

# Back and Forth Between Love and the Heart

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This written component is part of my MFA thesis project.

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The artistic component includes two works. *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* is an experiential installation that invites participants to connect through heartbeat synchronization via pulse sensors and loudspeakers, challenging notions of proximity, distance, and love under capitalism. And *This Could Be Our Sextape* is an audiovisual installation that explores the synchronization of two people's heartbeats during an intimate encounter, with a dialogue on sex, love, and relationships, raising questions about vulnerability and societal views on sexuality. The written component provides a theoretical foundation linked to sociology and philosophy studies, as well as personal experiences. The text emphasizes themes of love and relationships in capitalism and explores the heart as a symbolic and personal element, particularly through the uncanny theme and in relation to the loss of my father. The thesis also reflects on themes of space, materiality, and forms of intimacy.

The artistic component is composed of two works:

(Artwork no. 1)

*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* (2025)

Mattress foam, fabric, loudspeakers, pulse sensors, microcomputers, amplifiers, wood, plexiglass, Riso printing  
3,8 x 4 m

(Artwork no. 2)

*This Could Be Our Sextape* (2024)

Audiovisual installation  
08 min. 40 sec.

The works *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* and *This Could Be Our Sextape* were exhibited during Kuvan Kevät 2025 in Kuva/Tila at the Academy of Fine Arts, from May 16 to June 15, 2025.

The supervisor of the thesis project is Professor Daniel Peltz, the external supervisor is Dafna Maimon.

The examiners of the thesis are Itha O'Neill and Anni Puolakka.

The artistic component of the thesis project has been produced in collaboration with my partner Eelis Kostiaainen. For both works, he worked on the programming of microcomputers, the creation of software to record heartbeat data and create sound, and the fabrication of the heart sounds of the pieces. He also collaborated with me on *This Could Be Our Sextape* by performing with me.

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## Summary

*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* is an interactive installation that invites people to connect through heart rate synchronization. Participants share their heartbeats with another ear via pulse sensors and loudspeakers. When a person leaves, their presence lingers as their heartbeat continues to play. In a soft environment, the visitors' bodies become part of a round heartless organ, in an interconnected loop of heartbeats. Physically and emotionally, the piece challenges our perceptions of distance and proximity.

*This Could Be Our Sextape* is an audiovisual installation that examines how the hearts of two people behave during an intimate encounter. As the interaction unfolds, their heartbeats synchronize and desynchronize. A monitor displays a text-based dialogue in which the couple discuss intimacy, sex, love, and their relationship. The work raises questions about the boundaries between private and public spaces, as well as the performative and societal issues of sexuality.

The written thesis explains the theoretical context that informed the creation of the artworks. It also highlights important themes and questions conveyed through the works. It provides insight into my artistic practice and the type of art I create. The first chapter provides an overview of the definition of love and societal issues in relationships. These issues emerge from my life experiences and social studies (the works of Bauman, Illouz, hooks, Strömquist, etc.). Through the thesis, I strive to connect my personal life to my art because the making of my work stems from personal experiences.

The second chapter addresses the significant themes and questions I discovered while creating the artworks. It talks about the uncanny sensation of the encounter with the heart and how the heart sound was treated in the works, as well as the effect it had. Through my writing, I emphasize the importance of the heart in my practice and the connection between the heart and the loss of my father. The text also touches on questions of space and materiality, as well as the exploration of different types of intimate settings in the works.

# Introduction: Entering the Heart

## Letter to dad

*Well, dad. I never speak to you. It's even weird to call you dad. I usually feel like I don't have a dad. When I have to fill in the "parents" section of the documents, I sometimes don't write your name. I'm not even sure I know your date of birth by heart. It is strange to not know you, to not remember you. Well, I have three memories but none of your face. I don't know who you were, what you sounded like, how you smiled, if you smiled at all. What I know is only pictures, fuzzy memories and glimpses of you through others. Mom always talks about you as if I remembered. I never felt too curious to ask for more. Or maybe I did but I still don't know you. Not too long ago I realized that I miss you. I always felt that nothing had changed for me since your death, because I was too young to notice. It's hard to miss something we didn't know we always needed. I think I always looked for you in a way. I will always have this empty spot.*

When I was six, my dad unexpectedly died from a heart attack in his sleep. This important part of my life marked me deeply and has influenced my practice and thesis work a lot. However, the connection between his death and my artistic practice came to me later in the process of making the works.

## Definition of love

I have always wondered about love. Because of traumatic events in my life, I now face abandonment issues. The relationships around me feel vital, as I have been trying to fill a void inside myself with them. Because no relationship in my life, felt enough for me to feel complete, I was blaming the ones around me as the issue for why I still felt this void inside me. I have felt really alone so the state of being in relation feels like it will fix everything. I rely on my friends and lovers as if my life depends on it. I cannot do it alone. And I couldn't help but wonder<sup>1</sup> if the issue was not just me and the others but maybe something more global? Something societal that would explain why I feel so alone? Growing up in France in the 2000's has determined the societal issues that I and this text relate to. So, I started to search on the topic of love and analyse it from my point of view and those around me with whom I am in relation.

