

ONE-ON-ONE ENCOUNTER

WHAT IS IT?

A *One-on-One Encounter* as a format¹ of *Participatory Art Based Research* connects two people in an exclusive constellation, in which they talk to each other or act together and – by doing so – exchange and produce knowledge². Thus, this format is located at the interface between private and public and may contain confidential moments and information that should be handled with care by the researcher and all people involved³. Therefore, the research setting has to take into consideration how to deal with this issue of privacy and the conspiratorial atmosphere that may result from it.

In the postgraduate programmes *Assemblies and Participation*^I (2012-2014) and *Performing Citizenship*^{II} (2015-2017), several

CORPUS

I Assemblies and Participation (2012-2014):

The postgraduate program *Assemblies and Participation* (2012-2014): *Urban Publics and Performance* was asking what role performance and media-based arts can play in the context of new urban movements of democratisation. By initiating transdisciplinary research processes between art, academia and society the postgraduate programme discussed and rehearsed from 2012-2015 new forms of assemblies and participation in an experimental conjunction of theoretical and artistic approaches. How can artistic and academic practices be combined in a way that the research process itself opens up for more social participation?

II Performing Citizenship (2015-2017): From 2015-2017 the postgraduate program *Performing Citizenship* aimed to analyse new forms of citizenship and its inherent performative turn. Since artistic practices play an important role in this context, the postgraduate program was conceived methodologically as an artistic academic cooperation. The three-year programme qualified doctoral candidates both artistically and academically period.

CONTEXT

1 Research formats: A single research format is realised in a specific context to configure the collaborative research of different experts in a physical way. It can structure one complete research project or become a smaller element within another format. The process starts with a desire, need, or question that brings together the participants as co-researchers, creating a collective agenda and interest in the research process. This collective interest has to be established before the participating researchers are able to perform, test materials, act, or assemble collaboratively. The co-researchers should be able to arrange, rehearse and plan details and activities for performative events. The activities and events then need to be evaluated or compared in relation to the underlying needs, questions and desires. Only after this evaluation can it be decided whether the same process should be repeated, —whether the rules and conditions should be adjusted or modified, whether the format should be changed entirely or whether researchers should proceed to another application/publication.

2 Knowledge production: PABR formats and designs are governed by the pursuit of a question, a desire, a need or by the attempt to find a solution for a problem. This initial framing poses a functional background for the researchers to evaluate the outcomes of the performative events and research activities, and therefore produce specific answers to the functioning of hypotheses or working solutions. For the evaluation, several moments of presenting, analysing, reflecting and discussing results are implemented within the operational steps. Results can include solutions, knowledge, theories, practices, artefacts, feelings, etcetera. Many outcomes can be verbalised or visualised, but some manifest in a way that eludes the discursive grasp. Knowledge production within PABR means that explicit and implicit forms of knowledge are valued equally. The researchers try to choose forms of presentation and analysis that make these forms recognisable. It has to be made clear that this analysis is one of many possible research narratives. Besides, there might be diverse research narratives that can be known and recognised, but also some that remain unknown to the researcher. PABR is distributed knowledge.



One-on-One Encounters were developed within various research projects to investigate forms of action-based and activist knowledge in very different contexts and ways, such as *Face-to-Face with the Many – Action with Video Calls*^{III} by Margarita Tsomou (2014), *The School of Girls II – A Citizens' Encounter*^{IV} by Maike Gunsilius (2017), or Moritz Frischkorn's *On Logistics and Choreography*^V (2017).

III *Face to Face with the Many – Action with Video Calls* (2014): Margarita Tsomou investigated acts and forms of (self-)representation of the protests at Syntagma Square in the protests of 2011 in Greece. In her research process, *Face to Face with the Many – Action with Video Calls* was a one-on-one assembly, organised through video-calls in a Hamburg Internet café. It tried to create a format that tested forms of representation of the many by the many. Tsomou invited participants of the occupation of Syntagma Square to Skype conversations with twelve audience members from Hamburg to talk for one hour about their singular stories of the occupation, discuss its sustainability and current topics such as Europe, elections, self-organisation, solidarity and alternative economics. Margarita Tsomou, *Face to Face with the Many – Action with Video Calls*, 2014, Hamburg

