

FALK HÜBNER

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het perspectief van de kunstenaar.

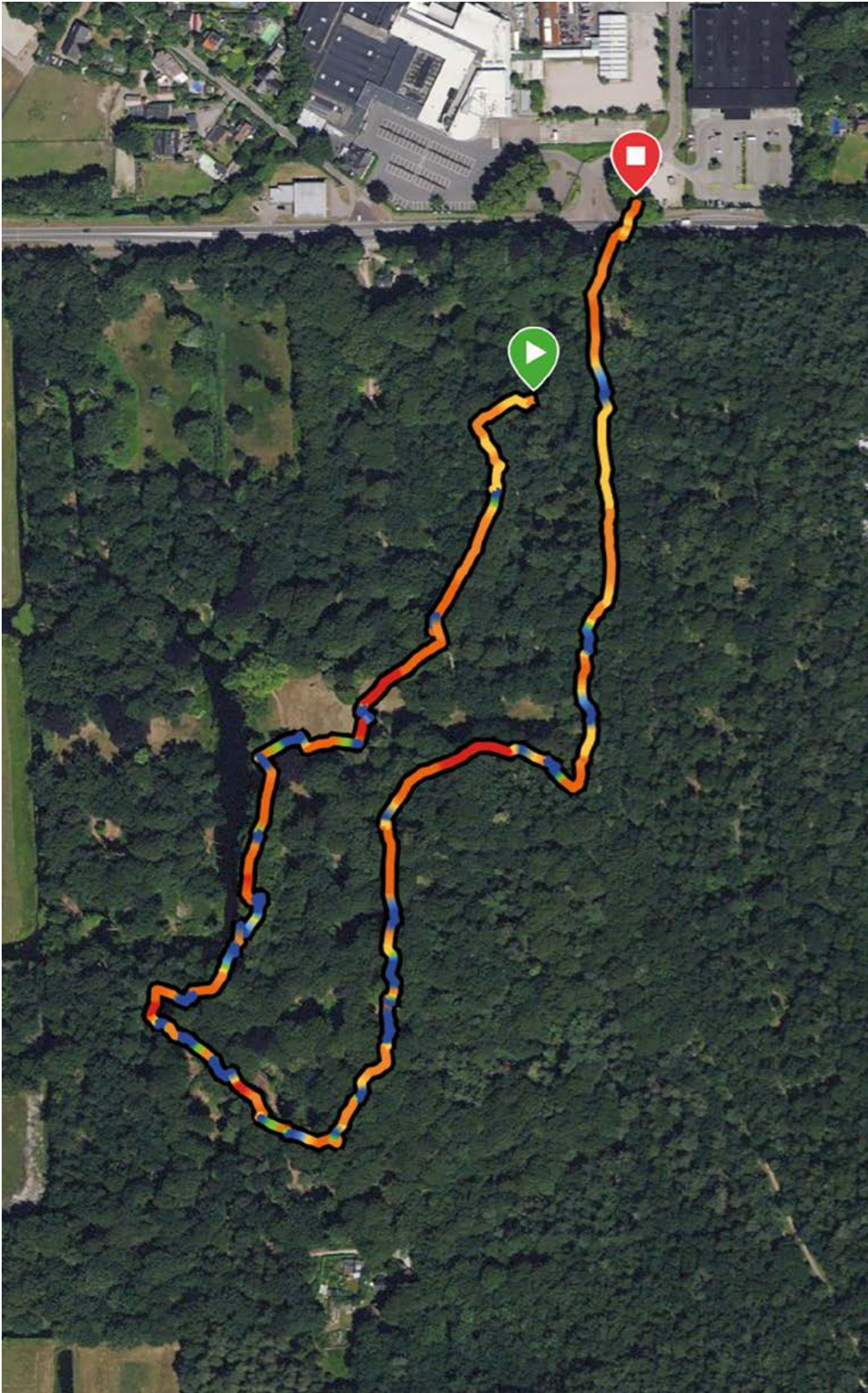
Editors: Marjolijn van den Berg, Nirav Christophe and Henny Dörr.

**“WHEN IT’S ALL THERE”:
FROM WALKING TO
ARTISTIC CONNECTIVITY**

FALK HÜBNER

With a background as composer, theatre maker, researcher and educator Falk Hübner is active in a huge diversity of collaborations within and outside of the arts. He is a composer who works with traditional instruments as well as with the computer. He loves to work with a variety of sounds: from the forest, the wind, human language, the city, all kinds of machines or the sea. For Falk, these sounds have encounters, become stories, stories, combine, overlap, or collide. New stories are created that can touch us deeper than words alone. His research focuses on the social-societal potential of artistic research, research methodologies, and the relation of the arts and art education in relation to society.¹ Falk Hübner is professor of *Artistic Connective Practices* at Fontys University of the Arts in Tilburg, The Netherlands. In *In Search of Stories* Falk Hübner worked with one patient between April 2021 and February 2022.

¹ Zie Hübner, 2024.



Meestal vanaf de eerste dag begin je een beetje van elkaar te houden. Want die gesprekken die je hebt, die zijn van zo een intieme aard, dat het eigenlijk na één dag voelt als of je elkaar al jaren kent. En dat heeft te maken met het type gesprek dat je hebt, want je hebt het niet over liflafjes, maar je hebt het over: Hoe is het om dood te gaan? (Nieke Koek)

A WALK IN THE FOREST

(Start soundfile 1)²

We walk through a small forest somewhere between Hilversum and Bussum. We don't talk. We have decided earlier that we will walk in silence, and that we won't direct this walk, we won't plan it. We would see where the paths take us.

The more we make our way into the forest, the more the dense sounds of cars, coming from the federal highway next to which we parked our car, smoothly change into a still-present but amorphous noise, and then get more silent and fade out entirely at some point, until only the soft sounds of a living forest remain. I am intrigued by the rhythm of our footsteps, a sound that constantly changes with the different kinds of grounds we are walking on. Subtle changes in sound that only become audible when it is quiet enough.

The route we took, tracked by a GPS watch. Next to being a piece of documentation, we also used the three parts of the walk to structure the work in the final score: De Heenweg (the outward journey); Omdraaien (turning around); De Terugweg (the way back).

² This chapter includes listening to three soundfiles. These can be accessed through an exposition on the Research Catalogue: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/shared/e2fc358dca3c7eazecd946a56f735c85>.

At some point in our walk, we come to a place that resonates with my fellow walker; the place feels special to her, and she wants to examine it more closely. We see a pair of dead trees, their trunks lying on the ground. One of the two has burls on it, something she later calls “the cancer of the tree”.³ In a conversation afterwards, she remarked that “however, the tree deals differently with its cancer, it does not die of it but rather incorporates the cancer in its being.” The second tree was covered with holes from beetles all over it, providing a new home for this other species. Finally, to complete the scenery, both trees are surrounded, partly covered by blackberry plants: new life, where the fruits were already growing, ready to be ripe and juicy, providing food for both animals as well as curious and fruit-lusty humans. Life, illness and death not only next to, but *with* each other.

