

A background image of a beach with waves and footprints, overlaid with a purple gradient. The number 05 is prominently displayed in the center.

05

Convivial Creativity in Everyday
Life: Cultural Resources in
Encounters and Ruptures

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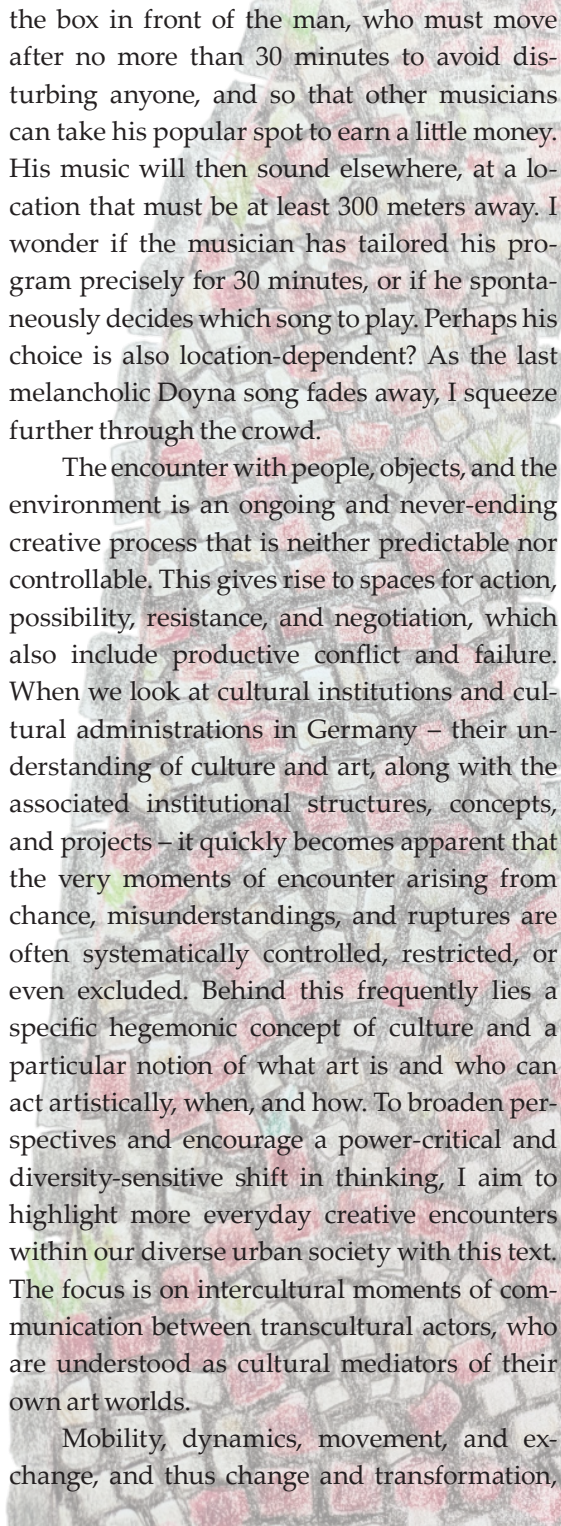
Convivial Creativity in Everyday Life: Cultural Resources in Encounters and Ruptures

Ronja Kampschulte

I'm strolling towards the Rhine, the sun is shining, and the city centre of Cologne is bustling with activity. It's one of the first spring days in April 2025. I had actually intended to avoid the crowds and get to the riverside promenade as quickly as possible, to see the calming, flowing, and simultaneously powerful river that, coming from the Swiss Alps, still has a long journey ahead of it before it flows into a large delta in the North Sea south

of Rotterdam, merging with the sea and no longer recognizable as the Rhine.

But as I hear a clarinet playing Klezmer songs, my steps lead me past the Cologne Cathedral, right into the hustle and bustle. I remember that I had actually wanted to look for concert tickets for Giora Feidman while listening to the man who has positioned himself on a stool near the Ludwig Museum. Time and again, someone hurries by, tossing a coin into



the box in front of the man, who must move after no more than 30 minutes to avoid disturbing anyone, and so that other musicians can take his popular spot to earn a little money. His music will then sound elsewhere, at a location that must be at least 300 meters away. I wonder if the musician has tailored his program precisely for 30 minutes, or if he spontaneously decides which song to play. Perhaps his choice is also location-dependent? As the last melancholic Doyna song fades away, I squeeze further through the crowd.

The encounter with people, objects, and the environment is an ongoing and never-ending creative process that is neither predictable nor controllable. This gives rise to spaces for action, possibility, resistance, and negotiation, which also include productive conflict and failure. When we look at cultural institutions and cultural administrations in Germany – their understanding of culture and art, along with the associated institutional structures, concepts, and projects – it quickly becomes apparent that the very moments of encounter arising from chance, misunderstandings, and ruptures are often systematically controlled, restricted, or even excluded. Behind this frequently lies a specific hegemonic concept of culture and a particular notion of what art is and who can act artistically, when, and how. To broaden perspectives and encourage a power-critical and diversity-sensitive shift in thinking, I aim to highlight more everyday creative encounters within our diverse urban society with this text. The focus is on intercultural moments of communication between transcultural actors, who are understood as cultural mediators of their own art worlds.

Mobility, dynamics, movement, and exchange, and thus change and transformation,

have been, are, and will always be (Greenblatt 2010: 3-5; Mecheril 2010: 8; Pries 2001: 5; Storch 2020: 10-11, 15-17). Through open intercultural contact, all parties can learn from the “other” and incorporate what is suitable for them into their own life plans. The self is fundamentally dependent on the designated other due to its own positioning (Göttsche 2013: 231; Sternagel 2015: 10). In relation to migration processes, it is assumed that cultures are dynamic mixtures in an interactive process (Pannewick 2010: 217, 249), both on the population, goods, and information levels, as well as in terms of everyday and artistic practices (Welsch 2010: 1-5). Welsch (2010) speaks in this context of “Transculturalization” (p. 5). Identity must be understood as a constantly changing and negotiable dynamic process, or as a practice and procedure (Castro Varela and Dhawan 2015: 225; cf. Middleton & Njogu 2009: xix-xv). It is inconsistent, contradictory, and unstable (Moser 2011: 50). Édouard Glissant (1997 [1990]) also emphasized that human “identity” is defined by the diversity of relationships with all their sensory aspects (p. 11). Modern research on multilingualism and societies outside the hegemonic orders of the global West repeatedly shows that extensive repertoires, open societies, and incompleteness can be considered the norm and that “Western” ideas of society and linguistic practices and concepts, such as the idea of the correlation between language and ethnicity, are rather exceptions (Evans 2009: xviii-xix, 209-210; Kopytoff 1987; Lüpke & Storch 2013: 347-348; Graeber & Wengrow 2022: 610-623, 649-651; Nyjamnoh 2017: 253-254, 2024: 121-122).