IV *The School of Girls II – A Citizens' Encounter* (2017): The second research project of Maike Gunsilius focused on the transgenerational relation between girls and women as citizens. In the *The School of Girls II – A Citizens' Encounter* their acting together as citizens was the topic of research. Five girls met five women. In one-on-one constellations, one girl and one woman spent a day together in Hamburg. They were given performative instructions, some materials and 200 euros. With these means, each team investigated how to act together in public and if and how this acting could become a practice of citizenship. In the evening, they presented the results of their research in the format of a lecture performance for a public at FUNDUS THEATER/Theatre of Research. Maike Gunsilius, *The School of Girls II – A Citizens' Encounter*, 2017, Hamburg

V *On Logistics and Choreography* (2017): What strategies do we have to comprehend the gigantic movement of goods that enable our daily life and our practices as citizens? Starting from this question, Moritz Frischkorn developed a one-week re-

Staging a *One-on-One Encounter* for *Participatory Art Based Research* provides two different roles for the researcher: She can be a constant part of the one-on-one constellation and talk to or act with different other experts or participants consecutively. Another possibility is that the researcher curates and hosts a situation of different *One-on-One Encounters*. Curating these encounters means asking: Who meets whom? How are the people addressed who participate in the encounters? What roles do they enact within their encounter? What relation between participants does the curation suggest or predict? And how does the *One-on-One Encounter* finally happen? What outcomes does it have? To document⁴ these fragile encounters can be challenging for the researcher. Especi-

3 Researchers/co-researchers/participants:

Researchers within PABR are those who are involved in the whole research process from beginning to end and are responsible for the shape and progression of the process.

Co-researchers are invited to collaborate and join the research process for shorter or longer periods of time.

Participants are invited to join the research only at certain points, for instance during its public presentation, and are involved in different ways. In order to organise participation on equal terms, it is crucial to recognise and acknowledge the different questions, interests, responsibilities, capacities and availabilities of the different co-researchers and participants and to define their role within the process.

4 Documentation:

How processes of PABR are documented depends on each project and cannot be determined in a general way. Researchers are advised to put documentation measures in place that help to store and translate processes and outcomes for those contexts in which she wants the project to proliferate. Documentation should be intertwined with moments of presentation and of gathering research material. Each project should develop a documentation method appropriate to the project, which may consist of several forms of documentation. Performances can be documented by video recordings, whereas collections, archives and media artefacts may become their own documentation. However, the collective activities are

ally in the case of the curated version of a *One-on-One Encounter* the researcher has to ask herself what potential a certain match provides, how the exchange or the production of knowledge can be encouraged within the encounter, and how it can be documented. Thus, the design of the research setting and its staging are important: How narrowly can a framework be set? Is it even possible to stage the encounter and the sharing or production of knowledge in public or should it remain private? How can it be learnt if the two people involved have adhered to the setting or deliberately undermined it? Or might it be precisely the intention of the researcher to provoke participants to sabotage the frame? In any case, the possibility of losing control is a parameter of the format.

WHAT IS RESEARCHED?

This research format aims at personal exchange in an intimate way. At the same time, it works with and around moments that produce knowledge in an exclusive constellation: Within this format, the researcher might aim at creating a situation that allows for the exchange and production of informal, insecure knowledge. In particular, knowledge that might be unproven and precarious can be exchanged and tested in this constellation. Whether the *One-on-One Encounter* frames a conversation or a space for acting together, cognitive as well as embodied knowledge

search installation with seven stations to investigate the relation between choreography and logistics and rehearse alternative corporeal strategies of referring to logistical movement. He established a fictional container as a working space that at the same time became the archive of his research. Using a puzzle-like compilation of somatic and dance practices, video and sound works, installation objects, and with the help of a small research library, the relationship between the human body and logistical choreographies was examined in a series of encounters between Frischkorn and one visitor at a time.

Moritz Frischkorn, *On Logistics and Choreography – A Research Installation*, 2017, Hamburg

can be verbalized and/or experienced.

Within a *One-on-One Encounter*, two people are connected in a direct or online face-to-face situation. They might both be addressed as experts from (possibly) different fields or contexts. Especially people who are usually not addressed as experts or experts who are not used to talking or performing in front of a larger public might share their informal, insecure, precarious knowledge more easily and comprehensively within the *One-on-One Encounter*.