³ An expression not so far from how scientists call these burls. See also: ‘Can Trees Get Cancer?’ Utah State University, <https://extension.usu.edu/forestry/publications/utah-forest-facts/041-can-trees-get-cancer>. Accessed Mar. 2024.



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Images: Stills from the video documentation during the walk.





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After we arrive back at the car, we don't talk much either. We agreed the week before that we would not only walk but also end in silence, and just leave the (beauty of the) moment as it is.⁴ To me, it felt as a strong shared lived experience: To go to somebody, to walk together, listen to her reflections from time to time during that walk, and to leave, with only a minimum of words said. In a short field note from 2 September 2021, the day of our walk, I wrote: "A special experience: Walking together as really together. Next to 'being guest', to be allowed and invited to go-with, to follow the patient; next to being really deep in the experience myself."⁵

She put this in two ways herself. First, the deeply personal important question: "Als je er dan samen bij die boom bent - wat moet dan nog?" Second, she described that we experienced a scenery where "everything is there at once": new and growing life, sickness, and death. Co-present, co-existing, making each other possible, even caring for each other.

II

This was a realisation she told me she had never before.

I was not sure what exactly made this experience and realization possible: It could have been just the walk itself, the silence between us, the curiosity of experiencing the forest, nature, silence, sounds of nature. Or the invitation to let me be part of her experience of nature, and the open kind of time we spent together doing this, only limited by her wish to turn around and go back at some point.

⁴ The reason for this has been a clearly methodological choice. In our conversations, my participant continuously mentioned the importance of silence and mindfulness. This choice was based on taking the urgency of silence seriously, and focusing on the embodied, performative experience - about being in the experience - rather than reflectively talking through everything immediately.

⁵ Original note in Dutch: "Een bijzondere ervaring: Samen wandelen als écht samen. Naast "te gast zijn", mee mogen gaan, patiente volgen; naast zelf heel diep in de ervaring zitten."

TOWARDS A WALKING SCORE

This walk was crucial, and a hinge in our co-creative, collaborative process. The conversations before the walk had established a process of getting to know each other and building a collaborative basis and trust, which had made it possible to let the important topics of the conversation and the work emerge, or to give them the necessary time to emerge. The idea for walking came up during these conversations, in which she told me about her life, her experiences, especially after the diagnosis. How “everything”, every expectation of one’s life, changes. Some of the crucial elements that were about to shape our co-creative work had already been present in an early text, a reflection written by her in June 2021. In this reflection on her chosen story, *Orpheus*,⁶ she already localized elements that are traceable in the final work and our co-creative process. And already in this reflection, which was even before we started working together as artist and participant, she mentions elements of the natural world as becoming a more important role than before the diagnosis: “Een gevoel van Orfeus en Apollo beving me. Ik had het leven nog nooit zo gevoeld zo intens, bijna goddelijk. De zon, de wind de regen, alles krijgt een nieuwe diepere dimensie voor me.” And just as the accent on nature, the notion of being in the here and now, even only in a sidenote (in which she writes about herself in the third person), is already present in this text early in our process:

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Maar toch heeft ze veerkracht en na de operaties en behandelingen haar kale hoofd staat ze iedere keer weer op om door te gaan. Hades mag nog even wachten. *Ze ziet ineens dat ze alleen nog maar in het Nu kan leven. Een echte toekomst heeft ze niet meer. Ze kan alleen maar het beste ervan maken, alles doorleven met ups en downs. Maar toch zoveel mogelijk leven in een ‘Beautiful State’.* Over de rest heeft ze geen controle meer. (my italics)

⁶ What fascinated her in the story of Orpheus is the attempt to turn time around – while the process of being ill with cancer is impossible to turn around.

In the process of our conversations, the notion of ‘making the best of it’ transformed into an attitude of ‘being present’. As she put it: “The only thing that helps me is presence.” And this notion of being present, co-present in our case, the curiosity of experiencing the forest together, was, in the end, the decisive ‘quality’ to bring into the collaborative work. It was important for both the participant and myself not to make something about an experience or being present, but to create a work that facilitates an actual experience of being present. Concerning us as collaborators, one could say that we experienced connection to each other not through talking to, but through *being with* each other, and taking the necessary time for this. And this is indeed where I locate the most intense moment of connection between us.

The walk, and with it the performative, shared experience of being present in nature, moving, in the here and now, quite directly lead to the idea of the final work: A text-based score for a silent walk, accompanied by sound files played back on headphones. After we had walked and reflected on the walk together, it was clear for us that we wanted to create a work that offers an invitation: to a scored and performative experience of walking into being present in the here and now, together with noises coming from trees, the grass, birds and other animals, the wind or the rain. A more ‘solid’ form such as a composition or a podcast (an earlier idea) seemed too much fixed or representational for the – somewhat ephemeral and performative⁷ – experience in the here and now of the very moment itself, which we wanted to offer. The idea came up to create something that accentuates the experience as such, to create a work that focuses on being in the moment, on the relation to nature, to being in nature: to create a ‘score of possibilities’.⁸ The score does not describe an exact walk on a map or even a specific area, but rather uses open ways of describing the walk, which can work in any surrounding that participants choose. For example, the score suggests choosing for a walk that is approximately half an hour long, but the participant is free to

⁷ In my understanding and use of the term ‘performativity’, I follow the now classic work of theatre and performance scholar Erika Fischer-Lichte (2004). In Fischer-Lichte’s understanding, performativity focuses on liveness, being present in the here and now. This happens in co-presence and co-authorship of everybody and everything present. For Fischer-Lichte, this encompasses performers and audience/participants. Nowadays, in the light of feminism and posthumanist philosophy, this understanding needs to be extended to other-than-human entities and environments, in our case the forest, its trees, and (the experience of) nature.

⁸ I adapted the term ‘score of possibilities’ freely from an idea by Dutch music theatre maker Paul Koek. Koek himself mentioned the idea of a ‘score of presumptions’ (Dutch ‘vermoedens-partituur’ or ‘partituur van vermoedens’) in the context of the Veenfabriek 2008 production *Licht is de machine* (*Light is the machine*). The idea was part of a process to rethink the open form as method to create theatre (Koek in Vigier and Elstgeest 2008, p.10).

walk longer or shorter; at the same time the score does indicate to walk away from the noise of cars or traffic, to indicate the direction of walking into a more silent environment or surrounding. This approach should provide just enough direction to the participant-walker of the score, to explore one's own directions, one's own possibilities.⁹



The score of the silent walk at the In Search of Stories exhibition in Utrecht, May 2022.

⁹ Just as the three soundfiles, the score can be accessed on the same Research Catalogue exposition: <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/shared/e2fc358dca3c7ea2ecd946a56f735c85>.