I sit down on a wall with a good view of the Heinrich-Böll-Platz between the Cathedral, the Hohenzollern Bridge, the Museum Ludwig, and the Cologne Philharmonic. I am

waiting, as my train will not arrive at the main station for a while. To my right, I see and hear the red DB trains passing by. Behind me lies the Rhine. The ground of the square is paved with red bricks. It is considered a “Gesamtkunstwerk” (total work of art) by the Israeli land art artist Dani Karavan, whose over 10-meter-high tower “Ma’alot” (Hebrew: Exit Song or Steps) is often interpreted as a Holocaust memorial. Integrated into the ground is a disc, which serves as the lid for the half-underground Philharmonic Hall built into the slope beneath it. The roof is built on swinging supports. The hall and the square were opened in 1986. However, due to the noise created by footsteps, skateboards, or rolling suitcases on the square, which reverberates in the concert hall because of the poor sound insulation of the roof, the square has been regularly closed off since 1999. On average, it is blocked off three times a day when rehearsals, recordings, or concerts take place. Costs of 300,000€ were planned for necessary security personnel in 2024 alone. Retrofitting the inadequate sound insulation was deemed too expensive by the city of Cologne at the end of the 1990s. Due to the nature of the Gesamtkunstwerk, the use of barrier tape is not allowed. Signs with instructions only in German have been put up, even though many tourists and people from all over the world are always passing through here (Schellen, 2024). The text on the laminated signs in DIN A4 format reads:

Unter diesem Platz liegt die KÖLNER PHILHARMONIE. Bitte betreten oder befahren Sie nicht die innere Platzfläche! [rote Schrift]. Tritt- und Rollgeräusche werden leider in den Saal übertragen, so dass Konzerte und Proben gestört werden. Wir danken für Ihr Verständnis! Karten und Informationen: koelner-phil-

harmonie.de. Die Stadt Köln und die Kölner Philharmonie.

I'm still trying to translate it:

Under this square lies the COLOGNE PHILHARMONIC. Please do not enter or drive on the inner square area! [red text]. Footsteps and rolling noises are unfortunately transmitted into the hall, disturbing concerts and rehearsals. We thank you for your understanding! Tickets and information: koelner-philharmonie.de. The City of Cologne and the Cologne Philharmonic.

A slightly yellowed image of the empty hall with a view of the seating is displayed to the right of the text. Neither the audience nor the musicians are shown in the photograph. As empty as the square is, the hall seems just as empty according to the visual representation. “Who would one actually disturb there?” I ask myself. The architectural conditions, as well as the requirements (silence, seating), considered necessary for the Philharmonic's concerts, stand in contrast to the everyday movement in the city, the mobility, and the noises and soundscapes of the urban environment. The square visualizes the absence of concerts through the presence of passersby; conversely expressed: The security personnel ensure that the square remains empty so that the concert hall can be filled.

Culture is considered in Germany as a good that creates ideal values, so public cultural funding, alongside the preservation of cultural heritage by public cultural institutions, the promotion of new and innovative art forms, such as scholarships for young artists, and the support of cultural education through institu-



tions like adult education centres or youth art schools, also promotes the quality of life and location in cities and municipalities through the support of cultural institutions with prestige power. Although cultural funding is a voluntary state task, Germany is one of the countries with the highest public spending on culture (Mandel 2002: 24-27). In 2024, the federal budget included expenditures of 2.3 billion euros for the cultural budget (Deutscher Bundestag, 2024). Although Hilmar Hoffmann's guiding principle "Culture for all" promoted more democratic and active participation of local societies in the so-called New Cultural Policy in the 1970s in Germany, and since then many outreach and cultural education programs have been initiated by cultural institutions, the

latter are still often not places of actual cultural participation (Annoff n.d.; Gram et al. 2024: 60-61). The underlying concept of culture in cultural institutions is often shaped in a euro-centric way, which is not accessible to everyone in society and does not make clear what this concept of culture entails. Museums, theatres, operas, literature, art, and cultural houses are still frequently anchored in the bourgeois educational elite, and the often subconscious dichotomy between high culture and sub- or pop culture is reproduced. Diversification processes in terms of equal opportunities for participation require a critical perspective on power structures, which also includes for example adequate financial compensation for people from communities whose knowledge is "needed"

(Görmar et al. 2023: 114-116). Mark Terkessidis (2010) points out that culture in the narrower sense (literature, art, music, film, drama) traditionally negotiates the self-understanding of a society. Culture plays an important role in the awareness of the self, which can be seen in Germany through the financial support of so-called high culture. These sums also make the cultural sector an important field for intercultural openness, as one must ask whether state funds are distributed in a way that benefits the entire population. However, this is not the case; a privileging of a group with certain (educational) prerequisites prevails in Germany (2010: 172-173). Thomas Renz (2016) reports that only 10 percent of the German population belong to the core audience of publicly funded cultural offerings, while 40 percent are categorized as so-called occasional visitors. A full 50 percent of the population would never enter cultural institutions (p. 65-66). In summary, only a minority of people in Germany belong to the regular audience of public cultural institutions. Even fewer people experience real participation or representation from these institutions (Kulturmanagement.net, n.d.).

There are government efforts, for example through programs in cultural education or funding, to change that. From 2018 to 2025, the Cultural Foundation of the Federal Government supported a total of 39 cultural institutions with 17.3 million euros as part of the program "360°- Fund for the Cultures of the New Urban Society." So-called agents have developed measures over a period of up to four years on how these institutions can diversify and contribute to creating a confident, open society towards immigrants, ensuring that the urban society benefits from them and that the existing diversity is also reflected within the

institutions. This is because neither in decision-making positions nor in the audience does the proportion of people with a migration background correspond to their share of the population (Kulturstiftung des Bundes, n.d.). The need for greater cultural participation has long been a topic in cultural policy. On the one hand, cultural institutions are trying to reach new visitors through creative methods and formats, increasing their appeal to new target groups. The English term for this is "Audience Development." The goal is to break up the current social homogeneity of a predominantly highly educated social milieu of visitors to the classical cultural offerings of publicly funded cultural life, so that a sense of community can be fostered (Mandel, 2016, p. 9). However, a generalized, deficit-based image of non-audiences or the recipients of cultural education must not be created. Instead, structural exclusions must also be considered (Henschel 2016: 150-151; Haselbach & Klein 2012: 112-113). Terkessidis (2010) also emphasizes that there are no "normal users." Therefore, spaces should be designed in such a way that all people, despite their undeniable differences, can find themselves within them (pp. 113-114). Patrick S. Föhl and Gernot Wolfram (2016) criticize the often strong focus on the audience (p. 272). The justification of Audience Development from an "economically well-situated, educationally bourgeois, white perspective of the majority society" (p. 121) must also be critically examined (Moser 2019: 119-122).

Overall, the question must be asked to what extent cultural institutions, perceived as high culture, can function as places of participation without top-down concepts through Audience Development approaches. Power relations and social practices regarding represen-

tations of migration must be taken into account (Bayer 2015: 212-220).



