Shifting the Focus: Intra-acting with Diverse Agencies and Happy Objects in a Day Center of Disability Services

LIISA JAAKONAHO

Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki

liisa.jaakonaho@uniarts.fi

ABSTRACT

The article is based on the author's experiences of facilitating creative movement groups in a day center of disability services. Through artistic and performative research, she investigates different forms and possibilities of agency in and around the movement groups. She draws on theoretical perspectives from critical disability studies, feminist new materialism and affect studies, particularly focusing on Sara Ahmed's (2010) notion of the "happy object," to challenge the human-centric view of arts education and artistic agency. She proposes a shift of focus in arts education from individual agents to the intra-action of diverse agencies in art making, teaching, and learning. She calls for more nuanced reflection on arts education practices in diverse contexts.

In this article, I reflect on the embodied experiences and material-discursive conditions of the dance-based, creative movement groups I facilitated in a disability services day center in Helsinki, Finland in 2013-2017. Now after seven years I have enough temporal distance to be able to reflect on the affective relationality that was at play in these movement sessions, across human and non-human agencies. The data I have gathered is not time-bound, as it could be realized in the same form today. However, the temporal distance has helped me as a researcher to develop a clearer standpoint and approach in relation to it. Based on my methodological choices, experiences, and observations, my aim in this article is to articulate what different forms and possibilities of agency this practice brings forth, and how this perspective can inform the way we understand the possibilities of arts education to recognize and foster diverse artistic agencies in post-anthropocentric times. I describe how my ethical reflections and methodological experiments at the day center began to shift my focus from a human-centric approach to acknowledging the intra-action (Barad, 2003) of everything that was present in and around my embodied encounters with the participants of the movement group.

The work conducted in this article aims to shift the focus towards material elements at the day center, and their affective significance, which I interpret through Sara Ahmed's (2010) notion of the 'happy object.' I focus on how the material objects that were present in the movement group carried affective meanings, and how these meanings were moving and performing beyond conventional understanding of the connection between material objects, human agencies, and affects that are embodied as joy and happiness. My aim is also to shed new light on the possibilities of artistic research in social care contexts, which in my opinion have not been explored and investigated thoroughly yet (see Laukkanen et. al. 2021). The article proposes a critically affirmative approach to the possibilities of artistic research in the context of social care and brings the epistemological framework of artistic research into dialogue with contemporary discourses and conceptualizations of artistic practices and arts education in health and social care contexts. The article is part of the written commentary of my doctoral research at the Performing Arts Research Centre, Theatre Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki.

The day center where I facilitated creative movement groups is part of the inclusion and employment services of a Finnish private non-profit organization that provides support for adults with intellectual disabilities. The activity took place in the evenings as part of the leisure time activities program, and the participants came from the housing services of the same organization. In facilitating the sessions, I applied my skills as a dance pedagogue, dance movement therapist, and movement practitioner. The exercises involved improvisation, use of imagery and symbolic expression, verbal and nonverbal expression of one's own associations and ideas, initiating movements, and mirroring others' movements. We also used some objects in the movement explorations, such as balls and stretchy fabrics. The sessions always started and ended with a moment of sharing experiences verbally or nonverbally.

In 2017 I continued the weekly sessions during a two-month research period and documented and reflected on the sessions in multimodal ways, including video, photography, and performative writing. These methodological experiments were part of a creative process that led to an artistic outcome of the research – a performance installation at the New Performance Turku festival in 2018. Parts of the material that were produced through the methodological experiments – performative texts, video, and photographs – were exhibited within this formally examined artistic part of my research. I describe the process and outcome of the artistic part in another article of my doctoral project (Jaakonaho, forthcoming 2024). In this article I focus on the material-affective conditions of the day center and articulate findings from my embodied research practice in this context.

All the seven participants of the research project had been attending the movement group for at least one year. They were all adults of different ages, between late twenties and early sixties. All of them attended the group without personal assistants, and none were wheelchair users. They were all able to verbalize that they understood that I was going to document and reflect on our sessions for the purposes of my research, and all of them, or their legal trustees, when appropriate, gave informed consent to their involvement in the research project.

In the following sections of the article, I first introduce theoretical perspectives from critical disability studies and new materialist feminist theory, articulating how disability can be seen as a posthuman condition (Goodley, Lathom & Runswick Cole, 2014). This is followed by description of my

methodological approach, and artistic experiments, through which I started to shift the focus from human agents towards the intra-action of diverse agencies. Then, I scrutinize the affective materiality of the context, bringing my personal embodied observations and findings into a dialogue with Fran Trento's (2020) notion of the "prototype space" and Sara Ahmed's (2010) notion of "happy object." Finally, I articulate how the findings of the research propose a shift of focus in arts education, from the centrality of human agents into a perspective that also acknowledges non-human and material elements, resources, tools, and environments in and through which art making, teaching, and learning take place.