Within this encounter, two people meet, perform and exchange ideas. Thereby, they receive or adopt knowledge from each other. Consciously or not, both of them produce knowledge in this very moment. Their (different) roles and the (different) ways in which they are addressing each other determine how one and one relate within this constellation. Within her research on activist protests on the Syntagma Square in Athens in 2011, Margarita Tsomou initiated the art-based research project *Face-to-Face with the Many – Action with Video Calls*: She invited a public to an internet café to meet twelve activists from Athens via video calls. In these face-to-face video meetings, the local participants could talk with the Greek activists about the situation in Athens, the protest movement and their activist strategies. In addition, Tsomou started a live chat as a meta-talk that anyone could join. Her setting takes up the activists' strategy to elude institutionalised public channels such as the press by using net-based (social) media.

fleeting and perceived differently by each participant. The same event can be evaluated differently from the outside than from the perspectives of the performing participants. For comparison and evaluation purposes, these different experiences need to be represented in some form: collective writing, questionnaires, drawings, transcriptions of discussions or interviews, formal responses, and so on.

The act of addressing people as experts might create a hierarchy between a person referred to as an expert for a certain discipline and another person who is not. Thus, the researcher should consider carefully what kind of setting and what kind of relation she creates: an encounter between two people addressed as experts or between an expert and a non-specialist. Furthermore, the question arises whether, and if so, how it is possible to collect feedback and to document the encounters. This question should be taken into account when planning the setting.

ARTISTIC MEANS

Creating the set-up for dialogues between two people is a common practice in the arts. Works by Tino Sehgal such as *This Progress* (2010) or the *Blackmarket for Useful Knowledge and Non-Knowledge* by Hannah Hurtzig/Mobile Academy Berlin (2005 – ongoing) and others could be mentioned. These examples show that the improbable dialogue that can take place within the intimacy of a one-on-one constellation can work as an act of self-authorisation of the participants, enabling the sharing of knowledge between two people – as Bojana Cvejic describes: “[...] assumptions, beliefs, opinions, habits, facts, information, techniques etc. The talk is an encounter that establishes a relation between knowledge and non-knowledge, between learning and unlearning, explores the difference between ignorance and opinion on the one hand and what is idealized as its opposite, e.g. knowledge, on the other hand” (Cvejic 2006, 17–18).^a

Of course, the format of the *One-on-One Encounter* is not limited to conversations. Encounters that rely more on actions offer the possibility for the exchange and the production of non-verbal action-knowledge. A joint action can for example be structured by the use of instructions or scores. Instruction-based art⁵ formulates precise instructions for actions framed by certain rules, spatial layouts, time limits, selected materials, etc.

Especially a precise and narrow framing can work as an invitation to playfully try out and create things one would usually not do. In this instance, two people cast together as team partners do things they would not usually do, or at least not do together. In following the instruction, the knowledge of the team partners is enacted, performed, and new knowledge is produced collaboratively.

Both forms of *One-on-One Encounters*, whether they focus on conversation or on action (or both), initiate and stage a relation. They can be considered as a form of relational art, which Nicolas Bourriaud defines as “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space” (Bourriaud 2002: 113). The format of the *One-on-One Encounter* thus has the potential to produce and question expertise, knowledge, know-how and doubt, and to relate them to each other in dynamic ways.

The research project *The School of Girls II* by Maike Gunsilius focuses on the collaborative and transgenerational performance

5 Instruction-based art: From the 1950s on, artists have been working with instructions. Especially during the 1960s, Fluxus Artists have developed numerous “event scores”: in written instructions they ask participants to do something, to act within a certain frame, as in George Brecht’s event scores, Allan Kaprow’s *Activities* (for example *Match*, 1975), in works by Alison Knowles (for example *Make a Salad*, 1962, or *Pick up a number from 1-10*, 1966) or Yoko Ono such as *Cut Piece* (1964), *Wish Tree* (1981 – ongoing), or many other instructions she collected in her book *Grapefruit* (1964). Recent examples for instruction-based artworks are the expansive and ongoing series *do it* curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist from 1995 on (Obrist 2013), Miranda July’s and Harold Fletcher’s *Learning to love you more* (2002-2009), or Sibylle Peters’ *Playing up* (with FUNDUS THEATER/Theatre of Research, 2016). Instruction-based art offers playful possibilities for a diverse range of actions that can engage individuals or groups of people, including the One-on-One Encounter as one possible constellation.