An older man sits down next to me, heavily loaded with bags. As he settles, he exhales audibly: "I need a break now," he says, almost to himself. I reply that I've been sitting here for a while, observing the busy activity at this heavily frequented spot along with its paradoxical barriers. For a moment, we both sit quietly, watching as tourists stare at their phones and consult Google Maps to find the best nearby brewery, as groups of teenagers with H&M and New Yorker bags walk by and as couples stroll towards the Rhine to have an Aperol or watch the passing ships. Even the Romans used the Rhine for trade and to this day the river, which is over 1,200 km long, remains an important transportation route. A child on a balance bike falls directly in front of us and screams. The older man tries to help, but in doing so, he knocks over his shopping bag, spilling the contents of it. The mother and I both bend down at the same time to help and end up getting in each other's way as we both reach for the same items. The man calls out: "Calm down, it's enough for everyone." We laugh. Self-efficacy experiences and self-empowerments occur through unpre-

dictable shocks and the associated creative acts, such as through the appropriation of space. As a result, shared moments of experienced community, i.e. "communitas" can emerge (Fischer-Lichte 2009: xxii). In this described encounter moment of transcultural actors, which is triggered by a coincidence or a rupture that shakes the actual actions and allows for a new role positioning of the involved actors, a liminal space is opened. I would like to refer to this space, following Homi K. Bhabha, as the third space. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the third space can be made fruitful for approaches in (intercultural or transcultural) art and cultural education (Mittelhammer 2018: 33-34). The world today is structured by transitions, various forms and patterns of difference and identity, the intertwining of the past and the present, as well as inclusions and exclusions. The central thesis is that cultural differences are constantly expressed in processes that open up intermediate spaces, which hold innovative places for societal development (pp. 1-2). An important role in his theory is played by alterity, as Bhabha assumes that identities, both on a collective and individual level, are always in relation to the "other" (Bhabha 2000: 23; Castro Varela & Dhawan 2015: 225; Struve 2013: 24-25). For Bhabha (2000), cultures are defined by difference and ambivalence, not by uniformity or closure (p. 54). He describes them as places of struggle over meaning and power (Castro Varela & Dhawan 2015: 257; Struve 2013: 41-44, 81). Bhabha's concept of hybridity is a postcolonial key concept that focuses on the encounter of cultures in intermediate spaces as places of negotiation and entanglement. Identification with the "other" is based on ambivalence, fra-

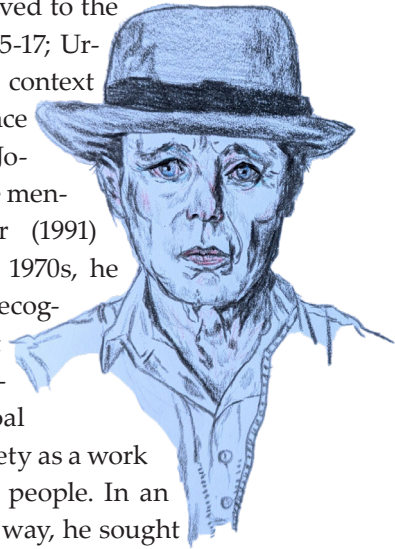


gility, and strangeness. He advocates understanding cultural differences as contested and conflictual, so that culture can be recognized as a meaning-producing, dynamic, and diverse process (Bronfen 2000: XI, XIII-XIV; Castro Varela & Dhawan 2015: 250-251, 257; Eremjan, 2016: 51-54; Huber 2014: 115-116; Moser 2011: 43; Struve 2013: 63-64). Hybridity, according to him, results (performatively) from opposites, but these opposites are overcome through the acknowledgment of the mixed. The processual nature and the creative reconstruction of identities are the focus, negotiated in the so-called third space (Struve 2013: 97). The productive intermediate space is opened up by moments of disruption and uncertainty in intercultural contact due to cultural differences (Ruf 2007: 76; Struve 2013: 50-51). Strategies of dynamic translation, which involve both understanding and misunderstanding, would be applied. Bhabha conceives the space of hybridity as a space of negotiation, resistance, and possibilities (Struve 2013: 109-112, 132-133; Moser 2011: 121-122).

Through and with art and the creative actions of transcultural actors in intercultural encounters within urban society, reality is created. The category of action and performance art must be emphasized particularly in terms of its performativity. It can be counted among the so-called second avant-gardes and spread increasingly since the late 1960s, starting in the United States (Bauman & Briggs 1990: 61; Helmstetter 2022: 9, 43-44). Performance art deals, among other things, with different and changing identity patterns and forms (Feige 2014: 217-220, 226-231). Anita Moser (2011) explains that the concept of art within the framework of action and performance art has been expanded, and the significance of the perfor-

mance situation as a dynamic process has been focused on. The direct communication and interaction between senders (artists), medium (material), and receivers (audience), as well as improvisation, have moved to the centre of interest (pp. 15-17; Ursprung 2010: 91). In the context of action and performance art, the German artist Joseph Beuys must also be mentioned. Christa Weber (1991) explains that since the 1970s, he has gained worldwide recognition as one of the most controversial contemporary artists. His goal was to create a new society as a work of art together with all people. In an open and experimental way, he sought to realize his idea of the so-called "social sculpture", which emphasizes the societal context of artistic action. Beuys reinterpreted the concept of art in such a way that any situation in which a person interacts creatively with the (social) world should be considered art (pp. 6-9). Especially Beuys' statement "everyone is an artist," which interprets creativity as a principle of life, attracted attention (ibid.: 19-20).

The man, the mother, the child and I are, for the moment, a mutually coordinated ensemble. The contrast between walking/moving (the mother and the child) and sitting (the man and I) creates an unexpected encounter situation. Waiting, according to Anne Storch (2020), is often perceived as a waste of time, but it is exactly here that liminal spaces could be opened. Paradoxical forms of waiting, which are inherent in practices of initiation and immigration, serve both the progression of time and



the powerful enhancement of hope, as this is where ideas of the subversive and reflection could grow. Waiting without distractions, which are often offered to us (waiting loops on the phone with background music, shopping opportunities in train stations and airports, etc.), could stimulate creativity and communication, thus contributing to new, even resistant thoughts (pp. 28-31). According to Walter Benjamin (1982), time can be perceived and shaped in different ways:

Man muß sich nicht die Zeit vertreiben - muß die Zeit zu sich einladen. Sich die Zeit vertreiben (sich die Zeit austreiben, abschlagen): der Spieler. Zeit spritzt ihm aus allen Poren. - Zeit laden, wie eine Batterie Kraft lädt: der Flaneur. Endlich der Dritte: er lädt die Zeit und gibt in veränderter Gestalt - in jener der Erwartung - wieder ab: der Wartende [D 3,4] (p. 164).

One doesn't need to pass the time – one must invite time to oneself. To pass the time (to chase away time, to strike it off): the player. Time sprays from his pores. – To invite time, like a battery charges with power: the flâneur. Finally, the third: he invites time and returns it in a changed form – in that of expectation: the one who waits [D 3,4] (p. 164).

Social administration and management lead people to struggle increasingly with waiting (ibid.: 178). Instead, however, “boredom” must be considered as something that can stimulate creative actions:

Langeweile haben wir, wenn wir nicht wissen, worauf wir warten. Und daß wir es wissen, oder zu wissen glauben, das ist fast immer nichts als der Ausdruck unserer Seichtheit

oder Zerfahrenheit. Die Langeweile ist die Schwelle zu großen Taten. (ibid.: 1024).

We are bored when we do not know what we are waiting for. And the fact that we know, or believe we know, is almost always nothing more than a sign of our shallowness or distraction. Boredom is the threshold to great deeds. (ibid.: 1024).