Disability as a Posthuman Condition

The methodological choices as well as the research interest of this study are informed by contemporary discourses of critical disability studies and new materialist feminist theory. Critical disability studies is a field of scholarship, which originally stemmed from the groundbreaking initiatives of disability activists in the 1960s civil rights era in the United States (e.g. Davis, 2016; Shakespeare, 2018). Whereas traditionally disability had been seen as a personal tragedy based on medical 'facts', the social model of disability claimed that it is the environment that *disables* people. Disability activists insisted that disability is not a direct result of a medical impairment; instead, it is a social phenomenon. The social and material environment is designed and built for people that fit into the norms of an abled citizen, therefore the cause of disability is not to be found in the individual body, but in the interaction between the individual and the environment. The social model of disability has been revolutionary in the ways disability is understood and investigated (e.g. Shakespeare, 2013). According to the contemporary multi-factorial way of understanding disability, it is a complex phenomenon that is constructed at biological, psychological, and social levels. The bio-psycho-social model of disability considers all the multiple factors that play a role in how disability is constructed (Shakespeare, 2018). In other words, disability is a phenomenon that is affected by both human and non-human factors, such as material environments, social structures, and norms, as well as biological and psychological features.

When reflecting on my encounters with the diverse agents and agencies in the day center, I began to understand and sense my own agency differently. Over the years that have passed since the embodied practice with the movement group, I have developed a conceptual and theoretical reflection, which has enabled me to become more aware of my vulnerability and dependence on the environment, noticing how I am abled by the material, social, and discursive structures of the society. As I've come to understand, we all depend on technologies and cultural and societal systems that enable and sustain our living, health, work, relationships, and cultural and political activities.

Many contemporary scholars of feminist theory see agency as interdependent, relational, vulnerable, and entangled with social and material structures. According to Sara Ahmed (2000), "Bodies materialize in a complex set of temporal and spatial relations'' (p. 40). Judith Butler (2016) points out that to be able to move, we all need a supportive environment and set of technologies that enable our movements: as bodily subjects we are dependent on social relations and networks of support. For Rosi Braidotti (2013), the post-human subject is a "complex assemblage of human and non-human, planetary and cosmic, given and manufactured" (p. 159). Developing on Braidotti's thinking, Goodley, Lathom & Runswick Cole (2014) argue that "disability is the quintessential posthuman condition: because it calls for new ontologies, ways of relating, living and dying" (p. 151). People with disabilities have particular and unique inter-relationships with the world, specifically its cultural, professional, disciplinary, and political practices and networks. A key feature of these inter-relationships is interdependence with other humans, as well as with technologies and other non-human entities. Whilst people with disabilities will continue to fight to be recognized as humans (in the humanist sense, and in terms of equal human rights), they enact forms of activism, art and relationality that push us all to think imaginatively and critically about the forms and possibilities of agency in post-anthropocentric times (Goodley et. al., 2014). The way Goodley et. al. (2014) describe the interdependence and inter-relationships between humans and non-human entities resembles Karen Barad's (2003) notion of intra-action. As a posthuman condition, disability appears to emerge in intra-action with the environment. Barad (2003) developed her concept of intra-action as an alternative to interactivity. Whereas interaction assumes that the entities are already defined and distinct before they interact, intra-action implies that the entities are co-constituted through their relations and entangled agencies

between human and non-human entities. Intra-action challenges the human-centric view of the world and emphasizes relationality and interdependence (Barad, 2003).

Shifting the Focus through Methodological Choices

In the beginning of the research project, there were many methodological questions to reflect on: How could documentation and reflection on the pedagogical situations be done in a way that would do justice to the quality of the encounters, within their socio-material context? How could methodological questions be approached creatively, whilst remaining consistent in the embodied ethics of the practice? I approached these methodological questions through artistic and performative research. Artistic research is a methodological and epistemological paradigm, which is rooted in artistic, embodied, experimental, and performative practices of artists and arts educators (e.g. Borgdorff, 2012; Hannula et al., 2014; Varto, 2018). Artistic research can be seen as part of a broader transformation in academia, which fosters "non-discursive knowledge forms, unconventional research methods and enhanced means of documentation and presentation" (Borgdorff & Schwab, 2014, p. 13). The methodological paradigm of performative research can be seen as another vein of this transformation (Østern et al., 2021). Performative research processes emerge through constant negotiations and entanglements across the material, social, and discursive planes – knowledge is seen as a fluid and complex process of creation, involving also more-than-human agents (Østern et al., 2021). In other words, the intra-action of all the human and non-human agents affects the situations of inquiry and knowledge production.

