



it is part XLII of an assemblage or: the art of noticing

studio documentation #2

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The problem was that we did not know whom we meant when we said "we."
- Adrienne Rich

What or who do we really mean when we say "we"? What does it mean to be a collective? For this Autumn Academy, we wanted to open up, deepen and expand the concept of collectivity by relating it to more socio-ecological issues of our time. We did that within the specific context of a museum. For three days we lived and worked intensively together, creating (temporary) relationships, connections and rhythms that we were able to map. In doing so, the program was not only theoretical, but also practical: 'form experiment and argument are an extension of each other', as Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing puts it.

We shared this experimental museum research setting, a non-hierarchical, mini-ecosystem with a group of fifteen students, a guest, the curator and several members of it is part of an ensemble. We stayed here together for a weekend. We read together, cooked, ate, walked, slept, woke up together, looked around and pondered the question of what and who we are talking about when we say "we". This staying and experimenting took place on several levels. In preparation, we put together a reader that acted as a theoretical framework, with texts and excerpts that touch on the issues above. These texts came from anthropology, philosophy, art theory, ecology and sociology, and were discussed collectively. We facilitated different places with materials: tabletops and trestles, cooking utensils, drawing utensils, textiles, cameras. This inventory acted as a proposal to which social, intellectual and practical responses could be made. We brought in different *potentialities*, both tangible and intangible, facilitating 'possibilities'. This acted as an open invitation to explore collectivity in a broader context.

In her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing asks: what and who is connected to what and who? How are relationships and relations in the world constituted and what is its future? Non-human actors are currently claiming an increasing role within thinking about the organization of the world. By exploring its premises and terminology, we wanted to examine the ecosystem that surrounds us as diversification within which intellectual pluralism emerges and through which other focal points and paradigms could emerge. Can we conceive collectivity much more ambivalently, as a rhizome? not as a horizontal, democratic, equal social structure, but much more capricious and open? Can we actively resist the tendency to define and fix identity? During this weekend, we wanted to experiment with identities and forms of living and working together that are 'becoming', transformative, fragmented, experimental, in which new extensions could constantly emerge, in ever new constellations.

In the book Tsing discusses what she coined *the art of noticing*. For her, this is an essential concept to provide insight into what can grow on what she calls 'the ruins of capitalism'. This noticing underlies 'fruitful entanglements' and 'assemblages'. The art of noticing, which, as she says, can be decisive, was a guiding principle for this weekend. This guidance contributed to a precarious but highly potential situation in which something could grow, could become. What could grow, could emerge, we gave space, showed, gained insights about that. How a collective functions is uncertain and we have 'noticed' and 'recorded' this process of becoming. For us, noticing is within this constellation a form of knowledge production. By initiating a collective process, this noticing became activated and self-sufficient in a fruitful way. A process took effect that produced (knowledge) almost naturally, but directionless. A form of thinking emerged, an ongoing conversation. The receptivity to ask questions (at the institutional level) about collectivity and its scope was visible internationally, and this summer academy can be a benchmark within this development.

Doing this experiment in the context of a museum also raised other specific questions. A museum is usually a place to exhibit and archive art. The museum has specific conditions. By going there to cook, eat, sleep, by using the museum as merely a place for research, as an academy, we raised questions about its functioning. We wanted to make it open, fluid and vulnerable, also in relation to an audience. In her book *Artist at Work. Proximity of Art and Capitalism*, Bojana Kunst writes:

The social thus produced is precarious, fleeting and affective, and it does not have a belonging, enduring, material or local character. This is the relational social that constantly improves, rehearses and develops the ways in which our affective and linguistic behaviors can be shared, negotiated, played and violated. This is also in accord with the shifts in the understanding of the museum's role in relation to the public – where the public is rethought as a multitude: "We do look at art, inhabit the spaces of art in various forms of collectivity, and in the process we produce new forms of mutuality, of relations between viewers and spaces rather than between viewers and objects. Beyond the shared categories of class, or taste or political or sexual orientations, another form of 'WE' is produced."

Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens is in terms of space, size and scale very suitable for such a study. The garden and rural surroundings could become part of the research, as well as the history in which both the environment and collectivity play an emphatic role.

This project was an initial exploration. Outcomes of this weekend could be new proposals, new questions, new experiments. And it is important that the project can be followed up. At another time, in another place, in another context. Its form may be a new edition: a public debate, a publication, an exhibition, a teaching program.