Waiting is part of many societal activities (Tsing 2015: 82). An example that waiting should not simply be seen as idleness or a waste of time comes from anthropologist Adeline Masquelier (2019). She examines the so-called “Fadas” in Niger. These are self-determined spaces where young, unemployed Nigerian men gather in urban neighbourhoods. It is shown that here, uncertainties and poor job prospects in a globalized world are confronted through the shared experience of being together. The economic marginalization of these young men is embodied through the act of sitting. The gatherings, which structure their daily lives, vary in nature. The Fadas, which particularly come alive in the early evening, can range from informal conversations to relatively structured organizations. The excluded individuals from the labor market develop new forms of sociability and spaces of belonging at these sites. Instead of focusing on the often critical or even crisis-like transition from youth to adulthood, which is frequently equated with boredom and an inability to progress, Masquelier highlights the collective benefit of these meetings (pp. 2-5). In this context, waiting or “doing nothing” is a way of resisting social marginalization and creating spaces for personal and collective growth. It becomes a tool for building solidarity and creating a sense

of belonging, even in the face of societal challenges. The described scene at the Heinrich-Böll-Platz in Cologne illustrates that practices such as sitting adjacently, observing the public environment, and waiting for public transport, alongside the contingency of accidental encounters, can serve as mechanisms through which social bonds and a sense of community are generated.

Finally, I rise to head towards the train. The man asks if he can accompany me, as he's headed in the same direction. He tells me that he lives near Keupstraße in Cologne Mülheim and that his son owns a Turkish snack bar there. As we pass the security staff – five people in neon yellow jackets – I ask him if he has ever been to the Cologne Philharmonic and he shakes his

head. He im-



mediately

adds that he is very knowledgeable about music and that his son plays many of his songs from their old Turkish homeland in his shop. As we enter the large train station hall, the man says that he finds Cologne's main train station interesting but not aesthetically, he prefers the one in Istanbul.

Our shared walk can be seen as a form of Walking Method. As we move, we perceive and gain insights. It is assumed that walking can bring people closer together and challenge un-

democratic institutions, as it is a free means of movement that makes one's own physicality tangible. Walking can be viewed as a kind of "in-between time" that connects activities which might otherwise be considered economically productive. In motion, we can become aware of our complex entanglements with materials, as well as social and cultural processes. Walking, as well as interdisciplinary talking, writing, and reading about it, can open new perspectives and create spaces away from destructive social forms like individualism, privatization and hyperspecialization (Stenning & Marland 2020: 1-4). In this way, walking becomes not just a means of transportation but also a reflective, relational practice. It engages with the environment and other people in ways that can foster solidarity, deepen understanding, and challenge societal norms. When thinking about walking, the following questions arise, among others: Why do we walk? When do we walk? What do we perceive? What influences us? How do we interact in movement with one another, with other living beings and with the environment? Artistic approaches in particular can reveal the ambiguity of walking and the various connections between the walkers and the (surrounding) world (Loose 2020: 13-14; Stenning & Marland 2020: 4-5). Walking and speaking are fundamental aspects of human existence. They are inseparable. Life itself can be interpreted as a long walk or conversation, framed by beginnings and endings, which relate to what has preceded them and simultaneously point to the future. Walking sets the whole body in motion. Like speaking, it is a fundamental social activity. Rhythm, timing, turning points etc., are always responses to the presence and actions of others. We walk because we are social be-



ings, and we are social beings because we walk. Walking is not just something the body does, but something that constitutes the body. This is why walking must be given more attention from a (social) scientific perspective (Ingold & Vergunst 2008: 1-3; Legat 2008: 35; Tuck-Po 2008: 25-26). Paths and routes unfold in the moment someone walks along them, just as a story unfolds when someone listens. This is why Katrín Lund (2008: 97) views walking as a narrative process that connects time (past and future) and places. Nico Nassenstein (2018) applies the method he calls “promenade linguistique” to examine the multifaceted tourist locations of Mallorca from the perspective of a personal linguistic biography. His work clearly shows how narratives, walking, and various places interplay and how insights can be gained from this. The different atmospheres seem to lead to the thematization of different contents and to the highlighting of various related experiences and emotions of the conversation partner in a multilingual context. According to Nassenstein, the method is characterized by rapidly changing dialogues, informal comments, sudden visual and auditory impressions, and unexpected encounters, which occur in a wide range of stylistic forms (pp. 81-84, 87-93). Action and performance art often consciously work with atmospheres, staging in public spaces, where fiction and reality merge, and where the attendees are thrown back on themselves through disruptions, prompting reflection. The contrast between movement and rest, walking and waiting, noise and silence, and thus the pause and absence as a whole, can have a performative effect. The perception of temporality and rhythm is significant in this context. Openness to situations that arise spontaneously and unplanned in the urban space, as well as a po-

tential “responsive availability,” as described by Hartmut Rosa (2020: 60-66), are prerequisites for enabling the experience of synchronization and resonance. In unexpected encounters closely tied to mobility, the significance of incompleteness for individuals, as well as for societies and global coexistence, as articulated by Francis B. Nyamnjoh (2017), becomes palpable. Incompleteness is normal. “Conviviality”, Njamnoh writes, invites us to preserve and celebrate it. The encounter with the incompleteness of the “other” must be seen as an opportunity to shape oneself. Through conviviality and boundary-crossing, alternative forms of togetherness would become visible, contrasting with the prevailing modes of violence and control (pp. 253-254). Exactly these performative moments of unexpected encounters, initiated by breaks, misunderstandings, and coincidences in the mobile, diverse urban society, which can open liminal negotiation spaces where something new in common can emerge, are often systematically avoided in cultural institutions. Yuriko Saito (2010) explains that the human desire for control over the uncontrollable continually manifests itself (e.g., through the elimination of dirt, disorder, etc., or in relation to aging). Often, ambivalent and contradictory actions accompany this (p. 7). According to her paradigm Western art is characterized by the fact that its properties seem to be determined by conventionalized ideas and the control of the artist over the material. Despite the many controversies about what constitutes artistic work and what does not, an art object is generally something with specific boundaries. This leads to the fact that the absence of an equivalent conventional understanding makes non-art objects appear “frameless” (ibid.: 18-19). Saito underlines that everyday aesthetics



have impacts on moral, social, political, and environmental levels (ibid.: 2, 51-53, 55). They can trigger unreflected actions. For this reason, she speaks of the action-oriented dimension of everyday aesthetics, in contrast to the viewing orientation of “art-centered” aesthetics (ibid.: 2-10). The fear of (too) little control (over nature or natural phenomena) or the loss of control is, for example, also the basis of many (linguistic) taboos (Allan & Burridge 2006: 123-124).