of girls and women as citizens (and non-citizens)⁶ of postmigrant Hamburg. Six 12-year-old girls and six adult women meet to research the possibilities of acting together as citizens within an artistic performance. After a short workshop, they pair up in teams consisting of one girl and one woman. Each team investigates a certain aspect of the overall research question by following an instruction. By inviting a stranger to a picnic, one team for instance explores how citizens and non-citizens of a postmigrant urban society can come together. After three hours, the teams return to the theatre space to analyse and reflect on the results of their investigation and present and perform their findings for the other teams and for an invited public. By taking questions of female solidarity in a postmigrant society into consideration, girls and women are invited to meet and perform as a transgenerational team on equal terms. All participants are addressed as experts for a different kind of knowledge in order to investigate the potentials and limits of acting in alliance. In an ongoing process of planning and testing, Gunsilius examined how the performative instructions have to be worded to offer a clear frame and at the same time create a space that enables girls and women to act as citizens in an (urban) public. The wording also aimed to reduce hierarchies within the encounters.

Although the *One-on-One Encounter* produces exclusive and intimate situations, there are different ways of creating a framework that allows the sharing of experiences and findings with others in a larger assembly: For the second part of the *School of Girls II*, an outside audience was invited to observe how the one-on-one teams share their experiences. In the *Blackmarket of Useful Knowledge and Non-Knowledge* format, several *One-on-One Encounters* are staged to take place simultaneously at different tables in the centre of a room. These tables are surrounded by spectators who can listen in to selected conversations via headphones. In

Face-to-Face with the Many – Action with Video Calls, spectators in the call-shop could witness the video-calls and/or join the public chat.

POTENTIALS, PROBLEMS AND OUTCOMES

In a *One-on-One Encounter*, knowledge, expertise and activities are shared between two people. The exclusive intimacy of this constellation between private and public has the potential to encourage people to open up quickly towards each other. At the same time, the content and findings of this shared exchange remain subjective. If the encounter is observed by an audience (including the researcher), the exchanged or produced knowledge is distributed in a wider circle. This distribution of knowledge in itself can be the specific object of the research interest. If so, this moment has to be focussed on within the respective setting. Thus, observing whether participants in the *One-on-One Encounters* adhere to the instructions and operate within the given frame or whether they ignore

6 Citizenship: Changing patterns of mobility and connectivity, migration and transnational cultural interconnections all challenge the legal and political boundaries of sovereign nation-states, their legitimacy and capacity to organize and provide citizenship (Benhabib 2006; Shachar 2009). At the same time, new alliances, networks and collectives of citizens emerge and assume roles and responsibilities formerly attributed to the state as an institutional body and as representation of the people. Given these developments, citizenship today is at the same time associated with old and ineffective protocols, which continue to produce exclusion, and yet is also 'in the making', moving beyond established concepts. Citizenship is simultaneously in withdrawal and in the process of becoming. At its best, this ambivalent performance of citizenship has the capacity to rearticulate or reinvent citizenship, to link old and new figurations of citizenship – often, if not necessarily, across given thresholds of legal and political institutions, social conventions, disciplinary competencies and discourses, ascriptions and attributions of race, class, culture and gender (Hildebrandt/Peters 2018: 3).

or subvert the set-up, might be more relevant to the research than the experiences and the knowledge produced and shared within the encounters themselves. Accordingly, in order to trace outcomes, the research setting for the *One-on-One Encounter* should – depending on the research interest – include moments of presentation, explication, feedback and documentation.

As already mentioned, it might be difficult or even impossible for the researcher to fully document this floating exchange of expertise. While observing the conversations in *Face-to-Face with the Many – Action with Video Calls*, Tsomou for instance noticed that most of the time the conversations did not focus on the set content (activists' knowledge), but instead had the quality of a flirt between two people. Hence, the *One-on-One Encounter* might provide a frame for documenting research outcomes that are different from what was originally intended.

In *The School of Girls II*, the encounters were narrowly framed and teams had to identify outcomes themselves, moderated by Gunsilius. Within the set-up of *On Logistics and Choreography*, Moritz Frischkorn was part of each *One-on-One Encounter* and could thus easily lead the encounters towards questions relevant to his research and note and compare outcomes.

One-on-One Encounters, whether they focus on verbal exchange or on acting together, have a unique way of addressing and connecting people – suggesting their collaboration, working on their relations and hierarchies and opening up a frame for research on social encounters.

ENDNOTES

a German version: http://www.mobile-academy-berlin.com/deutsch/bm_texte/bonja.html

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