something extremely powerful about the playful and willing attitude of the amateur/child/fool that may happen to get pressed under the ambition of the specialist.

Can we be specialists in curiosity?

Let's say we have a scenario: A group of specialists/authors/fools, have come together to make something extraordinary happen. There is no leader, but a jackpot of skills and talents and fantasies.

At first they have a lot of carefree fun, it's exciting, they play around like proper fools. Everything is still possible. And then they get tired and confused and bored. They don't feel like playing around anymore and they want to start making sense. Making sense of what they're doing. Now it comes to STAYING WITH THE TROUBLE. Insisting on the commitment of staying with uncertainty. My advice is – yes, speak about your troubles, but not too long. You won't find the best solution by sitting down. And by that I mean sitting down in your head. You can be sitting, and still be available and playful, and that's exactly my advice: to continue playing – even if you're bored. If you are, play with your boredom. You will come up with something. Something you probably didn't foresee; - in fact getting bored can be quite a gift; we could talk about boredom and confusion as a precious veil, - under it waits the unexpected.

A few more points/advice:

Remembering the **mushrooms**: Looking for the possibilities in our entanglement.

Encounters and exchange – two things one should absolutely be ready for:

Mild friction - what happens in the point of friction? In contact-dancing /contact improvisation, you look for the point of friction. That's where things can take off from, and the magic happens. And I do think, that the same applies to most encounters.

Uncertainty – to be ready for uncertainty. Even better, to be willing to stay with uncertainty. It's not the most comfortable of feelings, but with practice (at least that's my experience) it becomes more familiar and bearable. Even uncomfortably pleasant, like a hot sauna or a **foot massage**.

In fact I should mention that this is a part of Marble Crowd's daily practice. When we are working on a project together we sit in a circle with one foot in the lap of the next person and holding another in our own, creating a foot-in-lap chain. We squeeze and pull that piece of foot-meat in our hands for a little while and then we change legs and repeat.

After the foot massage, there is less need to talk about unimportant things, it does something wonderful for the tissues and leaves you in a open and willing state for the day.

Know and be aware that you do want to approach a result, a solution, a goal together, - and then let that awareness simply be, and get busy playing.

Speaking about things in abstractions and metaphors – like *a blue thick vibe... darkness creeping into the spine...* Naming things with our feeling, something we relate to together.

Remember that skills/specialisation are wonderful – especially as tools for communication and conversation, and at the same time be reminded that creating something special together is often about you relaxing your ties to your special skills.

Finding and feeling the sweet spots – feeling what makes the group tick, the mutual excitement, that's finding the gut of the group. Even if there may be differences and difficulties, the place where everyone goes, *yes.... this is hot.* Then you're in the collective gut.

It's an adventure really