Because my interest is in ethics, I felt that all my methodological choices were ethically charged and had the potential to problematize the situation in which I, as someone who currently identifies as an abled person, was acting in the privileged position of an academic researcher in a set-up which involved disabled participants. The situation was asymmetrical, and I did not see an easy way to overcome this asymmetry (see Jaakonaho, forthcoming 2024). My aim was to make the ethical questions, concerns, and tensions tangible and visible through my methodological choices. I wanted to explore the momentary qualities of the interactions as embodied, and situated, ethically

significant potentialities. In this thinking, I am informed by feminist care ethics (e.g. Noddings, 1986; Sevenhujsen, 1998; Tronto, 1993); an approach to moral philosophy, which sees moral choices as situated and embodied, rather than aiming to find universal moral rules or principles. At the same time, I was aware of the very concrete ethical questions around participation and participants' self-determination and followed through a process of acquiring informed consents from each participant (or their legal trustee, when appropriate), research permit from the organization, and an ethical statement from The Ethics Committee of the Helsinki and Uusimaa Hospital District before beginning the research practice.

My initial methodological experiments included performative writing, as I was aiming to find ways of languaging the situation that depicted the complexity of the situation and the embodied experiences. According to Pelias (2014), performative writing is writing from lived experience, based on the author's personal history and world view, while preserving the complexity of experience and without attempting to reach abstraction. As one performative writing experiment, I wrote a text, which describes my journey from the university to the day center and my preparations before the participants arrive:

> *I get on the bus, leaving at 4.11.*

> *On the way there I feel a bit sick, but not sick enough to cancel our meeting, so I'm on my way.*

> *On the way there I feel OK, I'm happy to come and see you again.*

> *I feel tired.*

> *I think about a seminar I've just been in.*

> *I try to forget about the seminar.*

> *I think about something that happened.*

> *I think about someone I know.*

> *I think about you.*

> *I think about what happened in our meeting last time.*

I get off the bus and walk to the place where we meet.

The walk takes about five minutes.

I walk through a housing estate. The houses are painted with bright colors.

The houses are white and grey.

They are new houses, some of them are still being built.

I ring the doorbell and wait.

> *(...)*

There are two tables in the middle of the room. I push them against the wall, to make some space.

I organize five, six, seven chairs in a circle.

I drink some water.

I eat an apple.

I eat chocolate.

I check my phone. I check facebook.

I continue reading an article on my laptop.

I don't do anything, I just sit there, waiting.

I rush around trying to get everything ready on time.

> *(...)*

I am not sure if you're coming today. You are late and I'm afraid you might not come.

I hope you'll come. It's important to me that you come.

I hope that you don't come today. I'm tired, if you don't come, I can go home and rest.

The doorbell rings. It keeps ringing, like someone is pressing the button repeatedly or holding it down.

I walk through the space to the hallway, to let you in.

To capture the material elements of the space, I took photographs (see figure 3) as a way of shifting the focus from human agents to also paying attention to the material agencies of the setting. I also brought a video camera to each session, which I placed on a table in the room to document the intra-actions of the sessions. After the sessions I sometimes stayed in the space and experimented with the camera, turning the researcher's gaze to my own embodied being, and exploring intra-actions between the camera, my body, and material elements of the space (see figure 1). Fragments of this video material were exhibited within the artistic outcome of the research.

Afterwards, I sat with my laptop, plugged into the hard drive where all the video material was stored, watching the videos closely, and writing from what I saw and remembered, aiming to also describe the non-human elements that affected the situation (see the excerpt on page 47). Aiming to depict what I saw on the video and remembered from the experiences, I continued the 'transcript' in the format of earlier performative writing experiment – not aiming to capture what I saw and remembered chronologically and systematically, but adding sentences between the already written lines, to make the plurality and diversity of the situation tangible. The 'transcript' became a kind of horizontal map, rather than a chronological description, as this excerpt shows:

> *You need help taking your shoes off, so I help you.*
>
> *I open the shoelaces, then I help pulling your foot out of the shoe.*
>
> *You don't need help, so you take your shoes off yourself.*
>
> *You need help, but I'm busy helping someone else, so you must wait.*
>
> *You don't want to take your shoes off, so you leave them on.*