Bayo Akomolafe emphasizes that modern civilization is based on the idea of separateness. He criticizes our categorizing mindset, which sees us as uniquely independent and disconnected from the animal and plant world, as well as from inanimate things like mountains and fluidity. He speaks of a shared agency, arguing that humans are not superior to the Earth. We have never truly been in control, and he calls for the building of new alliances and solidarities in the present – with a world we believed we had left behind. This would also include the spiritual. He is concerned with the processual nature and relationality of the world. He draws on West African Yoruba thinkers, believing that agency materializes through the body. For him, agency is a territory, widely distributed. It should be understood as an assemblage that uses bodies for its materialization. Thinking would not only reside in human life. He speaks of a cosmology of movement and animism (SRF Kultur Sternstunde Philosophie 2024, 1:42-4:20, 5:30-7:41). Akomolafe speaks of “white modernity.” By whiteness, he refers to a civilizational, planetary, and earth-shaping practice. He defines it as a socio-economic, racializing power arrangement that organizes bodies according to pre-established definitions of power and access in specific ways. This is based on a historically grown legacy, particularly in light of

colonialism. This interpretation would help break open rigid categories (ibid. 13:20–15:05). If we humans were to recognize that the world also acts and that we are all interconnected, it would become clear that we need a new ethical sensitivity – especially in the context of climate change (ibid. 16:20–18:10). His focus is primarily on integrating other cosmologies into our worldviews in order to learn from one another and allow new forms of knowledge, including the magical (ibid. 22:20–27:02). The Nigerian philosopher and psychologist believes that place-based knowledge from all over the world can be shared through conversation and experimentation. He sees particular value in the richness of African storytelling, which can offer important insights and be helpful in the face of the unraveling of modernity. Ideas of impermanence and the belief that we are not alone are, in his view, essential (ibid. 33:10–34:10). We would often regard language as a boundary that separates us from the world, rather than seeing it as part of the world. Language would not represent the world; it would not be nuanced enough to capture every molecular flow. Within a specific human framework and context, language may shape our perception of the world. But beyond these human-centered constraints, it would not represent the world outside of language. Instead, we need, Akomolafe argues, to reflect on the practices that constitute the world – language being just one aspect of these material practices, and thus never fully capable of depicting reality. He gives the example that language would not know how to deal with the scattering of cells through movement. He advocates for a playful engagement with uselessness against the backdrop of a processual and relational world – something that lies beyond the instrumental and the functional (36:43–39:24,

41:50-42:11). He believes that politics must position itself within the cracks of integrity and the dissolution of the Western concept of a stable individual. Politics, he argues, should be approached as a form of art, an experiment to create something. He critiques the notion that politics are clearly separated from philosophy and art, calling this a highly compartmentalized form of analysis. What we are facing, he says, is a paralyzing mass event that affects us all, yet we struggle with it because we have no ready answers to recent and current ruptures (climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other global disruptions). While attempts to give nature a voice in politics are important, he sees them as insufficient. Instead, he envisions solutions emerging through underground, transnational forms of politics – for example, through a possible explosion of carnival events. Such movements would reveal that power is not as fixed and stable as we often assume. It would not lie solely with nation-states, nor even exclusively within the capitalist system. Rather, power, in his opinion, is more widely distributed. He believes that a playful approach to power could function alongside the dominant system. It is about touching the ecology and the world – and being touched in return.

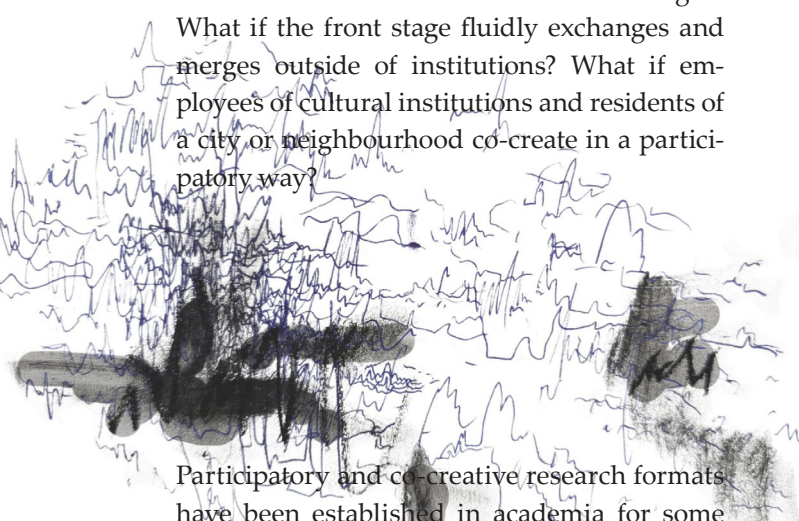
He underlines that we do not need to change the entire world, because that is the logic of capitalism. Instead, it would be about making small gestures and thinking within the cracks (43:05–48:10). I deliberately included this extended passage in my text to emphasize that the arts and cultural sectors can – and must – benefit from perspectives and ways of thinking that lie outside the dominant Western paradigms and traditional definitions of knowledge. Perceiving the world as active, fluid, relational, and processual opens new doors for



shaping collective interaction and should also influence the work of cultural institutions.

Erving Goffman (2003) conceives of the world as a social stage, where actors perform various roles, or in other words, he views life as a performance. In addition to the front and back stage, he introduces a third area that he refers to as the “outside.” This encompasses all places other than the two previously mentioned stages. He uses social institutions as an example: while most buildings contain rooms that are occasionally used as both front and back regions, the world outside the building should be understood as the “outside.” Generally, the control of the front region is significant because in everyday life, it is often important to

play different roles in front of different people and to keep certain audiences apart in order to maintain the intended impression of the performance (pp. 123–126). Goffman concludes that in social institutions, the impression created is often manipulated. A cooperative ensemble of performers strives to present a given situation before an audience. The interaction is based on behaviour rules (such as politeness). While roles are prepared in the background, which only the performers have access to, the actual performance takes place in the front region (pp. 217–218). But what if the front stage also would take place outside of institutions so that the “outside” includes the front and back stages? What if the front stage fluidly exchanges and merges outside of institutions? What if employees of cultural institutions and residents of a city or neighbourhood co-create in a participatory way?



Participatory and co-creative research formats have been established in academia for some time. Scientific and non-scientific actors work collaboratively together (Fücker 2024: 32–33). Participatory Action Research (PAR) has become a widely used approach in the social sciences.

The fundamental belief is that “knowers, and that which is known, and unknown, are entangled in relationship with one another, in localized and material ways, informed by diverse, multiple ways of knowing” (Gayá 2021: 171). People are recognized as situationally

reflective analysts of the world, who have particular expertise in relation to researching their own lives and, using this knowledge, are able to take action to change their lives for the better. However, Kesby et al. (2025) warn that the more PAR becomes systematized as a set of “tools” or “methods” promising innovation and impact, the more the organic and context-specific focus that challenges power inequalities may be co-opted by the economics of institutional reproduction. They emphasize:

PAR approaches have often in past decades come to resemble technocratic ‘fixes’ to address short-term problems that can be marketed at the end of a project funding cycle. Therefore, from our perspective, too much of what now purports to be PAR – participatory research, co-produced or co-designed research, within academic settings – lacks criticality. [...]. There is no gold standard of PAR praxis [...], as its use and its ability to effect meaningful change for people, places or policies are highly variable, contested, and unpredictable [...]. Nonetheless [...] this polyvalent research approach can and should be underpinned by the political commitments that are manifested in certain strands of critical theory and practice [...] (pp. 1–3).