One aspect that initially struck me about the experience, and the story of our walk, is the variety of connections that had been made, or that have emerged: between us as walking humans and our environment, the forest, the ground, and the trees; the connection between the participant and myself, which had intensified and deepened through the shared lived experience of walking together, being ‘just present’, without talking. And how intimate and close the connection can feel. As Nieke Koek says in the opening quote of the chapter: “You immediately start loving this person a little bit.” This phenomenon of connection is also what fascinates me about co-creative work between art and healthcare at large. In the coming sections, I will take a closer look at the various kinds of connections that are made in and through the work processes between artists and participants, how connections are created in *In Search of Stories*, what the qualities of these are, and what their underlying motivations and values are. The notion of ‘artistic connectivity’ will serve as a conceptual lens.

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Artistic connectivity is a concept that has been coined by designer Cynthia Hathaway as research explorer at Fontys Academy of the Arts Tilburg, and which has then been further developed collectively and collaboratively by myself and the *Connective Intra-Activiteam*, a research group at the same institution.¹¹ We have shaped this conceptualisation in the form of two conceptual clouds of the ‘artistic’ and ‘connectivity’.¹² These clouds, as an idea partly borrowed from the concept of word clouds, consist of a network of interrelated elements that, as a collective, network or panorama, offer a way of framing, understanding, mapping and imagining the term in question – without defining it in clear-cut terms: as fluid and flexible tapestries to think and work with.

¹⁰ This section contains material of my inaugural lecture publication for the professorship *Artistic Connective Practices* (Hübner 2022).

¹¹ The professorship *Artistic Connective Practices* started its work in September 2021. From the beginning, in my function as leading this professorship, I aimed for doing the important conceptual work of this professorship not alone, but collectively. This led to forming the *Connective Intra-Activiteam*, consisting of Danae Theodoridou, Heleen de Hoon, Juriaan Achthoven, Aart Strootman, Jan Staes, and myself. The work of the group has led to the publication *In Good Company. Think We Must.* (Hübner 2022) and to the *Connective Conversations* series (see <https://www.research-catalogue.net/view/1592576/1592577>).

¹² A third conceptual cloud our research team worked with is the one of ‘practices’. Taking this cloud into consideration would extend the length of this chapter too much. For more information and elaboration on this third conceptual cloud, see Hübner 2022.

The concept itself is thus designed in a way that it remains fluid / in flux, constantly developing further through intra-active encounters with cases of practices.¹³

Some of these terms and aspects of both the artistic and connectivity will come back in my review and reflection on the project through the course of this chapter. My aim is to contribute to our ability to articulate what we as artist-researchers are doing in such projects, and why it matters: both for the contexts outside of the arts (in our context here especially the fields of healthcare and medical sciences), as well as to ourselves, to enrich our own understanding of our work on the boundaries between artistic practice and health. In this sense I aim to shed some light on the ways in which connections are made in such transdisciplinary co-creations, and the value, precarity and importance of time in them. At the same time, this offers a framework through which we can think through such co-creative transdisciplinary practices, adding up to the ways of working, and forms of impact we already know.

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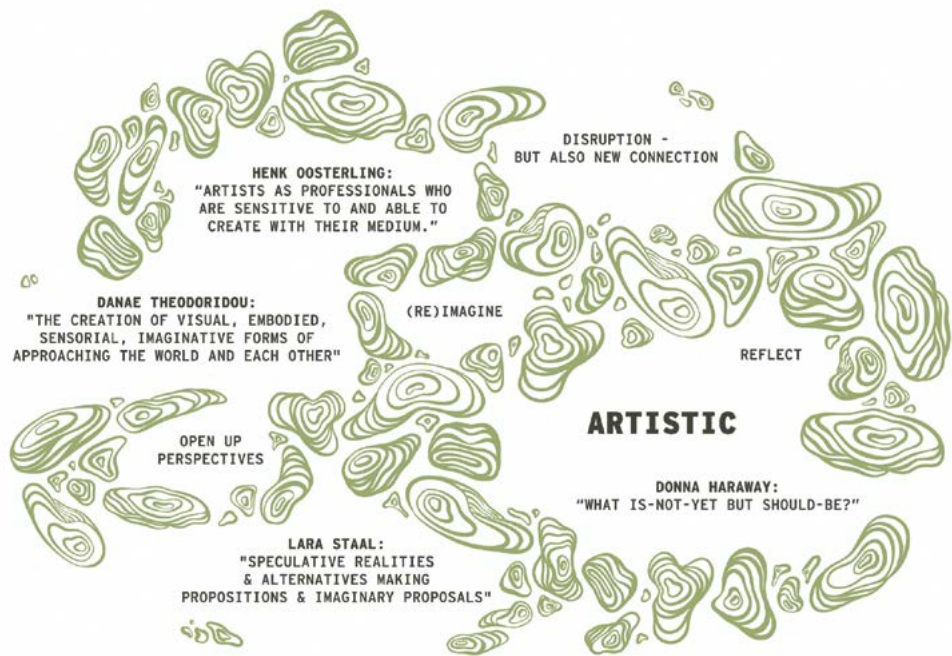
I draw on my own artistic and co-creative process within the project (as sketched in the previous section), two interviews I conducted myself with fellow artists Nieke Koek and Marcel Dolman, and the unedited version of two double interviews which Henny Dörr conducted with Tjallien Walma van der Molen & Silvia Rus- sel, and Donna Risa & Daniela Moosmann.¹⁴ The overall account thus focuses on research that has been carried out in and through practice, develops insights into what (some of the) artists involved in such projects actually do on the level of ‘making connections’ - and offers a few thoughts on what this actually means.

¹³ This being-in-flux and further developing through encounters is also what happens in this chapter: I start by exploring the resonances of artistic connectivity and its elements with the co-creative processes of *In Search of Stories*, and from there will further explore the elements that emerge through this encounter, enriching the concept of artistic connectivity.

¹⁴ See elsewhere in this book for a fully worked out edited version of these two double interviews.

ARTISTIC

What point is there to write about what ‘artistic’ means in a book situated in-between the arts and healthcare? Well, the intention of the conceptual cloud of the artistic is not to *define* the artistic (how could we?), but rather to frame a panorama of compelling and necessary elements, to think the artistic together with the connective. This is about what ‘artistic’ means in the context of work in which we are situating ourselves.



I7

The conceptual cloud of the artistic. Design by Siel Damen 2022.

As a point of departure, one can regard the artistic as processes characterised “by the use of imagination suggesting a certain type of aesthetics: work that relates to the creation of visual, embodied, sensorial, imaginative forms of approaching the world and each other” (Danae Theodoridou). Artists are both formally trained in, as well as literally practice the creation of such forms and in shaping, organizing or facilitating the processes that lead to artistic work,

be it through individual or collective processes. This particularly concerns the creation of *alternatives*, speculating and imagining, rather than confirming what is already there. As philosopher Isabelle Stengers puts it from the perspective of philosophy: “we who are selected, trained and paid to think, imagine, envisage and propose”.¹⁵ The artistic particularly concerns itself with the creation of alternatives, speculating and imagining, rather than confirming what is already there offers a challenge for practices in transdisciplinary context, such as *In Search of Stories*.