My situation has made my view of love complicated. Am I loved? How to love? What even is love? I came across a TED Talk entitled "L'amour dure 90 secondes" (Love lasts 90 seconds) by specialist educator Marine Duvouldy that widened my perspective of this feeling.<sup>2</sup> This initial encounter with Duvouldy's thinking prompted me to deepen my understanding of love, particularly through the works of Bauman, Illouz, hooks, Strömquist, etc. who link love to social and economic structures such as capitalism and globalization. In the TED Talk, she explains that love is not a long-lasting emotion as commitment, desire, trust, and a unique connection are only the causes or consequences of love. The emotion is not exclusive either. You can feel love with anyone as it is not reserved for only one person. Love is not a stable emotion that can be experienced over time. It is a fleeting sensation that lasts a few seconds (although Duvouldy does not explain why 90 seconds specifically) but is infinitely renewable. Occurring close together, micro-moments of love give rise to feelings. We can think of love as a moment. She explains:

Now the micro-moments of love experienced with strangers and those experienced with a loved one are almost identical. Researchers observe the same biological synchrony. Yet there are some differences, especially in the triggering factors of these micro-moments - since intimacy, words, and gestures are not the same - but also in their frequency since, logically, we share more micro-moments of love with our loved ones.<sup>3</sup>

Since the initial feeling of love (as in a micro-moment of connection) is a similar experience with anyone, these micro-moments are the are the foundational experience of all types of relationships. Relationships of all kinds (romantic, friendly, family) simply then take different forms in the bonds they create and how micro-moments of connection occur. Marine Duvouldy explains that the accumulation of these micro-moments strengthens the relationship. Accumulated, they create a bond of trust and security that is itself conducive to the multiplication of future moments of love. This definition of love enables me to talk about love in every kind of relationship on an equal footing. In each form of relationship, love is made up of the same component, the same essence, which is then perfumed with other feelings that enable us to identify different types of love. Duvouldy's view made love more palpable in my relationships. Indeed, it made my search for love more accessible because, in this way of thinking, love is all around us. Love as micro-

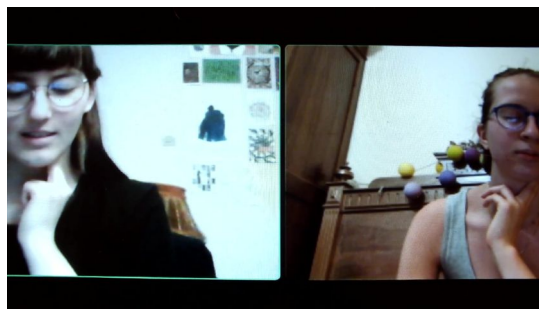
1 As the fictional character Carrie Bradshaw would say in TV series *Sex and the City*.

2 Marine Duvouldy, "L'amour dure 90 secondes" [Love lasts 90 seconds], *TEDx Talks*, Annecy, March 2018, [https://www.ted.com/talks/marine\\_duvouldy\\_l\\_amour\\_dure\\_90\\_secondes](https://www.ted.com/talks/marine_duvouldy_l_amour_dure_90_secondes).

3 Transcript of video, Marine Duvouldy, "L'amour dure 90 secondes" [Love lasts 90 seconds], trans. Martin Bermudez, *TEDx Talks*, Annecy, March 2018, [https://www.ted.com/talks/marine\\_duvouldy\\_l\\_amour\\_dure\\_90\\_secondes](https://www.ted.com/talks/marine_duvouldy_l_amour_dure_90_secondes).

moments of connection allows us to make links: these are moments that can occur at any time, during a discussion, a bodily exchange, a shared activity, a phone call, etc.

During the 2020 lockdown, I thought a lot about how I could connect with my friends when we could not see each other. I wondered how we were all feeling empathy for those who were sick even though we did not know them or see them. During this period, I was enrolled in a performance course, and I had to create a performance for the class. With Marine Duvouldy's view of love having completely changed my perspective, I wanted to create moments of connection through my work and explore the criteria for making them happen. At the same time, I learned that our hearts could synchronize with music we like. I started to wonder if my heart could synchronize with the heart of someone I love. For the performance class, I called my friends on Discord and tried to synchronize my heartbeat with theirs. In the performance *Distance* (2020), we listened to our heartbeats by placing our fingers on our necks. At the same time, we tapped the rhythm we felt on our computers. We were both listening to the other's heart and ours. Each performance lasted around three to five minutes, and at some point, our hearts would synchronize. I felt a connection with my friends while doing it and I thought that it was linked to the fact that our hearts synchronized and that this syncing moment was a micro-moment of love as Duvouldy defines it. So, I wanted to explore this idea further to see if synchronization would happen with more people and if heart synchronization made them feel connected to someone else.



Lola Barraud, *Distance*, 2020, video still.



Lola Barraud, *Coeur à Coeur*, 2022, video still.