When describing the participants' behavior, I chose to always use the pronoun *you*. This way I shifted the focus from individual participants to the interaction between the different agents. Through this performative choice, the plurality of the agents
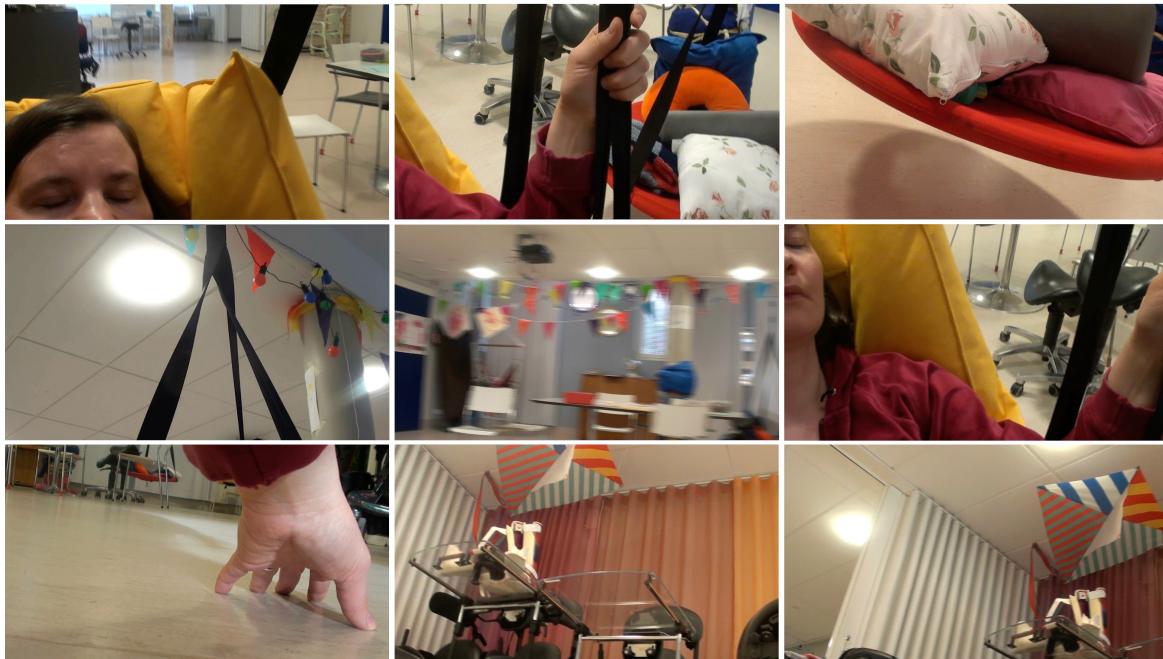
Figure 1. Video stills from artistic experiments after a movement group at the day center. Image: Liisa Jaakonaho.

that constituted the other, the *you,* was blurred. Although in the embodied situations I was very aware of everyone's unique presence, my research interest was not in individual agents, but in *agencies* – in the spaces and materialities across and in between the human and non-human elements of the situation. The choice of the pronouns also highlights the relationship between *you* and *I* and makes my own situated and subjective position visible.

The way I chose to 'transcribe' the situation was inspired by the methodological approach of situational analysis (SA). In situational analysis, to break down epistemological hierarchies, everything present in the situation of research is placed in a horizontal zone, attending carefully to differences and complexities, and taking non-human elements into analytic account (Clarke, 2005). I did not choose to adopt and apply SA as a method of data analysis in its full format. Instead, I saw it as a methodological inspiration, which supported the way I started seeing all the elements and data of my research in a horizontal zone. As a methodological experiment, I made a 'messy map' based on the video documentation and my memories from one movement session at the day center (see figure 2). The map includes various elements: objects, acts, qualities, themes, and affects, among other things that were present in and around our embodied inter-actions, intra-actions, and conversations. I placed

these elements in a random and 'messy' way on one surface. Making the map helped me dismantle the conventional, human-centric hierarchies of the situation.

The Day Center as a 'Prototype Space'

It's quiet in the space where we meet, no one is there yet. There are seven white chairs with metal legs, organized in a circle. A larger gap between two of the chairs, large enough to fit in one more chair. A red bag on the floor, next to one of the chairs. Two windows with open blinds. A door with a window, a green emergency exit sign above it. Two decorative mobiles made of tree branches, with small paper lanterns hanging from them. A cluster of wheelchairs. A blue sliding door of the toilet half open, yellowish light inside. White floor, the light reflecting on it. White ceiling, seven round lamps with bright white light. Shelves with colorful boxes of games, something that looks like books. A desk with a computer on it. Something colorful on the wall. More chairs in the background, some of them piled together. A white round table with one round metal leg. A round pillar covered with maps in the middle of the space, connecting the floor and the ceiling. A white sliding door connecting the room and the

hallway, slightly open. Humming and voices in the distance. Voices getting louder. Keys clicking. People walking into the room. [An excerpt from the video 'transcript' of the situation in the beginning of a movement session in the day center]

Shifting my focus from human agents to also acknowledging the non-human agencies of the day center, I saw an interesting combination of institutional and clinical neutrality, brightly colored soft materials, technological devices, and handmade objects (see figures 1 and 3). Aesthetically, there was an intriguing contrast between what appeared as clinical or institutional; the white and grey floors and walls, the empty corridors, the black and silver plastic and the metal of technology, and what appeared as 'fun' or homely; the colorful printed wallpapers, pillows, blankets and toys, various handmade art and craft objects. This contrast can be seen to represent the institutional framework, which I associate with anxiety, control, and discipline, as opposed to the embodied and playful, joyous encounters that took place in activities such as the movement group. The 'institutional' elements and qualities of the space reminded me that this was a place which people accessed through a process of disabling, medicalization, normalization, and exclusion. Against this backdrop, the fun and colorful elements created an affective atmosphere of warmth, joy, and humor, which was also embodied in the movement sessions, as I will describe in the last section of this article.