It is important to acknowledge the close relation of the artistic to technical knowledge and craft/craftmanship, to the detailed artistry needed for the creation of forms. The artistic is not a quality that can be present in any type of activity, where anything can be seen as artistic and therefore art would lose its particular characteristics, the complexity of its processes or the specific skills that artists are trained in. Lara Staal’s comment that we as artists “are trained in the imaginary”¹⁶ is telling here, similar to what Philosopher Henk Oosterling relates to when he describes artists as professionals who “have learned to listen to their medium [such as sound, paint, images, data, light, bodies or language]; they are sensitive to what their medium asks of them. They relate critically and sensible [or sense-able] to their medium”.¹⁷ Through this specific sensitivity, artists are able to work and create with their media, rooted – again and in the obvious overlap to our notion of practices – in training, repetition and practice.

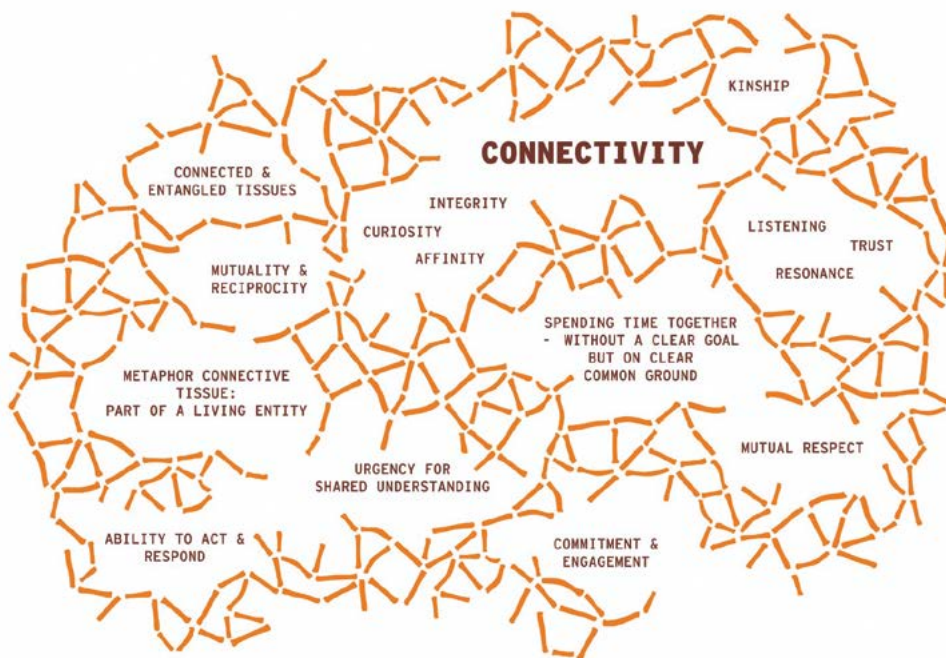
¹⁵ Stengers 2018, p.106.

¹⁶ Lara Staal in 2021 during *Connective Conversation* at Fontys Academy of the Arts.

¹⁷ Oosterling 2013, n.p., my translation. Implicitly Oosterling even relates to the idea of facilitating connectivity through art: “In the arts something between different cultures emerges. Something new emerges through the intervention of artists, so that people can think differently about the relations they have with each other.”

Finally, the artistic as something that intervenes, disturbs, de-familiarises and disrupts, offers an interesting tension here, specifically in relation to the connective. While interruption or disruptions seem to be mainly negative notions, a ‘tension of opposites’, the connective can offer a rather positive turn, to think them as being relational: as art producing disruption, disturbance, and de-familiarisation that breaks open, makes other views, thoughts and experiences possible, and then leads to new and potentially unexpected connections. In this sense, disruption can also relate to the speculative and is not necessarily negative, but can rather mean redirection, connection to alternatives and re-imagination.

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The conceptual cloud of connectivity. Design by Siel Damen 2022.

CONNECTIVITY

Connectivity needs to be understood as being more complex than just being concerned about simply connecting or making links. Instead, the term and conceptual cloud describes a variety of qualities of connecting, of the values, urgencies and processes underlying a connection.

Geographer and educator Martin John Haigh argues that connective practices build “participatory consciousness rather than on-looker consciousness [...]”.¹⁸ Haigh pleads for more individual commitment and a better “concerted will to do what is necessary to change human social behavior and so change the situation”.¹⁹ He argues for a notion of selflessness and acting for the welfare for all as a vital component of connective practices.

The conceptual cloud of connectivity. Design by Siel Damen 2022. In my understanding, connectivity is a concept that embraces ethical values, approaches of sharing, shared experiences and commoning/commonness. Connectivity can therefore challenge dominant and rather ‘neoliberal’ ways of being together, driven by economic reasoning or notions of efficiency (as present, for example, in huge parts of the healthcare system). In that respect, artistic connectivity can offer an approach by the arts to question, bend, provoke and open up these kinds of systems.²⁰ Transdisciplinary arts practices such as the ones in *In Search of Stories* present inspiring examples which embrace artistic connectivity as a concept to realize such alternative values and practices.

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¹⁸ Haigh 2017, p.6.

¹⁹ Haigh 2017, p.7.

²⁰ The notion of mutuality/reciprocity is an example of this challenging dominant neoliberal ways of thinking and doing: Connection and mutual exchange needs to be understood in the sense of being in a socially engaged relation with someone or something, while honestly and thorough being interested in and curious for each other, rather than according to the logic of commercial transaction (something is delivered/offered/sold for something else in return) or hierarchy.

(Start sound file 2) ²¹

The following section illustrates how Tjallien Walma van der Molen and Silvia Russel, in conversation with Henny Dörr, create resonances with several aspects discussed here as being aspects of the connective:

HENNY: Dus een vorm van responsiviteit?

SILVIA: Ja, maar je bent wel al één stap vooruit aan het denken. En je creëert steeds eigenlijk de context waarbinnen diegene een stap kan zetten. En dat creëren van die context dat is inderdaad heel erg in reactie op wat de ander inbrengt. [...]

TJALLIEN: Nee, maar je luistert wel vanuit een zelf gecreëerde ruimte. Basisruimten waarin iemand zich veilig voelt, alle deurtjes open durft te zetten...

SILVIA: Je heet iemand heel erg welkom denk ik.

TJALLIEN: Ja enorm.

SILVIA: In alles zoals diegene is. En ik denk in het welkom heten kan die ander... zou je kunnen zeggen: binnentreden.

TJALLIEN: Je creëert verbinding.