PAR is a constantly evolving relational project that requires ongoing work. The authors describe PAR as a “series of ongoing, unfinished improvisations,” which strengthen situated, relational, and embedded innovations, including unresolved contradictions, difficulties, and experienced emotions (ibid.: 3; Askins 2025: 134). Privileges, power structures, and perspectives of embodied lived experiences and relationalities must constantly

be reflected upon (Kesby et al. 2023: 23). When walking and resting together outside the buildings of cultural institutions is considered art, it automatically becomes arts-based research for all participants in the walking process. In this case, space is performatively designed on the urban stage, and messiness and fluidity in and through encounters play an important role. Arts-based PAR can be a way to mobilize stories and share various forms of knowledge in practice (Woodrow 2025: 111-113). The involvement of performance artists who consciously play with mutable parameters (rhythm, tempo, route choices, modes of movement), sharpen awareness of certain factors (terrain, weather, sounds), and blur the boundary between fiction and reality can support the destabilization of boundaries within the group (Smitheram et al. 2024: 727-728). Here, space is understood as a social or individual thinking and action space, a fleeting construct that feeds on social conventions. The perceiving subject constructs the space (Moser 2011: 117-120). At the same time, the subject is performative and shapes the happening (Schellmann 2016: 16). The engagement with space and its staging is, in summary, part of performative practices and discourses (Gronau 2010: 83-84). In this context, it must be considered that every (social) space is hegemonically constructed, as segregations are made based on gender, social class, or other factors. It is linked to symbolic principles of spatial representation, such as signs, maps or codes (Moser 2011: 119-120). Wiebke Sievers (2024) emphasizes that arts-based methods stimulate the world-building capacities of research participants by presenting their perspectives and stories, encouraging dialogical exchange, and thereby introducing different

futures to a wider audience (p. 14). Mutual learning through the transformative power of cultural productions should be encouraged, and places of collective participation should be designed, allowing plural and diverse forms of conviviality to emerge in creative processes. Flexible structures that also allow criticism should be established. Regular reflection on categorizations, positionalities, inclusions and exclusions, and the critical examination of self-reproducing stereotypes in German society should be planned to ensure both aesthetic value and political significance (Moralli & Musarò 2024: 233-234).

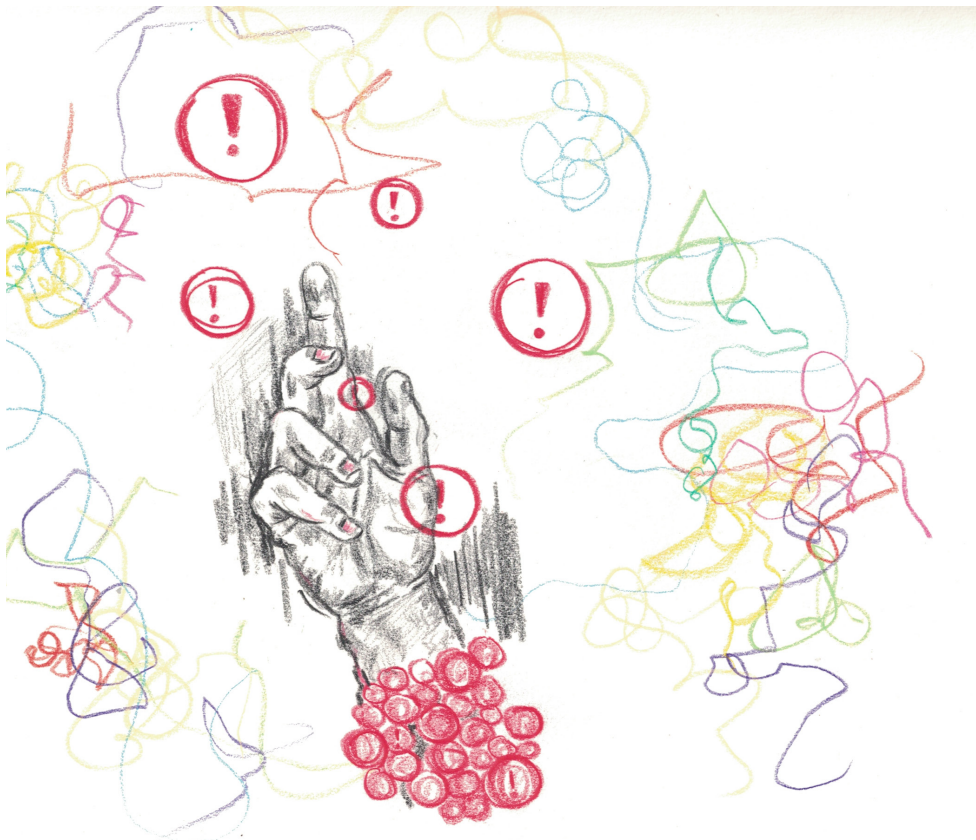
The sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2020) argues that the way of life we call “modern” is defined by “the idea, the desire, and the longing to make the world available.” However, “vitality, touch, and real experience arise,” Rosa claims, “from encountering the unavailable. A world that is fully known, planned, and controlled would be a dead world” (p. 8, *emph. in orig.*). This is perceptible in everyday life. One moves between what is available and what is unavailable, the latter of which can still affect us. It is a dynamic play along a boundary line, which, for example, is constitutive of games in general, but also relevant for falling asleep or love. The more one aims for the latter two, the less they can be forced. Therefore, unavailability constitutes human life (*ibid.*: 8-9). He formulates the following thesis:

Indem wir Spätmodernen auf allen [...] Ebenen - individuell, kulturell, institutionell und strukturell - auf die Verfügbarmachung von Welt zielen, begegnet uns die Welt stets als 'Aggressionspunkt' oder als Serie von Aggressionspunkten, das heißt von Objekten, die es zu wissen, zu erreichen, zu erobern, zu

beherrschen oder zu nutzen gilt und genau dadurch scheint sich uns das 'Leben', das, was die Erfahrung von Lebendigkeit und von Begegnung ausmacht – das, was Resonanz ermöglicht –, zu entziehen, was wiederum zu Angst, Frust, Wut, ja Verzweiflung führt, die sich dann unter anderem in ohnmächtigem politischem Aggressionsverhalten niederschlagen (ibid.: 1).

In aiming to make the world available on all levels – individually, culturally, insti-

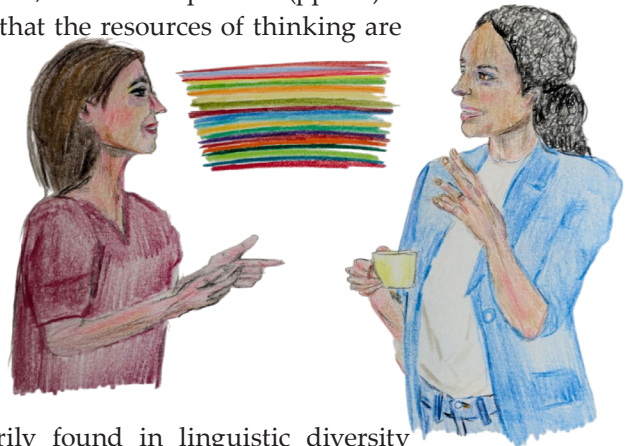
tutionally, and structurally – we encounter the world as an 'aggression point' or a series of aggression points, that is, as objects to be known, reached, conquered, controlled, or used. And it is precisely through this that 'life,' the experience of vitality and encounter – what enables resonance – seems to elude us, which in turn leads to fear, frustration, anger, and even despair, which then manifest, among other things, in powerless political aggression (ibid., p. 1).



