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A Thousand Concepts and the Participating Body: Concept Play Workshops at Kunsthall 3,14

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Abstract: Participation has become the keyword in museum and gallery education during the past decades. However, the focus on participation might contain neoliberalist tendencies, creating more entertainment and consumerism than art. In this study based on practice-based research, I explore a gallery educational method to mediate contemporary art to primary and high school students inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's process philosophy and new materialist theory–practice. What kind of roles can the method of Concept Play Workshop create for the participating body and how can it challenge neoliberal tendencies in museum and gallery education? In the workshops, children and young people create philosophical concepts with contemporary art, dialogue-based practices and artistic experiments in the exhibition space of Kunsthall 3,14 in Bergen, Norway. I argue that the method can create philosophizing, critical, uncomfortable, resting, dictatorial and protesting bodies. Representational logic becomes challenged, and discomfort and resistance become educational potential. The method creates multiple and overlapping roles for the participating body, shifting the focus towards multiplicities instead of the passive/active binary. Humans are not the only participating bodies, but attention is given to agential matter, contesting human-centeredness. The study is a contribution to the field of post-approaches in gallery and museum education.

Keywords: participation; participating body; concept creation; gallery education; museum education; new materialisms; educational dissensus; Deleuze; experimentation



Citation: Kukkonen, Heidi Marjaana. 2024. A Thousand Concepts and the Participating Body: Concept Play Workshops at Kunsthall 3,14.

Humanities 13: 11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h13010011>

Received: 30 October 2023

Revised: 15 December 2023

Accepted: 20 December 2023

Published: 8 January 2024



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1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to explore a method to mediate contemporary art exhibitions to school groups that I have developed during 2022–2023 and continue to research at Kunsthall 3,14 in Bergen, Norway. In Concept Play Workshops, students from primary and high schools explore and create philosophical concepts with contemporary art, dialogue-based practices and artistic experiments in the exhibition space. During the past year, I have created the method during three exhibition periods with three philosophical concepts: *time*, *intelligence* and *system*. The method is inspired by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (Deleuze and Guattari [1991] 2009) philosophy of creating concepts, Deleuze's emphasis on the experimental aspects of bodies in becoming (Deleuze [1970] 1988), new materialist theory–practice (Kontturi 2018; Kukkonen 2022a, 2022b, 2023; O'Sullivan 2006) and new materialist theories of pedagogy (Page 2018, 2020) where learning happens by engaging with bodies with matter in a socio–material world.

Inspired by practice-based research (Pringle 2020), I study the method of Concept Play Workshop through critical questions concerning museum and gallery education that have emerged in the process. A paradigm shift in education, often referred to as the 'experiential turn' (von Hantelmann 2014), has taken place in many museums and galleries during the past decades particularly in the Western world, including the Nordic countries. Visitors are no longer understood as passive receivers of information, but as active co-creators of knowledge and experiences. As I have also noted elsewhere (Kukkonen 2023), this paradigm shift has emerged with contemporary art's immersive and spatial artforms since the 1960s (von Hantelmann 2014), constructivist perspectives in

museums (Hein 2006), relational aesthetics (Bourriaud 1998), relational and performative perspectives in art education (Aure 2011; Illeris 2015, 2016; Skregelig 2019), participatory methods (Simon 2010) and phenomenological (Merleau-Ponty 2012) and pragmatic (Dewey [1934] 1980) educational philosophies. Participation—everything from a dialogue to sensory activities and interactive experiences in immersive installations—has become the keyword in educational activities.

But is all participation in museums and galleries meaningful? von Hantelmann (2014), like many others before and after her (e.g., Bishop 2012; Hacklin 2022; Krauss 1990; Ketola Bore 2022; Kundu and Kalin 2015; Stallabrass 2006), introduces critical perspectives to the experiential paradigm by pointing out that we should not fixate on artworks that produce experiences but ask how artworks change and affect our understandings. Art can move, trouble, confuse and transform our understandings, operating far deeper than mere entertainment. Kundu and Kalin (2015) study how the emphasis on participation might contain (conscious or unconscious) neoliberalist tendencies in art museums, and how participatory activities can appear as consumerism.

Neoliberalism, emerging in the 1970s, values citizens as active, independent and entrepreneurial decision-makers aspiring for freedom, self-expression and wealth (Davies and Bansel 2007; Kundu and Kalin 2015). Underpinned by neoliberal logics, cultural institutions are regarded as spaces where individuals can develop themselves by participating in adventurous experiences that might center on pleasure and feel-good sensations. 'Under the neoliberal regime, the art museum visitor is considered as a consumer seeking maximum customer satisfaction in the use of their "free time"' (Kundu and Kalin 2015, p. 42).¹ In practice, the emphasis on individual consumption and measurable, controllable and productive outcomes can lead to show-like entertainment, fixation on visitor numbers and mass-produced educational activities, risking the critical power of art. In the Nordic context, the Norwegian curator Kristina Ketola Bore (2022) and the Finnish curator Saara Hacklin (2022) have raised similar critical thoughts. Ketola Bore writes that spectacular and eventful sensory experiences need to be contextualized with critical perspectives, and Hacklin, inspired by the British art historian Julian Stallabrass' (2006), points out that show-like immersive installations are the art field's way of drawing in the public when competing for audience with mass culture.

By exploring the process of developing the Concept Play Workshops during the three exhibition periods at Kunsthall 3,14, I ask the following: What kind of roles can new materialist pedagogy Page (2018, 2020), Deleuze ([1970] 1988) and Deleuze and Guattari's ([1991] 2009, [1980] 2020) philosophy create for the *participating body* in museum and gallery education? How can the Concept Play Workshop challenge neoliberal tendencies? The method is situated in the field of post-approaches in museum and gallery education; studies that work with, for example, post humanism and new materialisms (e.g., Feinberg and Lemaire 2021; Hacklin 2022; Hackett et al. 2018; Kukkonen 2023; MacRae et al. 2017, decolonial theories (Mulcahy 2021) and cartographic methods to explore inclusion within museums (Rieger et al. 2019). Post-approaches emphasize the performative entanglements of both human and more-than-human bodies in learning, centering not only on verbal and cognitive perspectives, but also on embodied, material and emplaced knowing (Hackett et al. 2018). The new materialist approach shifts the focus from the human subject toward agential matter, challenging representational logic. Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, which has influenced new materialist theories, encourages experimentation—to follow 'lines of flight (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 2020, p. 22), interruptions and surprises, which can disrupt dogmatic thinking and making.