SILVIA: Ja ik denk, wat ook superbelangrijk is, dat is de verwondering, dat is de essentie ook van kunstenaarschap, dat je denkt, oh ik weet het niet.... Dat moet je ook gaan voeden bij de deelnemers.

HENNY: Dat je het niet hoeft te weten.

SILVIA: Wij weten het niet en zij hoeven het ook niet te weten, maar we werken wel vanuit die verwondering. De ruimte, de veilige ruimte, waarin we gaan verwonderen, totdat we ergens op stuiten en dan besluiten we: dit is het onderwerp wat we verder gaan uitdiepen. Eén patiënt bijvoorbeeld, die zei ja sorry hoor, maar kleuren, daar ga ik echt even geen betekenis aan geven. Ik denk prima, dat komt nog wel dan. En binnen 3 keer had zij rood, maar wel op een manier dat ze het vanuit haar eigen leven had ingebracht.

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²¹ <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/shared/e2fc358dca3c7ea2ecd946a56f735e85>.

This conversation illustrates several aspects of the connective: creating safety, facilitation, being responsive, and creating connection between artist and patient, are all attributes in close proximity to the cloud's elements, such as affinity, urgency for shared understanding, listening, and trust. Silvia also adds another aspect of the artistic: wonderment, closely related to curiosity, affinity, listening. A small but striking element that introduces the powerful link between the connective and the artistic can be traced in Tjallien's statement that she creates a connective environment or context, an attitude of listening, *from one's self-created space* – an artistic space, into which the other is invited. This directly leads to another interesting aspect of *In Search of Stories* in which the artistic and the connective come together: in the act of *creating encounters*. This is something artists are not merely doing accidentally, but in which are actually trained in (or are training themselves in),²² as Henny remarks: “Yes, you create connection. This could happen through offering cookies, but also through gifting a book. This kind of habit is my own, but it is enormously trained behavior as well.”²³ Donna Risa supports this in her reflection on what the project and the co-creative collaboration has brought her personally, as a human being - which she calls ‘professioneel dichtbij komen’:

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Wat het mij heeft gegeven als mens? Nou toch dat je heel dichtbij iemand kan komen, ook al doe je dat vanuit een opdracht, ja gaat co-creëren. Dat ik toch wel iemand ben die het belangrijk vindt om professioneel dichtbij te komen, omdat ik denk dat de relatie daardoor sterker wordt en ook weer dat ik het proces evenredig belangrijk vind als uiteindelijk het eindproduct. (...) Dat ik ervan overtuigd ben dat je heel dichtbij kan komen, ook in een kunstproject, bij de ander, zonder dat je jezelf daarin verliest. Dat heeft het mij wel gegeven als mens. (Donna Risa)

²² This training can happen through being educated as a teacher, or through artistic practice itself.

Henny: “En we gaan ontmoetingen creëren nu, en dat kan je trainen. Ik heb dat, dat is voor mij de basis geweest voor al mijn docent... voor al mijn ontmoetingen met studenten. Het is altijd die ruimte creëren van ik ben hier niet om jullie even een poepie te laten ruiken, nee ik ben hier om samen met jullie iets te gaan ontdekken.”

²³ Dutch original: “Ja je creëert verbinding. En dat zijn koekjes, maar dat is ook van ik kom vandaag met een boekje. Dat zit in mij, maar dat is een dat is ook getraind gedrag.”

CURIOSITY OF ARTISTS

I like to elaborate on one of my personal core insights during this project, which might be termed ‘curiosity of artists’, or ‘artistic curiosity’. And how this connects the artistic with the notion of connectivity.

One of the experiences that are still most remarkable for me during this and other projects is that participants talk to us about such extraordinary experiences, ideas, thoughts, and so on - some even tell us things they have never told anyone before! As Nieke Koek reports on her sessions with different participants: “Daar kwamen best regelmatig dingen uit, ‘Dit heb ik nog nooit tegen iemand verteld.’ of ‘Ik durf dat bijna niet uit te spreken.’” And yet, in the end they dare to speak out.

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In the case of my own collaboration, during our conversation several topics emerged that were of explicit importance to the participant: nature, attention, taking time, ... Which is quite remarkable, as we were not “just talking” and freely associating about “life” in general, for example, but situated in a project related to cancer, to healthcare, to medicine, to patients who are dying. A professional relationship, rather than a private one. And also here, during the walk in the forest, we came to experiences and reflections regarding the co-presence of life, sickness and death, which she never had before.

I locate the reason - at least in part - for this openness of the participants, and their willingness to discover unexpected sides of themselves, in the kind of curiosity that the artists “show” to, offer, or share with the participants. It starts with a kind of curiosity that is generous, sincere, and honest. Already here several of the elements of connectivity can be traced, as listening, trust, respect,

integrity, commitment, and indeed curiosity are indispensable in the contact between artists and participants. The kind of curiosity in particular, I believe, is already quite different from the curiosity the participants - as being terminal stage cancer patients – experience in the conversations with caregivers, oncologists or other professionals in the medical field: the artist's don't need to 'help', or don't need to fulfill any function in direct relation to the cancer.

However, the kind of curiosity is also more specific than 'just being curious for... anything' ("I am a very curious person, you know."). I experience this curiosity not as any kind of romantic, but rather professional curiosity.²⁴ Deeply embedded in the profession of artists, this curiosity comes together with the process of 'translating' material into a work – a mechanism crucial for a project as this. First of all, curiosity is an element of connectivity, a crucial ingredient in order to connect, or to facilitate a truly connective quality in an encounter. In guitarist, luthier and composer Aart Strootman's words:

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The shared desire for connectivity, born out of necessity and/or curiosity, must be in the DNA of those involved - regardless of what the context is. It can be enthused, but it can't be solely rooted in an art school, nor can it be classified in ECTS. Mutual respect, unrestrained browsing, willingness and above all curiosity without boundaries are, in my opinion, indispensable.²⁵

²⁴ And this professional kind of curiosity – not less empathetic, by the way – is also different from how friends and families are curious. This places us in a fascinating kind of triangle around the participant-patients, with medical professionals, friends and families, and artists.

²⁵ Strootman quoted in Hübner 2022, p. 27.