The contrast between the different elements of the space, and my methodological choice of shifting the focus to the environment, can also be interpreted through the notion of *inclusion*. The day center is part of the inclusion services of the disability services organization, which aims to support the equality and self-determination of people with intellectual disabilities. For many people, these services provide invaluable social contacts, and they can lower the threshold of attending mainstream activities. However, questions around the possibilities of inclusion are ambivalent and complex (see e.g., Laes, 2017). Several scholars have critically scrutinized the way inclusion presupposes 'bringing something' into the center, including those assigned to being 'outside' by others who are 'inside' (e.g. Biesta, 2009, Graham & Slee, 2008; Slee & Allan, 2001). Through my methodological choices, I aimed to turn my researcher's gaze away from what was 'in the center', obvious or pre-given, and see what was in the periphery.

The day center looked different every time I entered it: Furniture had been moved, and new artwork, crafts and seasonal decorations had been hung on the ceiling and walls. After our sessions, the space looked slightly different again, as we had reassembled it to accommodate our interactions, and engaged with the elements of the space. Drawing from neurodiversity, queer studies, and new materialism, Fran Trento (2020) introduces the notion of a *protype space* as a new model of inclusive space in the context of higher education, which considers also the non-human materialities and their agencies. They argue that the neurodiverse framework must recognize that human and non-human socialities are intertwined. Developing on social anthropologist Alberto Corsín Jiménez's (2013) term 'prototyping', Trento (2020) points out that facilitating environments for non-neurotypical body-minds requires us to disturb architectural and discursive normalcy, enabling non-typical modalities of self-presentation, questioning the primacy of the spoken language, and including multisensorial inputs that can be reassembled again and again. In prototyping, agency is not understood unidirectionally; there is a reciprocal and mutually affecting relationship between the material world and social relationships (Trento, 2020).

In light of Trento's thinking, it is interesting to consider whether the day center can be seen as an example of prototype space. According to my observations, the day center included multisensorial materials and elements, and it could be reassembled to accommodate diverse needs and activities. However, it also included elements that can be seen to represent the normalcy of a social care institution: the white and grey floors and walls, the bright lights, and empty corridors. Also, I took part in the production of normalcy: For the movement sessions I often adjusted the space in a rather normative way, placing chairs in a circle for our conversations and moving them to the sides of the room to make space for movement. In my mind these changes were meant to ensure physical safety, and to make our human-to-human communication more accessible. As I saw it, there would have been a risk of someone stumbling and hurting themselves, if the chairs and tables were left in the middle, and the circle formation enabled us all to see and hear each other better. Although in the actual movement interactions the space and its elements were intra-acting across human and non-human agencies, the space probably could have been arranged and used in much more imaginative and non-normative ways. As I see it now, in my artistic and methodological
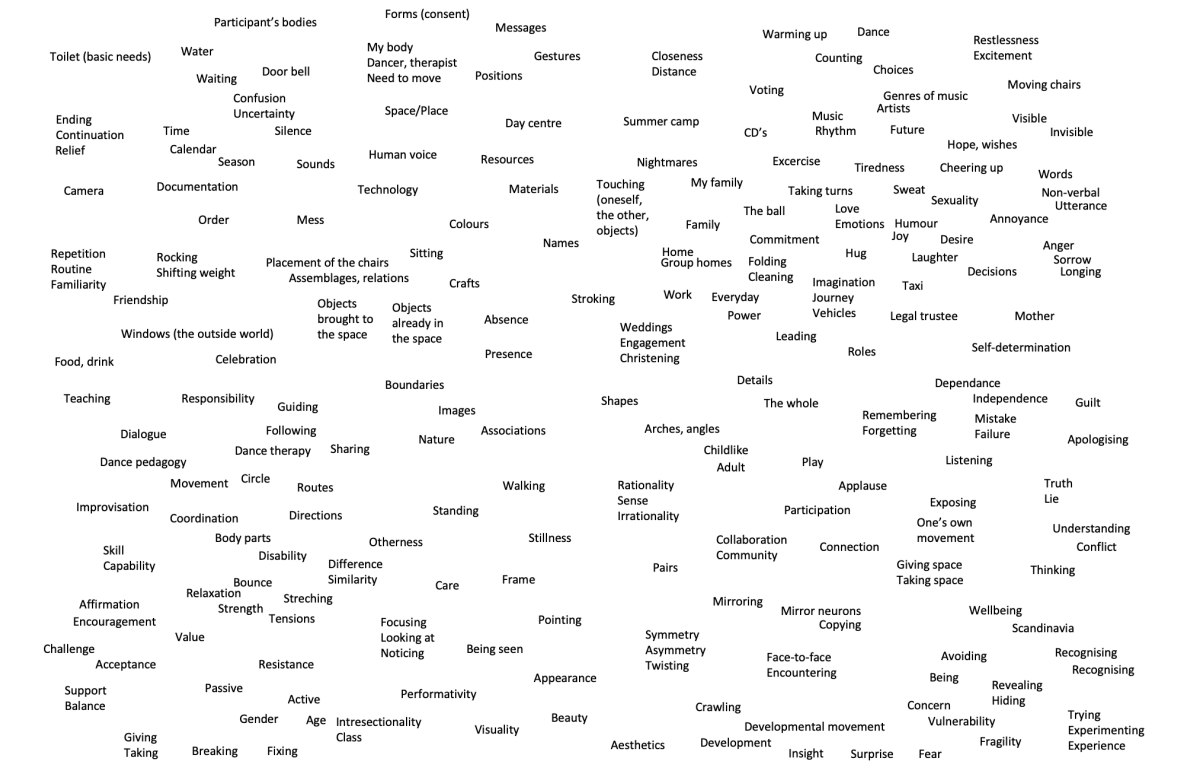
Figure 2. A "messy map" of the various elements and themes that were present in one movement session at the day center. Image: Liisa Jaakonaho.