Rosa believes that human (practical and cognitive) relationships to the world are dependent on the social and cultural conditions into which one is socialized. Our relationship to the world in the 21st century is shaped by technological advances, digitalization, financial market capitalism, constant competition and political-economic pressures for growth and optimization. This is evident in the ongoing drive to “improve” one’s body or in the long daily to-do lists. The sociologist assumes that this “aggressive” relationship to the world has developed over three centuries and structurally builds on the principle of dynamic stabilization, while culturally it is based on the idea of never-ending expansion. However, it is not the desire for “more” that is decisive, but rather the fear of loss, of having less, in a highly dynamic environment that is constantly in competition with us. Moreover, the promise of global expansion is a driving force and the dominant decision-making credo in all areas of life in late modernity. In summary, we are structurally (from the outside) and culturally (from the inside) encouraged to make the world an aggression point, i.e., to make it available and controllable (ibid.: 12-20). The social scientist and educator describes that in bureaucratic work, the focus is primarily on goal orientation in a time-efficient and manageable process, as well as on the exclusion of arbitrariness through legal regulations to maintain the principle of justice. The criteria of transparency and controllability in the working world often leave too little time for the actual work. However, in practice, it is precisely the unavailable aspects that allow for innovations and the development of competencies. Furthermore, unavailability can never be excluded or avoided. Therefore, it is

important to respond appropriately to it, as the creation of resonance spaces is fundamental to social coexistence (ibid.: 103-107). It becomes clear that flexibility and the avoidance or relinquishment of control, where possible, are considered significant by Rosa when it comes to the experience of vitality in the context of social life.

But how can cultural institutions recognize these productive moments of waiting, incompleteness, rupture, chance and misunderstandings in order to appreciate the diversity of urban society and make use of the cultural resources available to all, as François Jullien (2017) suggests? Jullien proposes a conceptual shift by speaking not of isolating “differences” between cultures, but of “distances” that productively juxtapose cultures and maintain a tension that brings out a “common” ground. He rejects the term “identity” due to its rigid connotations of self and instead uses the terms “fertility” and “resources.” Cultural resources, which cannot be owned and are therefore available to all, must be “exploited” (pp. 7-8). He believes that the resources of thinking are



primarily found in linguistic diversity and its productive deviations, which is why the fruitful process of translation (the back-and-forth, the “between”) must be preserved (ibid.: 53-60, 90-91). However, if cultural institutions

continue to try to unidirectionally transmit predefined knowledge, they are avoiding exactly this “in-between.” I suggest that cultural institutions revisit the approach of “culture by, for, with everyone,” expanding upon Hilmar Hoffman’s concept of “culture for all” (Pähler 2021: 71-72). This expansion involves broadening the perspective towards the creativity of encounters, the sharing of stories, an openness to sensual and physical experiences, the consideration of atmospheres and the acknowledgment of aesthetics in everyday life. Wolf-Dietrich Bukow and Karin Cudak (2016) highlight that society plays out in a temporally and socially condensed social space that productively frames everyday routines (p. 2-3). Social space can be defined as a “constantly (re)produced fabric of social practices” (Kessl & Reutlinger 2022: 3). Either the existing is confirmed, or it is questioned and transformed (ibid.: 7-9). Every action, every step and all encounters are meaningful because they create and shape spaces. The concept of space appropriation refers to an active engagement with space, where the space only emerges in the process. At the same time, societal norms and values are either repeatedly reinforced (inclusion in societal power relations) or newly negotiated (a constant process of becoming) (Landolt 2022: 194-197). Let us remember the scene I described: In relation to the space in front of the Philharmonic, state intervention in the public space becomes visible. But although there are no benches at Heinrich-Böll-Platz, the elderly man and I choose a wall to sit on. Furthermore, one could ask many different questions observing the place: Who moves through the urban space between the Cathedral, the Museum and the Cologne Philharmonic? Why do people choose this path, and how did they get there? What goal are they

pursuing? Who wears what clothing and carries what objects and belongings? What distinguishes the Klezmer player from the musicians performing in the concert hall of the Philharmonic? Who is being addressed and which audience is present? And very importantly: Who is absent? Yamamura (2005) highlights that adopting a spatial perspective bridges the gap between the concepts of “intersecting” and “intersectional spaces” by highlighting structural inequalities in urban environments. She demonstrates how spatial dimensions – such as class, temporal, and functional factors – shape migration-related diversity in intersectional spaces. By focusing on urban superdiversity and spatial inequalities, she reveals how stratification, discrimination and privilege are contested (pp. 10, 13, 16).

If cultural institutions perceive themselves as curious seekers of existing cultural resources in the society with the goal of being friendly hosts, but also being able to take on the role of the grateful guest in the neighbourhoods, working together with the city’s residents – who act as cultural mediators of their own life and art worlds – there is an opportunity to jointly develop new perspectives through creative action. If spaces can be shaped through shared experiences and encounters and creative actions are stimulated by chance, coincidences and ruptures, cultural institutions should try to experiment with these spaces. The independent scene often moves much more naturally within the urban space, allowing for fluid connections to be explored. Bold collaborations and the acceptance of a certain lack of control, which opens up new paths and shared stories should be promoted. It must be noted, however, that power hierarchies do not dissolve in these processes. Ann Laura Stoler (2008) argues that the nega-

tive consequences of colonialism and imperialism, both physically and psychologically, are still present in people's lives (pp. 191-198, 202, 211). Institutional discrimination reveals itself through its enduring and systematic nature, which leads to relative disadvantages between members of different social groups. It is based on legal and political frameworks, meaning organizational structures, norms, rules, routines and shared knowledge used as justifications for decisions (Gomolla 2016: 74-77). Structural discrimination, on the other hand, refers to the historically and socially structured discrimination that can no longer be directly attributed to specific institutions and is negotiated through representations and discourses (ibid.: 79). If cultural educators or facilitators of institutions see themselves as translators they could make unexpected exchanges and diverse knowledge visible, so that an open space could emerge that envisions polyphonic futures considering our interconnectedness with the world, according to Akomolafe (see above).

As the man and I walk, we adjust our steps. I walk slower than usual, being careful to choose a path without high curbs because I think the man may not be walking as well anymore. Eventually, I stroll beside him, engrossed in conversation, stopping occasionally to avoid getting too fast. I notice that the man also keeps stopping, though he doesn't appear exhausted. While I focus on him during the short breaks, he looks around and points at the steps in front of the cathedral: "I used to jump up those backwards," he says. At some point, I'm no longer sure who actually started stopping. Was it really me? In the end, the man decides our pace and uses the standing pauses to share his knowledge with me. He determines when we start walking again. A mimetic alignment takes

place as we adapt our behaviour to each other. Mimesis can be defined as:

"A becoming akin to the other, as a way of making oneself similar and standing in for the other, which does not necessarily align with representation in the pictorial sense. [...] [As] an aesthetic practice exposed to historical transformations [...], which is not only everyday and physical, world-bound and community-building, but also constantly problematizes the relationship between the self and the other" (Otto, 2013/2012).