Going into the artistic more specifically, as artists, we are thoroughly and endlessly interested in and curious about materials: colours, sensations, feelings, experiences, thoughts, associations – as these are the materials artists work with. This autoethnographic observation resonates with philosopher Henk Oosterling (also mentioned in the conceptual cloud of the artistic): Artists are professionals who have learned to “listen to their medium.” They are interested in their medium/media and are able to work and create with it/them. Depending on the artist, this can be very specific within an artistic discipline, such as canvas, colours, and paint. In other cases, the media can be extremely diverse, such as sound, electronic media, performance, objects, and bodies. Nieke Koek, for example, asks questions very specifically towards qualities of impressions, stories and feelings, connected to materiality – one could call them ‘material questions’:

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Dus, dan hadden we die body scan gedaan [inspired by mindfulness], en dan zei ik, nou, dan zit daar zo een soort gevoel, en dan zei ik, nou, kun je benoemen of het een kleur heeft. Ja, het is een beetje grijs-zwart. En is het hard of is het beweeglijk, wat gebeurt er als je het zou pakken? Gaat het dan indeuken, of beweegt het mee als rubber, of gaat het kapot als je het aanraakt? Hoe groot is het een heeft het gewicht? Kun je het lek breken, kun je het naast je neerleggen, of zit het aan je vast?²⁶

In fact, what Nieke does here, with these questions, is to initiate a first process of translation from the experiences, emotions and feelings of the participant towards their material qualities - a first step towards creating. My personal experience with my participant even extends Oosterling’s idea, in the sense that it is not necessarily about the exclusive sensitivity to my own medium/media as a music composer (think of instruments, sounds, melodies, sonic textures, and so on). In such a project, I feel that I need to be more open towards whatever kinds of materials emerge, but still with the same artistic curiosity in order to use a diversity of

²⁶ All quotes in this contribution that are not explicitly referenced come from interviews with the other artists of the project, which are included in the references at the end.

media and materials to (co-)create a work.²⁷ In a sense, I need to take an even-more-”not-knowing” position, than if I knew already what kind of work possibly to create, and with which kind of medium or media.²⁸

Marcel Dolman adds an interesting kind of curiosity in the context of his work with one of the three participants he worked with - a curiosity “for authenticity”.²⁹ In this encounter, Marcel felt as a “a kind of welcome visitor” who just has to listen to stories, without actually getting through to the person; keeping searching for “what someone moves or what doesn’t”. The participant kept telling the same kind of stories, whereas Marcel had the feeling there must be more to discover - without too much succes.³⁰ As an artist, Marcel is not only curious for materials or media, but also for (despite being a difficult concept) something authentic in the person with whom he is working. Something which really belongs to this person: “This is about you.” One might call it “to look for something really personal”.

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TRANSLATION INTO CREATING

An aspect that directly joins the notion of curiosity, – I mentioned it briefly after Nieke’s longer quote on the materiality of experiences – is the one of translation: What we all do in *In Search of Stories*, and related transdisciplinary co-creational projects, is to translate the materials, experiences of the participants – together with them – into artistic work/utterances, regardless if these works become objects, paintings, sounds, photographs or performances. As Tjallien puts it: “Het bracht me zoveel levenslust om te *vertalen* wat mensen, of hoe mensen hun leven... opnieuw vormgeven, of de mooie momenten eruit halen” (my italics).

²⁷ I understand “work” broadly as whatever artistic utterance is shaping/shaped, whether this is an object, a performance, sound, image or electronic media.

²⁸ Henny Dörr supports this point and acknowledges it in one of her interviews, also in relation to the other artists of the project:

“En dat vind ik zo bijzonder, dat we toch op de een of andere manier een groep kunstenaars hadden die veel verschillende competenties hadden, en ook veel verschillende vaardigheden, die niet alleen maar met de discipline te maken hadden.”

²⁹ See also Marcel Dolman’s visual essay in this book.

³⁰ From the original interview transcript: “Ik was een soort welkome gast.” Weinig vragen stellen. Weinig informatie over de persoon zelf, over “waar iemand van beweegt of waar iemand niet van beweegt. En dan wordt de ruimte gevuld met verhalen over hoe een orgel functioneert, en hoe dingen kunnen klinken. (...) Het transformeerde mij in iemand die dat vooral aanzag en aanhoorde. En bij iedere nieuwe ontmoeting dacht ik van, ik moet een nieuwe strategie verzinnen waardoor ik hem kan verleiden om iets anders te doen dat wat die doet. En dat is niet heel erg gelukt (lacht).”

So, the participants do not only share various experiences and materials, but offer them as something to think and work with in the co-creative process towards making an artistic work. This is, again, a crucial difference to conversations with doctors or psychologists, for example, as these don't necessarily *create* with what has been said.³¹ Poet and performing artist Kae Tempest addresses this in a wonderful, sensible, and vulnerable way:

Finishing work, is what gives the artist the humility necessary to begin again. Many, many people have ideas. But to go through the agony of finishing that idea, realising you are so ill-equipped that, despite your burning conviction, your deep creativity, your relentless practice and your natural talent, you have still failed. You made a good go of it.³²

The notion of 'translating' comes back in Nieke's thinking, too; It folds back to curiosity, and makes the (need for) curiosity as framed above even stronger: "In order to translate [any material] into an artistic utterance, you need quite a lot of, and detailed information - factual information, emotional information, who somebody is, how one feels, what someone thinks about things" (Nieke Koek).

This also introduces what might be called the *facilitation of a safe environment*, "which is kept open and organic, for as long as possible, to keep offering space to what happens in the now, and that this doesn't need to be a logical continuation of what we have done before" (Nieke Koek)³³ At the same time, however, Nieke acknowledges that it is necessary to reassure the participant that, despite the open process, they will come to a final result. Nieke puts it like this:

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³¹ I don't regard or mean any of these comparative observations as being judgmental, my aim is to signify differences between the professions/professionals, and to be specific about what I think artists actually do, and add to the field of care around the participant-patients.

³² Tempest 2020, p.77.

³³ Dutch original: "Ik hou het liefst zo een proces zo lang mogelijk veranderlijk en organisch. Ik, ruimte blijven geven aan dat wat er nu speelt, en dat dat niet per se een verlengstuk hoeft te zijn van wat we eerder hebben gedaan."

Je moet natuurlijk ook wel, dat is ook een vorm van veiligheid bieden, dat je zegt, ga jij maar gewoon een beetje zo, vlieg hier maar een beetje in rond, maar ik zorg dat er een landingsbaan gaat zijn, en ik ga je daar ook heen begeleiden, dat er netjes geland gaat worden.

In this sense, getting back to Kae Tempest, the artist is the one who finishes the work, and reassures the participant that this will actually happen, regardless how open and exploratory the co-creatie process is.

In summary, the point I like to make here is that the arts have to offer, through the approach of transdisciplinary co-creation, something quite specific to the field of healthcare and the work with patient-participants: First, a very particular kind of curiosity that has to do with materials, with forms, with the media artists work with. This does not necessarily need to be bound to the particular disciplines, but can be broader. What is crucial is the curiosity about materials. Second, the will, urgency and ability to turn this curiosity, the (shared) experiences and materials into a 'work', an artistic utterance in the broadest sense of the word. Both aspects, as two sides of the same coin, outline a crucial difference to other kinds of actors who surround the patient-participant, whether this is about family, friends, doctors, psychologists, oncologists or nurses: the kind of curiosity (the curiosity of 'how can we translate these experiences and these stories into something else?'), and its translation towards something that is *created*, the result of an artistic work.³⁴

³⁴ I don't mean do indicate any judgment with these observations and the analysis, as all kinds of curiosity have their place in the various relationships the participant-patients have with others. My intention is to foreground the difference and the specificity of what artists bring into these various relationships, and to show that art has something else to offer there, and something really meaningful next to what is already there around the patients.