Figure 3. Photographs from the day center. Image: Liisa Jaakonaho.

experiments after the sessions, (see figure 1), I reached a more reciprocal and creative relationship with the materiality of the space. It is interesting that when I was the only human agent in the space, it felt safer to engage with the camera and other spatial and material elements in a creative and non-normative way. However, in the interactions with the participants, there was a different kind of affective relationship with material objects, which I will describe in the following part of this article.

Material agents and happy objects

In the movement sessions we often used objects, such as balls and stretchy fabrics to engage in interactions and initiate movement. We often started in a circle, passing a ball around. Holding the ball, each participant expressed how they were feeling, and shared experiences from the past week. In the movement explorations, we sometimes used massage balls, rubbing them on the floor with the soles of our feet in different shapes and forms. At the end of the session, we sometimes moved with a large stretchy fabric, so that each participant was holding one side of the fabric in the air. Sometimes we also placed one or two balls onto the fabric and tried to keep the balls on the fabric as long as possible, whilst keeping the fabric moving. Another ending ritual that many participants enjoyed involved using the stretchy fabric to get a 'hug' so that group members held the fabric, wrapped it around someone (who had expressed their willingness for this), and gently pulled the fabric around this person's torso to create a bodily sensation of being hugged with the material. In this hug the physical contact between the participants was mediated by the fabric. Several participants could take part in the act of giving a hug, and the one who was being hugged could simultaneously feel embraced by the fabric and by other participants. These interactions, and seeing how much the participants enjoyed them, made me reflect on the way disability brings forth non-normative ways of engaging with the environment (see Yergeau, 2018).

In our movement interactions the material objects and elements were in a key role: Their specific qualities and performative and material agencies affected and mediated our embodied experiences. The interactions often started with us manipulating objects in a specific way. This manipulation became a reciprocal play between the objects and bodies, when objects' specific qualities – the stretchiness of the fabric, the bounciness and rollability of the ball

– responded to our movements, sometimes in unexpected ways. This unexpectedness often delighted and amused us, as this excerpt highlights:

I put my foot on a small massage ball and ask you to put your foot there also. I ask everyone to put their feet on the same ball. "Pile of toes", I say. Then I suggest that the one whose foot is at the bottom will bring it to the top. When my foot is at the bottom and I pull it out, my sock comes off and stays under the pile. "My sock got stuck there", I say. You laugh. We continue the game, but you find it hard to keep your balance. "Well, it was an experiment", I say. "It happened that the sock came off, you say", grinning. You start clapping your hands together, like you're giving applause." Then we kick the balls away from the circle, towards the walls. "Fun, fun", you say loudly and clap your hands again, laughing, "This is fun!" I start taking jumpy steps backwards, and then forwards. You follow me, so our circle gets bigger first and then smaller. When we are close to each other, I say "let's stay here, in the small circle". We stay in the small circle, doing small jumpy steps. You laugh. "It's good that you find this fun", I say, smiling. "Fun", you reply.

The participants often expressed and verbalized joy, happiness, and enthusiasm: They smiled, laughed, and spontaneously uttered words such as 'fun' and 'nice'. This made me consider what meanings happiness and joy carry in this context, and how they are constructed. The objects that were passed around, held, and played with in the sessions can be seen to carry affective meanings that were attached to everything that the sessions represented: the expectations, projections and desires, joy, happiness, social inclusion, creativity, and wellbeing.