2. Abstraction and Material-Relational Situations at Kunsthall 3,14

I began to work at Kunsthall 3,14 in October 2022 as the Education Project Manager.² Kunsthall 3,14 is a nonprofit art institution in the center of Bergen displaying international contemporary art. The institution is located on the second floor of a new empire/renaissance style building from 1845 that used to host the Bank of Norway. Ex-

hibitions take place in the main hall and a smaller room, the vault. In addition, sound installations are presented in each exhibition period in PARABOL, a sound shower located in the entrance hallway.³ The institution's profile and program are characterized with social and political themes, and the leading principle of Kunsthall 3,14 is to dare to look into and bring light to social and cultural blind zones ([Kunsthall 3,14 2022](#)). During my first year working at Kunsthall 3,14, the exhibitions—where some of the Concept Play Workshops took place—involved themes such as Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine, artificial intelligence and ChatGPT, iconoclasm, civil disobedience and the environmental aspects of global trade.

The Concept Play Workshop method builds on my PhD thesis, *Material-relational abstraction: Museum educational situations with abstract art* (2023), where I studied how new materialist theory-practice can open up perspectives when creating and understanding museum educational situations with abstract art. New materialist theories and practices acknowledge matter not as passive or static but as agential, relational and unpredictable, constantly changing and becoming ([Coole and Frost 2010](#); [Page 2018](#)). Following the movements of matter, new materialisms challenge human centeredness, representational logic and the hegemony of language ([Kontturi 2018](#); [Hultman and Lenz Taguchi 2010](#); [O'Sullivan 2006](#)).

Creating concepts, inspired by [Deleuze and Guattari \(\[1991\] 2009\)](#) and Elisabeth [St. Pierre \(2019\)](#), was central in the PhD thesis, concerning especially the philosophical concepts of *abstraction* ([Kukkonen 2022a](#)) and *material-relational situations* ([Kukkonen 2022b, 2023](#)). Through concrete, playful and artistic experiments ([Kukkonen 2022a, 2023](#)) and by reading [Deleuze and Guattari's \(\[1991\] 2009, \[1980\] 2020\)](#) philosophy, I defined abstraction as the representation-breaking and uncertainty-provoking quality in art that challenges patterns and traditions and contests what is already known. Art with abstraction provokes *material-relational situations*, a concept I formed from the writings of the art historian and curator Dorothea [von Hantelmann \(2014\)](#) and the material and embodied pedagogy underpinned by new materialisms by the artist-researcher-teacher Tara [Page \(2018, 2020\)](#). Abstraction cannot always be understood with rational, verbal or logical ways, but by engaging with agential matter with bodies and senses.

Situation in the concept of material-relational situation is inspired by [von Hantelmann \(2014\)](#). She writes how artworks do not only represent or describe reality, but they actively create it in *situations* and *situationally*. 'What kind of situation does an artwork produce? How does it situate its viewers? What kind of values, conventions, ideologies, and meanings are described into this situation?' ([von Hantelmann 2014](#), para. 3). Art always produces experiences—not in a universalist manner—but in social, economic and cultural contexts. The *material-relational* in the concept, and how learning happens in *material-relational situations*, comes from the artist-researcher-teacher Tara Page's material and embodied pedagogy underpinned by new materialisms (2018). [Page \(2018\)](#) writes how we can learn with the teaching matter in a socio-material world: «Bodies and things are not as separate as we were once taught, and their intra-relationship is vital to how we come to know ourselves as humans and interact with our environments» (p. 2). The entanglements of bodies and matter, or intra-actions according to the feminist theorist and physicist Karen [Barad \(2007\)](#), are pedagogical.

[Barad \(2003, 2007\)](#) has defied anthropocentric notions of the world where only language, culture and discourse make meaning: "[...] the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter" (2003, p. 801). With agential realism, Barad argues that reality is created in entangled material-discursive processes, where matter is understood more as a "doing" than a "thing" (2007, p. 151). Barad emphasizes the continuous and often nonlinear processes of intra-activity of both human and non-human bodies. "'Matter' does not refer to an inherent, fixed property of abstract, independently existing objects; rather, 'matter' refers to phenomena in their ongoing materialization" (p. 151). To ethically follow the material processes, and their surprises, teachings and interruptions, can show new ways of thinking and making in the world (see also [Kontturi 2018](#)).

In the next section, I present the method of Concept Play Workshop, which is grounded in the new materialist concepts of abstraction and material-relational situation and the philosophy of concept by [Deleuze and Guattari \(\[1991\] 2009\)](#).

3. Concept Play Workshops

‘But the concept is not given, it is created; it is to be created’ ([Deleuze and Guattari \[1991\] 2009](#), p. 11).

In a two-hour workshop at Kunsthall 3,14, children and young people (11–19-year-olds) explore and create philosophical concepts through conversations and artistic experiments in encounters with contemporary art. The first part of the workshop centers on dialogue, in which we reflect on different understandings of a specific concept. How has the concept, such as time, been understood in different cultural and historical contexts? Does the concept exist only in a theoretical and abstract dimension, or can it also become concrete in different materials, such as artworks? How can materials and visuals around us affect our understandings and be part of creating concepts? In the second part of the workshop, the participants continue the concept creation with artistic experiments. The starting point for the workshops, and the chosen concept, is always the artworks in the current exhibition.