THE WAY BACK. TIME TO GET BACK TO TIME

How to give shape to the process of translation, in time? Time, more specific the notion of spending time together, and the procedures and values entangled with the use of time, are crucial elements in processes of transdisciplinary co-creation. To achieve such translation and creation of artistic works, a considerable amount of time is needed, in a purely quantitative sense. This concerns the time in the studio, both with and without participants, and the time in-between artist-participant encounters, to be able to reflect, to let ideas and impressions sink in, and so on. As Nieke recalls:

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I really needed a lot of time, with each one of my four participants. En dat betekende zowel veel tijd in het atelier, dus dat ik bijvoorbeeld dacht, we gaan hier gewoon een halve dag, of een hele dag tijd voor nemen. En, maar ook in dat je er twee weken tussen moet laten zitten voor dat je elkaar weet ziet. Soms nog langer. En dat dat óók heel belangrijk is, dat je dingen kan laten indalen. Dus ik heb bijvoorbeeld twee trajecten, die hebben wel een jaar geduurd. Van eentje zit ik nu nog in het laatste staartje. En eentje heb ik gedaan in twee keer een week. In de eerste week ben ik naar hem toe gegaan, en daar in een Bed & Breakfast geslapen, vier dagen, waardoor we vier hele dagen, maar ook best lange dagen, met elkaar hebben gewerkt. En vervolgens is hij een keer teruggekomen naar Zaandam naar mijn atelier, dan hebben we daar drie dagen gewerkt. Ook lange dagen. Maar dus die hebben we, je zou kunnen zeggen dat we een periode van acht weken hebben samengeperst in twee keer een week.

Next to this, in first instance rather practical, one needs to ask: How much time does an artist take or need for being receptive for what-is, for who a participant/someone is? How much time in order to let that emerge which needs/wants to become material? In my own process, for example, quite a few conversations were necessary in order to carve out the topics that were essential for

being translated into a work - without yet knowing what kind of work this could become.

As being an element of the conceptual cloud of connectivity, the idea of ‘spending time together’ in order to find or develop meaningful connections sounds quite self-evident at first sight: We spend time together because of mutual interest, affinity, a thorough curiosity in each other; not because we need to arrive at a certain tangible product or end point, via an efficient process or plan, in a precisely defined time span. The point here is to spend time with each other *without* a precise plan, spending time that is not framed, but spent on a clear (common) ground, such as a context, a frame as the basis for a common understanding (such as the interest in each other’s discipline or profession), or, as in the case of *In Search of Stories*, the agreement to create an artistic work together.³⁵

Probably needless to say, these kinds and processes of spending time together hardly go fast or efficient, but rather, well... slow. They literally take time. In relation to the concept of slowness, philosopher Isabelle Stengers notes: “Slow, today, designates all those social movements that endeavour to escape what has been put forward in the name of efficiency, and discover that in this name many relations have been cut or destroyed, to be replaced by divisions and oppositions between contradictory interests”³⁶ It is telling how Stengers brings the notion of slowness in direct proximity to making connections, to relationality. She refers to movements such as slow food, slow fashion, and so on; all movements that favour a “more varied, richer, deeper, and better-integrated memory [that] will open up more sophisticated anticipatory capabilities”.³⁷ However, slowness in itself is not the point, but rather what slowness makes possible: Stengers continues to argue that “[t]hinking together and negotiating can not only open up new, mutually agreeable transactions, but might also become important and rewarding in themselves”).³⁸ The point of being

³⁵ As one might imagine, this stance can potentially cause tensions with medical or healthcare partners in such projects. In my experience, healthcare contexts are less used to open-ended processes, even less so with patients who have a terminal disease. This potential tension also goes in relation to treatment plans that typically have some kind of goal or end point - even if this end point is death.

³⁶ Stengers 2018, p.104.

³⁷ Cilliers 2006, p.3.

³⁸ Stengers 2018, p.104.

“rewarding in itself” directly relates to the urgency of spending time together that folds back onto itself: spending time together for its own sake, which produces a different kind of value - and work. In this sense and in the context of *In Search of Stories*, time can also be understood as a ‘vehicle’ for artistic curiosity, and the process of co-creative translation towards an artistic work. Time facilitates the possibility for thorough interest and curiosity, and at the same time, the other way round, artistic curiosity *needs* this kind (and amount) of time as a crucial prerequisite.³⁹

ON NOT KNOWING, PROVIDING SPACE FOR IT... THROUGH TIME

I like to mention the aspect of not knowing, as being important, and as something that needs to be given space, through time. Moments ‘in which one does not know’ require attention, often patience - and thus time. Time to go into these moments, to actually *be* in them and explore them. Henny discussed this with Silvia and Tjallien as well:

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HENNY: Er zijn ongetwijfeld momenten geweest dat je het even niet wist. Wat doe je dan [...]?

SILVIA: [...] er [zijn] momenten [...] die onaangenaam zijn, die oncomfortabel zijn. Waaronder bijvoorbeeld, je weet het even niet, of het is ook heel confronterend wat de ander inbrengt. Dus dat je daarop voorbereid bent, hoe ga je daarmee om.

TJALLIEN: En daarin speelt tijd...

HENNY: Tijd, dat betekent niet meteen een antwoord willen hebben, maar erop gaan zitten?

TJALLIEN: Ja en dus niet bezig zijn met een eindproduct, maar de tijd het laten doen. En dat is voor mij parallel geweest ook aan de vraag over contingentie, hoe ga je daar mee om? Door stilte, in ons proces was dát het vaak, en dan kwam er een handeling, of we gingen iets borduren. Dat was dan al iets wat we deden en waarvan we nog niet wisten hoe we verder zouden moeten. Of dat je beelden nog een keer opnieuw gaat schuiven.

³⁹ As a sidenote, I like to mention a few other elements that develop in such collaborations important for the discussion here: As a co-creative process develops, trust and ownership develop as well - which both take time and ask for a subtle sense of understanding how the connection is taking shape.

This conversation testifies to a strong relation between allowing for ‘not knowing’ to ‘be there’, to enter the co-creative process, and time. This might look counterintuitive (due to being non-efficient), as it means to resist seeing or experiencing material, and instantly know what to make of it, or having an idea in one’s imagination and simply finding the material to realise this idea. Allowing for not knowing means to look for a closer connection to the material to emerge, spending time with it - together - and co-creatively discovering what it might become, or mean.⁴⁰

Finally, the last and probably most confronting aspect is a perspective from which the entire project *In Search of Stories* started with, and which is constantly present: Our participants only have a limited time left to live; they are dying. Apart from the fact itself, which can potentially present a quite heavy weight on the process (and on the emotions of both participants and artists), it has a few consequences. In time, everything will end, potentially very soon. I am not so much interested in the pragmatic aspect of this, - we need to be finished before the end - but rather in how to work with the energy of the constant awareness that life will soon come to an end - and to provide a space for this in the co-creative process. Nieke Koek offers a wonderful view on this, which touches on a number of aspects discussed here:

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En het liefst zou ik dat bij iedereen doen, weet je wel, met elk proces. Dat je gewoon kan loslaten dat er een deadline is of zo, maar stiekem voel je natuurlijk dat er een keer iets af moet komen, maar vond ik het belangrijker om mee te kunnen gaan op de golfbewegingen van het proces, dan aan te sturen op een eindstation. En daar, dat is ook misschien wel interessant, want je weet dat je werkt met iemand die oog in oog is komen te staan met zijn eigen vergankelijkheid, met zijn einde, dus je wil niet de hele tijd over een einde praten.