Ahmed (2010) has contributed to the field of affect theories with her notion of *happy objects*. Affect theories emerged in 1990s in the social sciences and humanities, as many theorists became interested in experiences and phenomena that are not limited to human sensibility and that fall outside of the dominant paradigm of representation (e.g. Clough, 2008; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). Ahmed (2010) problematizes our conception of happiness and what constitutes the 'good life.' She argues that certain ideas and objects are perceived as happy objects that contain the promise of future happiness. For Ahmed (2010), these happy objects demarcate the kind of life we should strive for: Happiness becomes tied to acquiring the right or

proper objects and unhappiness to anything that deviates from this norm.

The material objects that we played with in the movement interactions were always in motion: They were passed around, thrown, stretched, swung by, wrapped, and rolled around. They were not normative 'happy objects' that could be possessed, frozen, or fixed in place. They could only be momentarily grasped, and their main function was to create moving connections, in which happiness and joy were emerging as affective resonances between different agents and agencies. As Ahmed (2010) writes, "We can value happiness for its precariousness, as something that comes and goes, as life does" (p. 199). In the movement sessions our interactions between human and non-human agencies highlights this precariousness and proposes a shift of focus from normative human happiness, which is based on owning or seeking to own objects, towards a post-human happiness that emerges from moments of letting go and allowing objects to connect us and play with us.

Through analyzing interviews of personnel of health and social care institutions, Laukkanen, Colliander and Teikari (2017) examine the values attached to culture projects that aim to make art and culture accessible in these contexts. Following disability studies scholar Tanya Titchkosky (2011), they see accessibility as an interpretation of relations between humans and the environment they live in. According to Laukkanen et. al. (2017), promoting accessibility in social care contexts is built on biased expectations; a promise of something good, which positive emotions are attached to and imprinted on, including social and cultural capital. This phenomenon can be understood through Ahmed's (2010) notion of the happy object: The accessibility of art and culture can be seen as something that offers a promise of access to society (Laukkanen et. al., 2017).

Through the critical lens of Ahmed's thinking, further developed by Laukkanen et. al., the movement sessions can be seen as happy objects. It is not simply that the sessions *were* fun and what we did together straight-forwardly *created* the joy, but the meanings, promises and expectations that were attached to the encounters and intra-actions manifested as ways of connecting with others, feeling better, being active – things that according to a normative idea of 'good life' make us happy. In other words, the affects that were embodied as joy and happiness cannot be understood simply as an effect of this activity, but they emerge as an effect of a material-discursive network of beliefs, structures, and practices. However, in our concrete, embodied and material encounters, happy objects were on the move, and at least momentarily we reached a sense of happiness and joy that was not attached to normative human values, patterns, and beliefs.

Conclusion: Shifting the Focus in/to Arts Education

In this article I have discussed and reflected on my methodological choices, experiences, and observations in and around the movement sessions that I facilitated in the day center of disability services. I have reflected on the forms and possibilities of agency that my research has brought forth, and considered how my observations and insights may shed light on the possibilities of arts education in post-anthropocentric times. I have described how I shifted the focus from individual agents to the intra-action (Barad, 2013) of diverse agencies that were present in the situations of research and shown examples of data that highlight this shift. In my methodological experiments I started with a first-person perspective, performatively languaging relational situations between *I* and *you*. As my research progressed, I started paying more and more attention to material conditions of the day center, including non-human agencies that were present in the situations of the research.

The articulation of the findings of my research shows that paying more attention to non-human agencies, and their intra-actions with human agents, can highlight complex processes of meaning-making and value creation and help us understand affective, reciprocal, and ethical dimensions of arts activities. Based on this articulation, I propose that in arts education we should shift our focus from the centrality of human agents into a perspective that also acknowledges material elements, resources, tools, and environments in and through which art making, teaching, and learning take place. This shift calls us to problematize conventional and taken-for-granted practices in arts education, rethink the boundaries and definitions of art and education, and commit to a more critical and nuanced reflection on our presumptions, expectations, possibilities, and implications of our practices in diverse contexts. We should also continue to problematize and disrupt normative understandings of artistic agency, and pay more attention to embodied situations, material arrangements, and complex

intra-actions that are at play in artistic-pedagogical situations, within their specific socio-material environments. This way we can hopefully make more space for diverse others, reaching towards more inclusive and less human-centric conceptions of art, and 'happier', more sustainable practices and ways of understanding, facilitating, and fostering diverse artistic agencies in post-anthropocentric times. I hope that future research in arts education will continue to scrutinize specific and situated experiences and material-discursive arrangements, radically re-thinking how we understand artistic agency in educational, rehabilitative, and recreational settings.

References

Ahmed, S. (2000). *Strange encounters: Embodied others in post-coloniality*. Routledge.

Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Duke University Press.