The method is inspired by [Deleuze \(\[1970\] 1988\)](#) and [Deleuze and Guattari’s \(\[1991\] 2009, \[1980\] 2020\)](#) process philosophy. The philosophers are critical towards conventional understandings in Western philosophy where concepts are regarded as representations, abstract extractions to categorize concrete phenomena, or as commercial products and services: ‘the concept has become the set of product displays’ ([Deleuze and Guattari \[1991\] 2009](#), p. 10). According to [Deleuze and Guattari \(\[1991\] 2009\)](#), concepts must be invented and they ‘would be nothing without their creator’s signature’ (p. 5). Philosophical concepts do not exist in an ideal theoretical dimension “out there”, given that everything in the immanent world is connected and in a constant becoming ([Deleuze and Guattari \[1980\] 2020](#)). Concepts are singular rather than general—they are always created and conditioned by specific contexts. In the Concept Play Workshops, concepts are regarded as propositions or springboards that open rather than close perspectives, taking the concept creator to new understandings.

Each exhibition period centers on one philosophical concept: *time*, *intelligence* and *system*. The first hour of the workshop concentrates on dialogue-based practices ([Dysthe et al. 2012](#); [Hubard 2011](#)) in the exhibition space. After I welcome the group and present myself and the institution, the visitors can experience the exhibition by themselves for 20 min. They are encouraged to use the whole exhibition space, their senses and bodies, and to explore the artworks from all sides and perspectives. After this, I gather the group again, and the visitors can share their first impressions, experiences and thoughts. The specific philosophical concept is introduced to the conversation when appropriate, although it often emerges in the discussions «by itself». In the following conversations, we wonder how the exhibition can provoke different understandings of the concept, and how the concept can become concrete in matter, actions and everyday life situations. This is accomplished by asking playful philosophical questions, which can generate more questions. The dialogue is inspired by the American museum educator and researcher Olga Hubbard’s interpretive inquiry (2011), which consists of both factual and interpretive questions, and the writings of Olga [Dysthe et al. \(2012\)](#) about dialogue in gallery space that provokes wondering and counter-perceptions, promoting democracy and multivocality. In some of the workshops, I also tell the group the artist’s background and how the artist might have used the concept in the artworks. If appropriate, I also guide the conversations to different cultural and historical understandings of the concept, and I am prepared to mention some examples in case the students lack ideas.

In the second part of the workshop, the students continue the concept creation by creating definitions through artistic and concrete experiments in the exhibition space. Each workshop period has a focus on one form of artistic experiments (clay, collage and

installation), and some of the experiments can be conducted in small groups. Throughout the Concept Play Workshop, play is emphasized, given that ‘playfulness makes it possible to experiment, test out new understandings and see things from multiple perspectives, given that no actual risk of failure exists’ (Kukkonen 2022b, p. 88). I am inspired by Christopher Harker’s (2005) understanding of play as being and becoming based on Deleuze and Guattari’s ([1980] 2020, [1991] 2009) philosophy. Playing contains both order and breaking of patterns. This makes it possible to challenge representational logic, to think and make anew, without sliding into chaos or “anything goes”. At the end of the workshop, we study the different definitions: the multiplicity of the concept (Deleuze and Guattari [1991] 2009, p. 15) created by the participants.

In this study, my understanding of the participating body is inspired by Deleuze’s conceptualization of the body in *Spinoza: Practical philosophy* (Deleuze [1970] 1988). Following Spinoza’s understanding of the body, Deleuze emphasizes the creative and experimental aspects of bodies: ‘We do not know what the body can do...’ (p. 17). Challenging the superiority of mind over bodies in Western thought, Deleuze states that ‘There is no primacy of one series over the other’ (p. 18). Bodies and minds are one movement, and knowledge constantly operates beyond the limits of the two. ‘There are no fewer things in the mind that exceed our consciousness than there are things in the body that exceed our knowledge’ (p. 18). Although bodies are «wholes», they are created by relations to other bodies: ‘[...] each body in extension, each idea or each mind in thought are constituted by the characteristic relations that subsume the part of that body, the parts of that idea’ (p. 19). Bodies are not only human bodies, but also animals, ideas or bodies of knowledge. Depending on the number and quality of their relations, bodies affect and are affected. ‘They represent compositions of relations. Now, these relations characterize bodies insofar as they combine with and affect one another, each one leaving “images” in the other, the corresponding ideas being imaginations’ (p. 58). A body with multiple relations has more power to affect other bodies but is also more sensitive to being affected.

4. Theory–Practice and Ethics of Experiment

Developing the Concept Play Workshops has happened in a constant dialogue between practice and theory, inspired by practice-based research by the researcher and the former Head of Research at Tate, Emily Pringle (2020). Whereas research made in museums and galleries has traditionally focused on art historical research, Pringle’s research about practice-based approaches has been influential in introducing ways for museum and gallery educators to study their practices. According to Pringle (2020), practice-based research involves generating new knowledge both through and about practice. The practice is constantly informed by theory, and it produces theoretical reflections and analysis. Throughout the process of planning, conducting and analyzing my practices at Kunsthall 3,14, I have constantly reflected on the process, together with new materialist theories (Kontturi 2018; Page 2018; O’Sullivan 2006) and Deleuze and Guattari’s ([1980] 2020, [1991] 2009) philosophy, as well as literature concerning the social, cultural and political themes emerging in the exhibitions (e.g., Blaisdell 2016; Gardner 2006; Hooker 2011; Power 2021; Thomson 2022; von Tunzelmann 2021). I have also had critical and creative discussions about the practices with my colleagues within the institution, and I have presented and discussed the project with the research group, *Art, children and young people*, at the University of Agder.

Rosi Braidotti’s (2018) ‘ethics of experiment’ has been an important thread when building the theory–practice. The workshops are constructed around experimentation both through dialogue and artistic experiments, where the participants can test out and create multiple understandings when creating the concepts. Braidotti (2018) writes about experimentation as an ethical responsibility: ‘At this particular point in our collective history, we simply do not know what our enfolded selves, minds and bodies as one, can actually do. We need to find out by embracing an ethics of experiment with intensities’ (p. 190). Experimenting and challenging dogmatic thinking and making is not only a possibility, but an ethical responsibility. However, experimentation does not mean a

complete jump into chaos, but gently challenging dogmas, one little experiment after another. In the workshops, the big philosophical questions are supported with closed questions and contextualizing information, so that the breaking of representational logic—abstraction—is always connected to something concrete. The format of the workshop can also create familiarity by invoking the memory of a “standard” visit when school classes visit museums and galleries, consisting of a dialogue-based part and art making.