⁴⁰ Despite being quite far into the text already, I want to acknowledge and to thank Henny Dörr for her editorial work and feedback on the text. This paragraph is an example of Henny spending time with my text, thinking through it and generously offering her thoughts on what might be added, changed, or elaborated more.

I read Nieke's quote as one way of acknowledging that co-creative processes in such a project cannot necessarily or easily be planned thoroughly or exactly (e.g., in the same way that a theatre production has a premiere scheduled even before starting with rehearsals). I don't mean to suggest any romantic ideal towards artistic creation and the time this needs with this. I don't see artists in a role of 'medium of inspiration', waiting for a moment 'when inspiration strikes', or anything like that. I see (professional) artists as professionals who are very much capable of working according to deadlines and are capable of "actually finishing" (see the earlier quote by Kae Tempest). But the process of creating and finishing a work in co-creation with patients in a project such as *In Search of Stories* is, I argue, of an entirely different order, as in most cases the collaboration does not happen between professionals but involves an emerging co-creatorship (which implies not creating a work *for* or *about*, but *with* someone) between a professional artist and a non-professional participant. Obviously, I don't mean to indicate any judgment with this, but rather that such processes imply a complexity that can only be approached with a kind of emergent sense of time. To just mention a few of the complexities: A participant will likely develop some sense of ownership,⁴¹ which brings both artist and participant in a process in which roles might be necessary to re-negotiate. This process also involves to 'train' or practice imagination, as we invite the participant to explore: "What is actually possible?" On a more practical note, participants at times need to take a break of several days or weeks because they are not healthy or strong enough to work (which can mean substantial insecurity for the artist if the participant will actually return); and if participants are strong enough, they might have other things to do, too: In the case of the participant I worked with, they might go on vacation at times (or multiple times), which can have consequences on the overall timeframe in which a work is created. Finally, the steps necessary in the collaboration are not always exclusively artistic; sometimes participants simply need to talk.

⁴¹ For a more in depth elaboration on the development of ownership, see Hübner 2017.

The complexities mentioned signify an important difference between practices in which an artist creates a work for someone, be it a patient, a care institution or a participant, in which the artist can shape one's process entirely by oneself, and a co-creative collaboration between artist and participant. As soon as one takes emergence serious as a parameter of shaping such a collaboration, one needs to acknowledge that this implies a certain unpredictability– within limits – regarding time

FINISHING THE WALK

(Start sound file 3) ⁴²

It is time to collect what comes up through reflecting on these pages, to observe what has passed, and what this has brought to this project, this kind of work. In the words of the participant I worked with, it is time to “slowly go back into the normal world.”⁴³ I like to spend the final paragraphs of this chapter with a brief revisiting of the topics that have passed throughout this ‘textual walk’. Throughout this chapter, I have traced a variety of terms – such as artistic connectivity, curiosity, and time – in order to come to valuable insights and understanding of our work as artists in transdisciplinary co-creations related to healthcare.

While the concept of artistic connectivity is not an activity or method in itself, but rather a sphere or quality in-between artist and patient, it is created and facilitated by certain behaviours or strategies. Two of them are artistic curiosity and spending time together (in the sense I described), offering two related perspectives on this transdisciplinary work: First, the notion of artistic curiosity, deeply embedded in the profession and practice of artists, is a crucial element in the co-creative process. In my experience, and this was strengthened by the conversations with my colleague-artists, it is this very particular kind of curiosity (which, by the way, can feel very light and obvious for an artist oneself) that makes the process of translation of the various conversations and experiences into an artistic work possible. This work, in turn, is also a carrier of this curiosity.

Second, time, and more specific the notion of spending time together, is essential to this work. This gets to the heart of the processes and the kinds of underlying values that facilitate connection. We need to stay alert for any misuse of the term – ‘quickly walk by and reconnect’ is not, really not, what is meant by it. In addition to this, the discussion on time offers a few hints to the

⁴² <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/shared/e2fc358dca3c7eazecd946a56f735c85>.

⁴³ From the score: Op de weg terug mag je je open stellen voor wat er in je en om je heen opkomt: aan gedachten, reflecties. [...] Je komt nu langzaam terug in de gewone wereld. Observeer het verschil in relatie met de Stilte die je zojuist wellicht hebt kunnen ervaren. De geluiden worden misschien harder, je hoort weer auto's of pratende mensen. Kom langzaam terug. En neem mee dat je altijd weer terug mag keren naar je innerlijke stilte. Het is er altijd, in het Hier en Nu.

practicalities of preparing such projects, particularly in relation to medical and healthcare partners: I believe we need to resist the often-present pressure on time, and make the need for time and open-endedness clear from the very beginning of designing projects such as *In Search of Stories*. This is where the immense value of the arts and artistic processes lie - not only for us as artists, but on the long run for the non-artistic partners as well.

In this sense, spending extended amounts of time with people who only have limited time left in their lives in order to co-create artistic works offers as a strong countermovement, and a statement for values that are largely underappreciated in a time in which capitalist values such as efficiency or speed are globally over-present. And once more, this is not about a romantic idea of spending the last bits of one's life with beautiful or touching things or the like. This project is not really about being a recipient: listening to beautiful music, visiting galleries or theatres for astonishing installations, paintings or performances. It is about *creating oneself*, about artist-participant collaborations, about processes of having conversations, discussing materials, associations, imagination, about making choices (sometimes hard and difficult ones), about experiencing which choices result in what kind of shapes, structures, sounds and experiences. About connecting to persons, to past and present experiences, and translating these into artistic works.

This is not about holding up to the myth of the artist and one's sacred and mysterious creation process, impossible to be planned. It is rather about acknowledging that this kind of co-creative artistic work *asks for time* to truly connect. Connectivity is a concept that indicates what 'truly connecting' can mean, and what values are encapsulated within the process of connecting. The final artistic work is then not so much the centre of what this is all about, but rather an outcome of, and a symbol for the time that has been spent together in order to create it.

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COLOFON

“When it’s all there”: From walking to artistic connectivity

This is a publication by HKU Press (HKU University of the Arts Utrecht and the professorship Expanding Artistic Practices)



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