Barad, K. (2003). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 28*(3), 801–831. https://doi.org/10.1086/345321

Biesta, G. (2009). Sporadic democracy: Education, democracy, and the question of inclusion. In M. Katz, S. Verducci, & G. Biesta (Eds.), *Education, democracy, and the moral life* (pp. 101–112). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-8626-7_8

Borgdorff, H. (2012). *The conflict of the faculties: Perspectives on artistic research*. Leiden University Press.

Borgdorff, H., & Schwab, M. (2014). *The exposition of artistic research: Publishing art in academia*. Leiden University Press.

Butler, J. (2016). Rethinking vulnerability and resistance. In J. Butler, Z. Gambetti & L. Sabsbay (Eds.), *Vulnerability in resistance* (pp. 12–27). Duke University Press.

Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Polity Press.

Clarke, A. E. (2005). *Situational analysis*. SAGE. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412985833

Clough, P. T. (2008). The affective turn: Political economy, biomedia and bodies. *Theory, Culture & Society, 25*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276407085156

Corsín Jiménez, A. (2013). Introduction. *Journal of Cultural Economy, 7*(4), 381–398. https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2013.858059.

Davis, L. J. (Ed.). (2016). *The disability studies reader* (5th ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315680668

Goodley, D., Lawthom, R., & Runswick Cole, K. (2014). Posthuman disability studies. *Subjectivity, 7*(4), 342–361. https://doi.org/10.1057/sub.2014.15

Graham, L. J., & Slee, R. (2008). Inclusion? In S.L. Gabel & S. Danforth (Eds.), *Disability & the politics of education. An international reader* (pp. 81–100). Peter Lang.

Gregg, M., & Seigworth, G.J. (Eds.). (2010). *The affect theory reader*. Duke University Press.

Hannula, M., Suoranta, J., & Vadén, T. (2014). *Artistic research methodology. Narrative, power and the public*. Peter Lang.

Jaakonaho, L. (forthcoming 2024) Vulnerable agencies: A performative research assemblage on dis/ability. In T. P. Østern, T. McCaffrey, K. Chikonzo & N. Chivandikwa (Ed.), *Theatre and performing arts, disability citizenship and community development*. Cappelen Damm.

Laes, T. (2017). *The (im)possibility of inclusion. Reimagining the potentials of democratic inclusion in and through activist music education* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Arts Helsinki]. Sibelius Academy of the University of the Arts Helsinki, Studia Musica 72.

Laukkanen, A., Colliander, M., & Teikari, A. (2017). Tarvitseva, ulkopuolella, vailla: Kulttuurin saavutettavuuden tulkintoja kulttuuri-, sosiaali- ja terveysalan henkilöstön puheessa. *Kulttuuripolitiikan Tutkimuksen Vuosikirja, 3*(1), 6–20. https://doi.org/10.17409/kpt.65723

Laukkanen, A., Jaakonaho, L., Fast H., & Koivisto T. (2021) Negotiating boundaries: reflections on the ethics of arts-based and artistic research in care contexts, *Arts & Health, 14*(3), 341–354. https://doi.org/10.1080/17533015.2021.1999279

Noddings, N. (1986). Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education. University of California Press.

Østern, T. P., Jusslin, S., Nødtvedt Knudsen, K., Maapalo, P., & Bjørkøy, I. (2021). A performative paradigm for postqualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Research, 23*(2), 272–289. https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941211027444

Pelias, R. J. (2014). *Performance: An alphabet of performative writing*. Left Coast Press.

Schwab, M., & Borgdorff, H. (2014). Introduction. In M. Schwab & H. Borgdorff (Eds.), *The exposition of artistic research: Publishing art in academia* (pp. 8–20). Leiden University Press.

Sevenhuijsen, S. (1998). *Citizenship and the ethics of care: Feminist considerations on justice, morality and politics*. Routledge.

Shakespeare, T. (2018). *Disability: The basics*. Routledge.

Shakespeare, T. (2013). The social model of disability. In L. Davis (Ed.), *The disability studies reader* (4th ed.) (pp. 214–221). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203077887

Slee, R., & Allan, J. (2001). Excluding the included: A recognition of inclusive education. *International Studies in Sociology of Education, 11*(2), 173–191. https://doi.org/10.1080/09620210100200073

Titchkosky, T. (2011). *The question of access: Disability, space, meaning.* University of Toronto Press.

Trento, F. B. (2020). Protocols for a procedural space for failing. *Research in Arts and Education*, 2020(2), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.54916/rae.119292

Tronto, J.C. (1993). *Moral boundaries: A political argument for an ethic of care*. Routledge.

Varto, J. (2018). *Artistic research: What is it? Who does it? Why?* Aalto ARTS Books.

Yergeau, M. R. (2018). *Authoring autism: On rhetoric and neurological queerness*. Duke University Press.