I have narrowed down the focus of this paper on my theory–practice, paying close attention to not only my role, but also to the more-than-human elements in the process of developing the workshops. The many heterogeneous components—such as the art, philosophies put to work, the institutional place and context, materials used in the workshops, me as an educator and the students participating in the workshops—create an intricate and intertwined system, ‘an assemblage’ (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 2020, p. 2). However, I do not analyze or write about specific situations or the students’ individual responses, which can be seen as a limitation to the study. I have done this for ethical reasons. Although the groups were informed and agreed that I can mediate the method in professional contexts, I find that a stronger research design would have been needed if individual responses had been included in the study. Bringing in the students’ responses is something I wish to take up in future studies concerning the method.

5. Philosophizing and Critical Bodies

The first Concept Play Workshops took place in the exhibition *Re-Monument* (24 February–9 April 2023) by the Georgian–Australian artist Nina Sanadze. In the exhibition’s two installations and a video work, Sanadze reuses original fragments of plaster and wax models from the studio archive of the Soviet monument sculptor Valentin Topuridze (1908–1980), who was a neighbor and a family friend of Sanadze (Kunsthall 3,14 2023a). Once a celebrated Soviet sculptor in Georgia, monuments made by Topuridze were destructed and torn down following the fall of the Soviet Union (InQueensland 2021). The main focus of the workshops was on the *Apotheosis* installation (2021), in which fractured plastic and wax models lay on top of each other in a colossal pile in the main hall of Kunsthall 3,14. In the bottom of the hill rested a soldier-like figure with a chipped cape, and next to it, a white torso with metal wires sticking out from the plaster. Fragments of reliefs depicting lines of soldiers were leaning against a massive, scruffy head with curly hair and a messy beard. A face of a woman with a resting and peaceful expression lay tilted next to a muscular horse. A man with a mustache stood in the forefront with his hands in the pockets of a long winter jacket, depicting Josef Stalin.

The workshops focused on the philosophical concept of time. When welcoming the group, I briefly presented the exhibition with “brainstorming”. What are monuments, and how can they express different periods of time, collective memories, people and phenomena? What monuments do we have in Bergen? What happens when the monuments represent ideologies and values from the past that we no longer agree with today? After the groups had experienced the exhibition by themselves for about 20 min, I began the dialogue by asking if the participants had some first impressions, thoughts or ideas—how was it to go around the exhibition? To encourage the participants to express themselves, I sometimes referred to comments and opinions I have heard from other visitors (some have found the exhibition exciting, but I have also heard that it is strange or confusing—how did you experience the exhibition?). In my practice, I have noticed that this can greatly help to start a conversation and support the visitors to also express the ambivalent, uncertain and negative emotions connected to the experience. The following conversation focused on (but was not limited to) questions concerning the philosophical concepts of time, which were formulated in each workshop according to the age of the participants.

What do you think, what has happened to the sculptures?

Judging by their style and condition, how old are the sculptures in the pile?

What are they made of?

Can you perceive time in the materials?

What is time? How can different materials react to time?

Can you see a beginning or an end in the installation? Or perhaps a change?

Like many phenomena, iconoclasm reoccurs constantly in history. Can history or time repeat itself? Can the concept of time be understood as a circle, like a clock-face, the constant circle of seasons or the Earth's orbit?

Can you think of cultures or historical periods when time has been understood as a circle?

In the Western world, time is often understood as a line with a beginning and an end. What do you think, does time have a beginning and an end? How can something begin from nothing?

Can you see action in the materials? How have the materials been changed or remolded by human or non-human agents? Can time be understood as action?

Can you think about a moment when time has passed very fast or very slowly?

Through the playful experimentation with different definitions of the concept of time, the participating bodies become philosophers in the workshops. In *What is Philosophy?* (Deleuze and Guattari [1991] 2009), Deleuze and Guattari state that '[...] philosophy is the art of forming, inventing, and fabricating concepts' (p. 2). Furthermore, a concept is a multiplicity, created of multiple components and variables: 'Every concept is at least a double or triple' (Deleuze and Guattari [1991] 2009). The goal of the first part of the workshop is to provoke thoughts, ideas and opinions concerning the concept, and to see how concepts are always created, and how differently they can be defined in different contexts. For example, when we wonder how time is often understood linearly in the Western World, I am prepared to give context to the abstract idea: the linear concept of time has roots in, for example, Christianity and the Genesis creation narrative (Thomson 2022). The questions listed above are meant to function as an inspiration to generate more questions by the participants (not all questions listed above need to be asked).

Some of the questions are open, and some are more closed. The closed questions often connect the philosophizing to specific cultural and historical contexts. This is inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's ([1980] 2020) immanent ontology, also called 'flat one-world ontology' (Østern et al. 2021). Abstraction is always connected to the concrete (Kukkonen 2023): there is no universalist dimension where, for example, philosophical concepts could exist isolated and ideal. Deleuze and Guattari ([1991] 2009) write the following: 'Concepts are not waiting for us ready-made, like heavenly bodies' (p. 5). During the workshop with the concept of time, the concept was discussed in the contexts of the fall of the Soviet Union and other instances with iconoclasm (for example, the Black Lives Matter and MeToo movements and the destruction of the remaining Soviet monuments after the escalation of Russian's war of aggression in Ukraine).