Mimesis is described on the one hand as a sensual, physical process and on the other hand, it is connected to representation, action, performance, and power in the sense of appropriation. Michelle Puetz (2022) explains that mimesis creates a world of illusions, appearances, aesthetics and images in which existing worlds are appropriated, changed, and reinterpreted. In everyday intercultural encounters, mimetic processes occur that can destabilize boundaries. Although the man appears to be in the weaker physical position, he is ultimately the one who directs our progress.

William and Raine (2025) advocate for understanding the rhythmic fluidity of life as an opportunity for change. Affective encounters with the (surrounding) world would push the subject into the background and bring the continuous reconfiguration of subjectivity into focus. Actions and thoughts, they underline, are simultaneously shaped, with neither preceding the other (p. 13). DiPiero (2022) highlights that improvisation is deeply embedded in our everyday experiences. He suggests that a politics of the everyday is a politics of impro-

visation. He aims to trace the seemingly extraordinary potential of improvised artistic practices back to the ordinary moments that constitute improvisation itself: “the messy in-between that structure/agency binaries confuse for inconsequential or invisible” (p. 195). No action could necessarily create a break in the sensual merely through the attempt, but it would be only through this attempt and the cultivation of tendencies that prepare us to act – small repetitions in daily life – that a moment is activated. He reminds us that we cannot listen (or “attend”) without simultaneously responding with our bodies. Listening, he argues, is a practice that directs our attention to how we are already connected to the external world, influencing and being influenced. Our contingent encounters with the world – how we respond and how we are already responding – are the necessary fact of our being. Critical reflection through improvisation, DiPiero suggests, can help bring this fact to the forefront, continuously orienting us toward what is relevant in the moment (pp. 195-197). He emphasizes in his work that improvisation is not something extraordinary. Contingent encounters highlight the embodied fact of our everyday improvisations. Contingency structures our lives and brings improvisation into being as an everyday given. Improvisation exists everywhere because existence itself is contingent. Contingency, he argues, is the fundamental core of what it means to improvise. He proposes the following theses:

1. Contra the notion of improvisation as a creative capacity developed by subjects, improvisation can be productively understood as co-extensive with a contingent encounter between subjects, objects, and multiple environments,

where environments encompasses everything that has an effect, from physical spaces to the discourses governing how things are perceived or known. In this formation it is the subject’s role that has historically overdetermined theorizations of improvisation.

2. Given the radical contingency of every improvisation, each is incommensurate with every other instance, even within the same genre or medium – that is, improvisation is always a singularity.

3. If improvisation is always a singularity, then its ontology must be understood through contingency, and contingency alone, as this remains the only constant from improvisation to improvisation. In spite of every irreducible, irreplicable difference, it is always true that improvisation is contingent, and equally so.

4. The singularity of improvisation tightly links it, on a formal level, with practices in everyday life. This link is so tight, I suggest, that it is not so much that improvisation in music and in social life are identical, but more that all musical and social actions (and the musical and social spaces they create) are inherently improvisatory. That is, we do not act but through improvisation (*ibid.*, pp. 6-8).

This implies that improvisation cannot necessarily be understood as an open or spontaneous process. Rather, certain social investments lead to improvisation being perceived as an expression of freedom. Contingency indicates that every improvisation is simply dependent (*ibid.*). DiPiero further explores walking as a contingent and improvised phenomenon and compares it with musical improvisation. Both are forms of improvisation, but they differ in context and thus lead to different results. Everyday prac-

tices like walking and musical improvisation, involve a subject interacting with contingent circumstances. Both activities, DiPiero writes, occur within constraints, are unique and rely on repetitive learning and expression shaped by broader sociopolitical factors. Despite differences in context, both walking and improvising music share the same structural process of engaging with contingencies. While the difficulty of each may differ, improvisation in both cases operates similarly, responding to what is available. He writes that the distinction between musical performance and everyday life lies in context, not in the process of improvisation itself. Whether simple or complex, improvisation would remain the same mode of engagement (*ibid.*: 136-137, *emph. in orig.*).

Encounters create and transform differences, as it is the generative and relational coming together of affective actions, speech acts and becoming, which brings the unpredictable, surprising, and disturbing into focus. Learning is thus understood as something that is affective, spatial, continuous, non-linear and largely immeasurable (William and Raine 2025: 5). In this context, adopting a phenomenological perspective is meaningful, viewing learning as a lived act, as a practice embedded in situations, and as a process. The various forms of knowledge present (and also implicit) in the world can thus be perceived physically. Reflection, awareness of situations, non-rational processes and emotional abilities are prerequisites for learning. From the phenomenological perspective, learning is understood as a dynamic and decentered, inter-relational state of being and becoming, which is not limited to cognitive processes. Physical, emotional, and intuitive knowledge, as well as non-discursive and aesthetic forms of learning, are

considered (Kueppers & Desmond 2018: 6, 14). Walking as a physical engagement can be a form of “embodied research” or an “embodied method.” This is because the body functions as an archive and through the perception of the environment, processes of memory, sensibility, affect, relational connection and learning are stimulated, which in the normal course of academic work would typically not be activated in this way (Collier 2020: 63-64; Legat 2008: 39; Shepherd et al. 2018: 4, 12). Learning from each other could be facilitated through walking, which perceives improvisation as a contingent phenomenon and acknowledges the creativity and situated knowledge of transcultural actors. The significance of performativity in intercultural encounters, mobility, misunderstandings, breaks, and unplanned experiences could be brought to the forefront in the form of participatory action-based research, where participants (including staff from cultural institutions) view themselves as cultural mediators of their own art worlds, as researchers and as experimenters who resonate with each other. Since the analysis of art and cultural experiences is closely linked to one’s own bodily sensory perception, attention must be given to the performative power of the senses, physical experiences and the emotions associated with them (Banes & Lepecki 2007: 1-2). The unexpected and the encounter of differences can lead to the opening of third spaces, where something new can emerge, leading to new, more diverse perspectives on the work of cultural institutions and destabilizing boundaries in the late capitalist, neoliberal and postcolonial world. Essential to this is the ongoing reflection on one’s own roles and involvement in (institutional) and historically grown structures and power hierarchies, as these situations always influence the out-

comes (Diebäcker 2022: 171-172; Foroutan & İkiz 2016: 143; Fricker 2007: 10-14; Klein & Göbel 2017: 11-13). The opening up of cultural institutions to the city's residents through collective action and the sharing of stories could contribute to greater social cohesion and the development of new ideas for the collaborative design of cultural institutions (Fonseca et al. 2018). Central to this is the recognition of actors as sovereign artistic and cultural practitioners and relational translators, who also engage in resistant practices (Butler 2005; Castro Varela 2018). The man and I say our goodbyes with a Kölsch 'Mach et joot,' a simple phrase that fades almost instantly into the familiar noise of the station - footsteps, loudspeakers, and the steady rhythm of trains coming and going.

Note: All figures are the author's own illustrations

The paintings and drawings embedded in the text serve to visualize personal experiences as well as to illustrate the theories and concepts discussed. All graphical representations were created by the author. The figures are not labeled in order to not disrupt the flow of reading.

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