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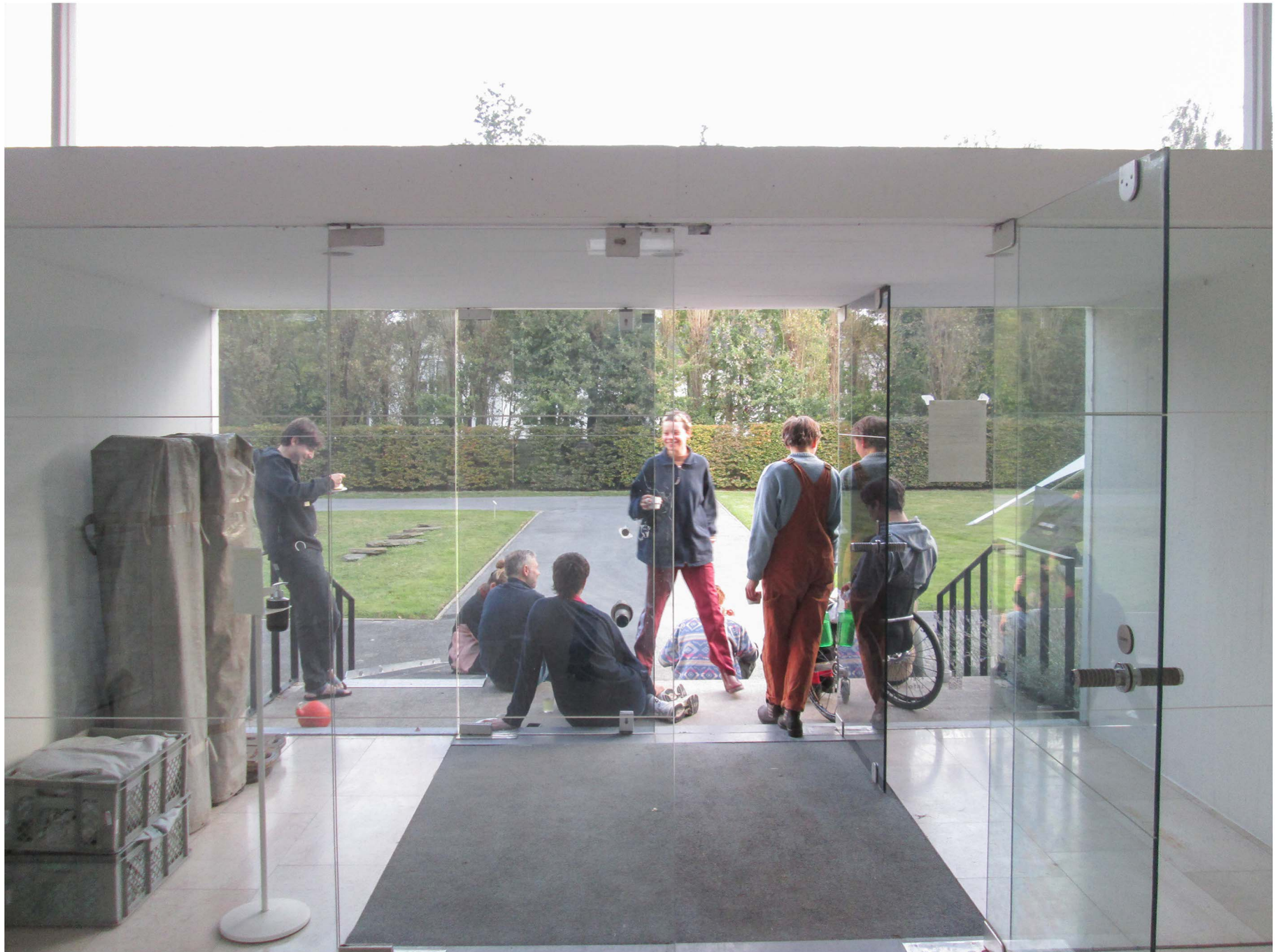
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educational program 'autumn academy', Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens, Sint-Martens Latem

For three days we lived together, we cooked, slept, ate together, we performed, dug holes, read and discussed texts, did exercises, made campfires, prints, drawings, clothes and much more. There was magic in the air.

Marcia Liu
Loran van de Wier
Chrys' Amaya Michailidis
Maxim Ventulé
Bas van den Hurk
Jochem van Laarhoven
Carmela Michailidis
Isabel Burr Raty
Linde Roza
Julie van Riel
Milan Veraart
Elvira Mulkay
Arno Mertens
Imme van Zuilekom
Hinde de Dreu
Marina Cañada Atucha
Vera Goldhoorn
Anton Van den Steen
Ieva Ratniece
James Van Cauwenberghe
Kobe Ypers
Emile Vereecken
Edo Maas
Nausikaä De Nil

dates:
6, 7 & 8 October 2023

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Laurens Otto
Museum Dhondt-Dhaenens
An-Valerie Vandromme
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