In the process of developing the method, I have many times wondered if the closed questions and bringing up, for example, the artist's interest might dominate the concept creation too much. However, when performed in moderation, I argue that anchoring the concept creation to different cultural and historical contexts and political questions, such as iconoclasm in the workshops with time, can help to broaden the viewpoint from oneself towards other bodies and contexts. This is also connected to critical perspectives in the experiential turn in museum and gallery education. von Hantelmann (2014) writes that, in the experiential turn, the focus turns from the artwork towards the self: '[...] an aesthetic experience that is no longer work-related but self-related' (para. 40). The strong emphasis on the subject might support 'narcissistic consumer culture' (para. 19). If a big sensory experience, possibly super fun and spectacular, is not contextualized, it risks being more reminiscent of entertainment than art, and the situation gives the visitor the role of a consumer. Page (2018) writes the following: '[...] embodied material pedagogies are just not concerned with describing individual sensations/perceptions and memory, nor individuals' pedagogy. This is because these ways of learning and teaching are not made

and/or performed in isolation—they are relational, collaborative, and critical’ (p. 7). In the Concept Play Workshops, the open and closed questions can connect the concept to social, cultural and historical contexts, and give critical insights. The workshop can therefore also provide the role of a critic to the participants. Sanadze’s exhibition, for example, opened up critical conversations about iconoclasm—should we deconstruct or preserve monuments that remind us of difficult and problematic times in history?

In the second part of the workshop, tables and chairs were arranged in the exhibition space next to the installations, and each student got a small lump of clay. The participants were encouraged to form a sculpture that expressed the students’ understandings of the concept of time. It was emphasized that there are no right or wrong answers, but that the students are free to explore and experiment with associations, understandings, and the material. If the students struggled to get started, I encouraged them to simply follow the material and how it changed in time throughout the workshop. Groups that had less time for the visit, received a lump of clay in their hands without sitting down around tables. With these groups, the concept creation happened by going around the exhibition space with the clay lump. I asked them to “capture time”, the present moment, in the lump of clay. They could also respond to the exhibition by forming the clay, expressing affective responses and understandings of the participant. They were also encouraged to use the permanent parts of the exhibition space (columns, chairs, and the wooden floor) in the experiments. The clay could become something more representational, as in a figurative small sculpture, or simply an intuitively formed lump while experiencing the exhibition.

In the experiments with clay, learning can happen by engaging with bodies with matter. [Page \(2018\)](#) writes that agential matter is pedagogical in its resistance: ‘Matter can teach us through resisting dominant discourses, and we can learn new ways of being’ (p. 1). In workshops with clay, the material becomes drier and drier when molded in warm hands, and the surface begins to crack. The more intensively the lump of clay is being handled, the faster it changes, whereas an untouched lump dries only slightly on its surface during the workshop. The lump might take unexpected forms in process of molding, suddenly invoking the memory of something, or pre-described visions might turn into something else. Can the new forms tell something about time? Too much water liquifies the lump, which might again provoke questions about the concept. Is it possible to «go back in time», and form the lump anew?

The new materialist approach can also be found from the dialogue-based part of the workshop, and material-relational situations with material and embodied pedagogy happen throughout the workshops. After welcoming the group, I encourage the students to use the whole exhibition space and to look at the artworks from different perspectives, close and far away. This was particularly important in Sanadze’s exhibition, where many of the sculptures lay next to the floor or in angles that made it difficult to perceive the forms, requiring movements from the participants. This I supported also with my own example, going down on the floor to point out details or stretching my neck and body to get a closer look at the objects. During the dialogues, the students could stand or sit on chairs or on the floor, but we also moved during the conversations when focusing on something specific in a work. In the conversations, as also described above, the emphasis was not only on human subjects but also on the more-than-human matter.

The new materialist approach in Concept Play Workshops challenges the neoliberalist tendencies in gallery and museum education by turning towards the more-than-human bodies and contesting the subject/object dichotomy. As in [Page’s \(2018\)](#) material and embodied pedagogy inspired by [Barad \(2007\)](#), agency does not happen within a body, but in entanglements between different bodies, both human and non-human. New materialisms ask not only how humans make and understand art, but also how art makes us ([Hackett et al. 2018](#)). The researcher Anna [Grear \(2020\)](#) argues that the attentiveness and shift of perspective in new materialisms can defy neoliberalist objectifications of more-than-human matter:

“There are no guarantees of immunity from neoliberal subversions of commons, but actively turning towards more-than-human commoners—allowing them actively to co-shape the normative praxis of commons—holds out a space, at least, a resistive, alert, subversive onto-politics of radical inclusion and care might work against neoliberal reductionisms and objectifications.” (p. 354).

6. Uncomfortable and Resting Bodies

Oceanic horror or how to survive the night in the haunted mansion of absolute capitalism by the Danish artist Søren Thilo Funder was an installation consisting of multiple components in the dimly lit main hall of Kunsthall 3,14. A video projected on the back wall showed stock traders, working at a firm called *Archipelago*⁴, walking in dark corridors and sitting in meetings in a conference hotel. Here and there, the film displayed computer-generated scenes where flows of money, bodies and products are flowing around in abstract, underwater rooms. The traders are sleeping on make-shift sleeping stations in the offices and corridors, seeming unengaged and disconnected like zombies in a haunted house. They are connected to technology like wireless earbuds or mobile phones at all times, rarely lifting their gaze from the screens. A stressed-out, desperate man washes his face on the toilet. Later, in a meeting room, the man's colleagues cut his throat in front of others, as if he was offered to something. However, no one in the meeting room seems to be bothered by the blood and violence.

The scene is continued in the exhibition space. Multiple sleeping stations, crafted by office-like furniture, such as desk chairs with wheels and long storage cabinets together with mattresses, sleeping bags and masks, invite the visitor to take a nap. However, each station has a mobile phone or a tablet, displaying a video or the logo of the company. One of the sleeping stations is constructed of luggage and neck pillows suited for travel. The stock traders at *Archipelago* are always on the move, connected to technology even when sleeping, and only resting to work more ([Kunsthall 3,14 2023b](#)).

When facilitating the workshops, I was wearing an *Archipelago* ID card hanging around my neck, and I welcomed the groups by introducing the firm as if the exhibition space of Kunsthall 3,14 was actually the *Archipelago* office space. In the brief introduction to the exhibition, I said that the stock trader firm operates in a capitalist system with liberalists values, and we brainstormed briefly what capitalism and liberalism can mean. The students could then go around the exhibition space, watch the films shown on the various screens and sit and lie in the sleeping stations. When we started to talk about the exhibition and the participants' first impressions and thoughts, the students could continue lying on the sleeping stations. In the following conversations, I drew the participants' focus to the philosophical concept of intelligence with the following questions:

What kind of intelligence might the stock traders working at Archipelago need?

What kind of intelligence might a capitalist system focus on? What kind of traits are understood to be intelligent?

Have you made IQ tests? What kind of intelligence do they measure? Can intelligence always be measured?

Have you ever fallen asleep at school or work?

At Archipelago, the traders think that you can achieve anything and become happy if you just work hard enough. What do you think about this mindset? What happens to our health if we work too much? What happens to our intelligence if we get tired and burned-out?

The Archipelago people are always connected to technology. Have you used ChatGPT? What kind of intelligence is artificial intelligence based on?

What kind of intelligence does a musician, a football player or an artist need?

Are humans the only intelligent organisms in the world? What about animals and plants?

In the second part of the workshop, the participants continued to create the concept of intelligence by building collages by cutting and gluing magazines, newspapers and composing small objects on canvases. The collage technique was inspired by Funder's installation that was constructed of multiple different components. The magazines had a focus on science and nature, beauty and well-being, gardening, technology and art to provide a wide range of possibilities to experiment with the concept. By using objects (everything from stones, shells and small toys to deconstructed parts of an old DVD player, as well as some of the clay sculptures left behind by the groups in the previous workshops), it was possible to create collages where the concept of intelligence grew out of the canvases. I also encouraged the students to wonder about the intelligence of the specific material objects, which can support the acknowledgement of the agency of non-human matter. In some workshops, the students used tablets to experiment with the concept by chatting with ChatGPT.⁵ How does artificial intelligence understand the concept? Critical attention was paid to its human-centered and stereotypical answers, and its ability to challenge representational logic.

The collage technique and the experiments with ChatGPT enabled combining contrasting, opposing and overlapping definitions, so that the concept of intelligence became a thousand intelligences rather than one fixed intelligence. This made it possible to create 'multiplicities' (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 2020, p. 7). In *A Thousand Plateaus—Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 2020), Deleuze and Guattari explain that multiplicities do not have an essence or a core, but they emerge from multiple different sources so that it is impossible to point to one specific element that keeps the construction together. Rather than creating one concept, the Concept Play Workshop as a method encourages the formation of a multiplicity of concepts, both in a singular experiment and when the singular experiments are regarded as a whole.

Thilo Funder's exhibition could be experienced as the most unnerving out of the three exhibition periods in the project, although all of them operated around urgent, political and societal themes, possibly provoking difficult and challenging experiences. Thilo Funder uses the genre of horror and its temporal qualities in his art and artistic research to create new narratives (Kunsthall 3,14 2023b). Although theatrically staged, the films had graphic content with violence, and the installation referred to suicide and self-harming influenced by the capitalist system. The exhibition space was dimly lit, and the conversations took up themes such as burn out, endless and lonely competition after achievements and money and sometimes dystopic ideas about how artificial intelligence might influence the future. The teachers were informed about the challenging content and themes beforehand, and I reminded the participants throughout the workshops that they can take a break at any time and tell me if the situation becomes overwhelming. When I would notice an overwhelmed student, I had a conversation with the participant.⁶

Upon reflection, these situations were possibly the most challenging but also rewarding part when developing the method of Concept Play Workshops. Although such instances can be uncomfortable to both the participants and the art educator and teachers, they can provide great pedagogical potential. Inspired by the researchers in education, Gert Biesta (2006, 2014, 2018), Dennis Atkinson (2011, 2018) and French–Algerian philosopher Jacques Rancière (2004, 2009, 2010), Lisbet Skregelid (2021) writes about 'educational dissensus' as a pedagogical strategy:

Educational dissensus can introduce what could be seen as disturbing art and initiate situations that offer resistance and through an agonistic lens and as such invite disagreement and uncertainty and celebrate the possibilities of the unseen. [...] I see this as a pedagogical form that contrasts and creates a tension in the normal order and offers possibilities for valuable disruptions (p. 5).

Art that challenges the status quo is rarely easy or comfortable. This difficulty is also connected to the concept of abstraction, which I have previously presented in this article—the representation-breaking and uncertainty-provoking qualities in art. I have written elsewhere (2023): 'When order, routines, rules, categories, patterns and conventional

logic are broken, the situation becomes unpredictable, and one might lose control' (p. 56). However, when uncertainty is approached playfully with dialogue-based practices and artistic experiments, the encounters can build our tolerance towards uncertainty in everyday life. Abstraction and the 'educational dissensus' (Skregelid 2021) can also challenge the neoliberal tendencies in museum and gallery education. Kundu and Kalin (2015) point out that participatory activities in museums underpinned by neoliberalist tendencies rarely '[...] encompass resistance, agitation, or a destabilization of the status quo' (p. 48). Participation driven by neoliberalism might rather produce feel good sensations, give instant satisfaction and serve as entertainment.

Thilo Funder's exhibition also provided other interesting roles for the participating bodies during the workshops. The participants could lay in the sleeping stations, use the sleeping masks and go into sleeping bags throughout the workshops. While the school context and the workshop itself with its activities created obvious expectations for active participation—by joining in the conversation, thinking about the questions and creating art—the students could also simply lay and rest. Given the capitalist critique and the themes of burn out and mental health in the exhibition, it would have been contradictory to require active participation at all times. Participation in the conversation and the experiments were a possibility but not a requirement, and I told the students that they can also simply rest in the sleeping stations if they wanted to. In the method, the 20 min spent in the exhibition in the beginning of the workshop also had the goal of simply being with the art without any extra activities.

7. Dictatorial and Protesting Bodies

In the exhibition *UNCHARTED* (8 September–22 October 2023) by the Turkish, Amsterdam-based artist Servet Koçyiğit, wool and cotton threads in various colors traveled high in the air around the room, creating an enormous loom-like system in the exhibition space (Kunsthall 3,14 2023c).⁷ The threads, starting from large yarn rolls, went through a red and white roadblock in front of a jacquard woven tapestry depicting a Turkish landscape. The linearly arranged threads, reminiscent of power lines, made turns around the permanent 19th century columns of the exhibition space, and went through a life-size container built of wood. The threads were attached to stone weights, hanging behind the container, next to a tapestry depicting a famous photograph by Terje Nesthus of the activist Synnøve Kvamme in a demonstration in Hardanger in the West coast of Norway in 2011 (Øystese and Berget 2013). Wearing a national Hardanger folk costume, Kvamme was being carried down from a container by six policemen in uniforms. The demonstrators, using civil disobedience by not informing the authorities about the demonstrations beforehand, protested against building a power line through Hardanger. The photo has become a symbol of resistance to building power stations in natural habitats (Kunsthall 3,14 2023c).

A video montage, *Connecting the world takes every one of us*, by the American artist Benjamin Gerdes was displayed in the vault, a small room next to the main hall (Kunsthall 3,14 2023d). The film is a combination of commercial videos presenting highly advanced technological solutions that can make logistical and digital systems, such as how data are transported around the world, even faster and more effective. An endless stream of packages flows on transport bands, robots carry products in warehouses and cable is laid under the seabed between continents. The video clips have brisk-paced music together with hyper-positive voices explaining the high-tech solutions. The film bombards the spectator with selling slogans, but are the systems celebrated in the commercials truly that unproblematic and effortless? The film shows how many systems that we might think as abstract and weightless, such as how data are transported around the world, are in fact based on heavy industry and infrastructure, creating a burden for the environment.

When welcoming the groups, I briefly introduced the exhibitions by saying that both exhibitions are related to the global world and how different systems—technological, logistical and social—might «weave» and connect people, cultures, markets, products and continents together. We also talked about installations, and how they are related

to or create a space, allowing us to use our whole bodies when experiencing the work. After the students explored the exhibitions by themselves, I opened the dialogue with first impressions and thoughts. The following conversations focused on the philosophical concept of a system.

What kind of systems can we find in the artworks?

What kind of systems might wool threads, a container or stones be part of?

What kind of systems are you part of? Can you think about technological, logistic or social systems?

Can you think about examples of materials or products that are made in many different places through international trade? What about materials or products that come from one place?

Can images construct a system? What kind of visual systems are you a part of?

Is a human body also a system? What about nature and plants as systems?

Can you think about something in the world that is not a system or part of a system?

In the second part of the workshop, the participants create their own systems by building installations in groups with threads in the exhibition space. In the beginning, I tell the groups that as all systems in the global world, the systems created in the workshop need to be based on some rules and premises. First, the systems need to relate to the non-human and human elements in the room, as systems can rarely exist isolated in the world (the students can use their own bodies when building the systems, as well as the exhibition space—the pillars, doors and other permanent elements). Second, the systems need to be aesthetic—the participants can cut, knot, weave and palm the threads. Here, aesthetic does not necessarily mean beautiful, but visually interesting. Third, the system needs to be sustainable—the participants must be able to deconstruct the system so that the thread can be used again. Finally, inspired by Koçyiğit's wall tapestry with civil disobedience, the students may decide to not follow the rules and use civil disobedience—for example by cutting the thread so that the installation becomes more aesthetic but less sustainable—but it needs to be a well-argued choice, and the participants must be aware that there might be consequences (I might come with scissors).

During the concept creation, I playfully take the role of an authoritarian leader in the global world, and I give further instructions that the participants need to relate to. For example, I say that the world needs more systems, and that the groups need to increase their production speed, or that the global systems cannot have static points—all parts of the system must be in movement at all times. Eventually, the different systems created by the small groups must produce a global system and connect with each other. The groups can always decide to not follow the rules and use civil disobedience. For example, they might isolate themselves from other systems, decide not to move or to create something not visually interesting. However, these decisions might create problems: moving systems might eat up the static ones, and isolated systems might run out of materials. Finally, the groups need to focus on sustainability by deconstructing the systems by going back the same route they came from to gather the thread to a ball again. As is often the case with sustainability, the process requires time, patience and creativity. Bottle necks (building stands still because of a small knot in the thread), shortage of materials (a ball of yarn rolls away from a group sitting on the ground), conflicts between systems (people collide and threads get tangled) and roadblocks (other systems or elements in the exhibition space stop the process) might occur in the process.

The workshops with the concept of a system differed from the other workshops in their more immediate emphasis on relational teamwork and intense focus on embodied understandings. The concept creation was more tightly connected to a specific context and was more guided with the instructions. The [Deleuze \(\[1970\] 1988\)](#) understanding of a body as a whole but created by relations to other human and non-human bodies, affecting and being affected, received perhaps the most explicit role in these workshops out of the

three exhibition periods. I wished to design a playful experimentation where the concept could be created by the ' [...] complex materiality of bodies immersed in social relations of power' (Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012, p. 21). The exhibition space turned into a microcosmos of the global world with dominating rules and power relations (at the same time, museum and gallery educational situations always emerge through complex power relations between children, art educators and teachers in the contexts of educational system, the art institution and the wider society).

The participants needed to constantly relate to the human bodies, the body of the room and the thread and the concepts of systems as bodies, as well as my gallery educator body. They needed to therefore take into consideration many aspects of the concept of a system and create the concept anew to «stay in the game». Throughout the workshops, I encouraged the participants to pay attention to how the systems become embodied and concrete through their bodies, the exhibition space and the available materials. Some of the threads were very thin and fragile, breaking in the midst of the concept creation, and in some workshops with many participants, I used tape to create limited areas where the systems could be built to safeguard the artworks. The surprises provoked by both human and non-human bodies could further create the philosophical concept.

The concept creation was characterized by the many strict rules on one hand, and encouragement to break free from the rules on the other hand. This was inspired by Gerdes' montage, where a system begins to turn against itself by simply following its own absolutist rules. In his film, Gerdes uses commercial videos provided by businesses, given that these are the only visual materials available about the technological systems and locations (Kunsthall 3,14 2023d). However, when the visuals controlled by the businesses are repeated over and over again, they begin to seem absurd. The aim of my playful dictator role in the workshops was to similarly provoke the students to see the absurdity and challenge the rules, and to (paradoxically) give the participants the role of the protesting body. In these experiments, the rules can be regarded as representational logic—as a threshold where one can move further and beyond. Following the ethics of experiment, the experimentation starts with little steps, and is characterized by playfulness with both order and chaos (Harker 2005). Breaking representational logic does not need to mean throwing oneself to the unknown with no anchors, but by taking little steps. The art historian Katve-Kaisa Kontturi (2018) writes: 'While Deleuze and Guattari encourage us to experiment beyond the limits of recognition, the already known, they do not advise us to surrender to unknown forces altogether. Instead, their lesson is one of dosage: gently deterritorialise your territory [...] (p. 42).

Throughout the creation of systems in the exhibition space, I emphasized playfulness with the tone of my voice, by demonstrating the system building with my own embodied examples, by talking about playfulness and experimentation when giving instructions to the groups and by reminding them of the possibility of civil disobedience. Eventually, or when a participant would get tired of being part of a system, I opened a conversation about the importance of sometimes disconnecting ourselves from the various systems we are part of, and we wondered with the students how the systems could have more care and empathy.

8. Conclusions

As Kundu and Kalin (2015) note, participation in gallery and museum education needs to be thought of beyond the binary of active participant and passive observer. Creating participation only for the sake of participation creates more entertainment and consumerism than meaningful encounters with art. In this article, I have argued that the method of Concept Play Workshop created philosophizing, critical, uncomfortable, resting, dictatorial and protesting participating bodies during the three exhibition periods. Each of these can create different possibilities for learning, contesting the passive/active binary. This study contributes to the field of post-approaches in gallery and museum education (e.g., Feinberg and Lemaire 2021; Hacklin 2022; Hackett et al. 2018; Kukkonen 2023; MacRae et al. 2017;

Mulcahy 2021; Rieger et al. 2019), knowledge that has been called out previously (Hackett et al. 2018; MacRae et al. 2017). In future studies, it would be interesting to test out the method in a classroom context and also outdoors with public art.

In Concept Play Workshops, representational logic is challenged by experimenting with philosophical concepts in contemporary art exhibitions with dialogue-based practices (Dysthe et al. 2012; Hubard 2011) and artistic experiments inspired by Deleuze ([1970] 1988) and Deleuze and Guattari's ([1980] 2020, [1991] 2009) philosophy and new materialist (Kontturi 2018; O'Sullivan 2006; Page 2018) theory–practice. The 'multiplicity' of the concept (Deleuze and Guattari [1991] 2009, p. 15) created by experimentation is connected to different cultural and historical contexts and political questions, broadening the focus from oneself towards other bodies and contexts. This can challenge neoliberalist tendencies in which the strong emphasis on the subject creates 'narcissistic consumer culture' (von Hantelmann 2014, para. 19).

The method can also create uncomfortable bodies: challenging representational logic can create discomfort, resistance and agitation. Referring to the concept of abstraction (Kukkonen 2022a, 2023) and inspired by Skregelid's (2021) 'educational dissensus', I have argued that the discomfort and uncertainty can have educational potential and work against the neoliberalist tendencies in the participatory paradigm, which might focus on spectacular and satisfactory feelgood experiences. Humans are not the only participating bodies: the new materialist approach in the method points towards more-than-human bodies in the workshops that are part of creating the concepts of time, intelligence and system, and the material–relational situations at Kunsthall 3,14.

Funding: The Concept Play Workshop project received external funding from Arts and Culture Norway.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

- ¹ Kundu and Kalin (2015) define neoliberalism as follows: 'Emerging in the 1970s, neoliberalism has privatized collectively and/or used state-run resources. Neoliberalism is associated with liberating free enterprise from bonds imposed by governments that might restrict the movement of goods and services. Mandates in harmony with neoliberalism have included cutting public expenditure for social services, including the funding of higher education, deregulating to increase profits, encouraging privatization for efficiency, and emphasizing individual responsibility to ensure consumer choice and entrepreneurial initiative' (p. 40).
- ² I have previously worked as a museum assistant and freelance guide at Aboa Vetus and Ars Nova Museum in Turku, Finland (2014–2016), as a museum guide at Seurasaari Open-Air Museum (part of the National Museum in Finland) for three summer seasons 2012–2016, and as an intern at the collection unit at WAM Turku City Art Museum (2015). In August 2023, I graduated with a PhD from the University of Agder in Kristiansand, Norway and I began to work as Head of Communications and Education at Kunsthall 3,14.
- ³ The sound installations are part of an ongoing collaboration with Lydgalleriet in Bergen, curated by Julie Lillelien Porter.
- ⁴ *Archipelago*, launched in 1996, was one of the first stock trading companies in the US that used electronic communication network (ECN). *Archipelago* merged with New York Stock Exchange in 2006. ECN makes it possible to do automated trading, passive order matching and after-hours trading (Hayes 2022).
- ⁵ These experiments were also inspired by the exhibition *Another Leader: Act #II* by Nástio Mosquito (21 April–4 June 2023). The exhibition was curated by ChatGPT and the former Head of Communications at Kunsthall 3,14, Tuva Mossin (Kunsthall 3,14 2023e). Thank you to the University of Bergen for loaning tablets for the experiments with ChatGPT.
- ⁶ In each workshop, I paid attention to not only on what is being said, but also to the students' body language to make sure that the students were adequately supported during the workshops, given that children and young people might not have the same verbal skills to express themselves as adults (Robson 2011). However, as I have written elsewhere (Kukkonen 2022b, it is not always easy to detect signs of discomfort in a museum and gallery educational setting, as the workshop might be the first time I meet the group, and I do not know the students' individual ways of expressing themselves.
- ⁷ The exhibition *UNCHARTED* was curated by the art historian Dr. Lora Sariaslan.

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