After the pandemic, I expanded this project. I wanted people to be able to connect physically as well. I found a solution for a position that would allow two people to listen to each other's hearts at the same time: one person lies on their back and the other lies on their belly on top of them, upside down, with their head on their partner's chest. To support this position, I created a pillow and mattress to make the exercise comfortable. During the performance *Coeur à Coeur* (2021-2023), I invited pairs of people to listen to each other's hearts. They listened and, at the same time, tapped the rhythm of the heartbeat on the other person's body. Each person listened to the other and received their own heartbeat. I led the experience by first guiding them to listen to their own bodies, and then to listen to each other's. Then, I recorded their testimonies using a questionnaire. I conducted this work with a scientific approach as if I was conducting an experiment trying to prove that heart synchronization led to a micro-moment of connection. This aspect was inspired by the work of Pedro Reyes, *SANATORIUM* (2011), which is a performative installation in the form of a temporary clinic that combines art and psychology. People are "treated" with therapies developed from diverse disciplines. "Conducted by non-professional, ordinary people, the placebo treatments that make up this project are spaces for encounter and dialogue, presenting life-stories and narratives which aim to cure the maladies and diseases associated with contemporary life."<sup>4</sup> Visual elements of *Coeur à Coeur*, such as a blue mattress, were also meant to mimic the feeling of a scientific study.



Pedro Reyes, *SANATORIUM*, 2014, exh. ICA Miami.  
Photo © Lisson Gallery.

4 "Pedro Reyes: Sanatorium," *Maat*, Exhibition, curator Inês Grosso, <https://www.maat.pt/en/exhibition/pedro-reyes-sanatorium>.

## Introducing the thesis works

For five years now, my artistic research has been focused on the question of heart synchronization as the spark of a micro-moment of connection. It has been a way to explore from this starting point how people connect with each other, how a feeling of love or empathy is created and what the notion of love means in our society. This research also deals with questions of distance and proximity in both the immaterial and physical aspect of relationships. I explore what a personal/intimate space is and play with the limits of this invisible space created by each person. I have been working on these questions in various projects where I seek to create moments and spaces of connection. This research is based on the organ of the heart as a means or tool of connection; I primarily investigate if by listening to someone else's heart, one's heart can synchronize to the same rate as that person. And I question whether this synchronization would lead to creating a connection with another person on an emotional level. My thesis' works continue the same research questions and expand beyond them through different lenses. *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* (2025) and *This Could Be Our Sextape* (2024) are the works that formed the artistic component of my Master's thesis. They were presented in the Kuvan Kevät 2025 exhibition.

*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* asks how this "heart connection" would operate in a group setting where people have different levels of proximity: from strangers to lovers. But it brings wider questions to how people are linked in an individualistic society. This work also reveals more personal questions regarding my interest for the heart linked to the death of my father. This interest is brought out through wider inquiries: how does losing someone affects you, what it is to lose a heart. Can you feel a connection to a heartbeat only, without knowing whose it is and whether it is still alive or not. Is the moment wherein the heartbeats synchronize a physical connection only, or also an emotional one?

*This Could Be Our Sextape* explores heart synchronization from another angle than my previous works. It investigates if in a moment of connection, hearts are in fact synchronized or not. At what levels do we connect during an intimate moment like sex? The work also raises personal issues of how I struggle to feel connected and look for connection at all costs. It addresses societal issues related to sexuality and vulnerability in relationships.



Lola Barraud, *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, 2025, exhibition view, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.



Lola Barraud, *This Could Be Our Sextape*, 2024, exhibition view, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.

## Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony

*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* is a large-scale installation (about 4m wide) taking the shape of a soft round environment in which several people can bond by taking part in a cardiac synchronization exercise. I was offering workshops to facilitate the experience, but the audience could also participate on their own at any moment during the exhibition. Participants can share their own heartbeat with another ear while listening to someone else's heartbeat. This listening exercise is done with the use of heart sensors recording people's pulses and speakers that broadcast a heartbeat sound using sensor data to control the sound rhythm. In this interactive installation, individual spots are designed to accommodate an experience for eight bodies. These spots are formed of bumps and holes, creating an organic landscape. The sculpture is made of foam mattresses covered by fabric. A heart-rate sensor and a loudspeaker are placed in each spot: the sensor on the surface of the mattress and the speaker hidden inside. Their placement is thought so that, when using the spots as intended, you can hear through the speaker and put your finger on the sensor at the same time.

Each heart sensor is linked to a speaker via a microcomputer: when a person (A) places a finger on the sensor, their heart rate data is processed by a microcomputer. The latter creates a heartbeat sound at the rhythm of that person (A). The sound is then sent to a speaker located elsewhere in the installation so that another person (B) can listen to the heartbeat of person (A) in real time. Each listening area is linked to another spot, therefore, all the spots are connected in a large loop consisting of eight different heartbeats. In this installation, we feel someone's heart, an intimate organ, without knowing to whom it belongs, which transforms the "other" into an abstract body. When someone uses a sensor and then leaves, making the spot empty, the speaker connected to this sensor continues to play the last data it received until someone else comes along. So, when listening to a heartbeat, it could be possible to listen to someone's heartbeat from the past : a heartbeat that is no longer broadcast live. Which creates a sense of loss and uncertainty, questioning the physical and emotional reality of the heart connection.



*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, video of the experience and sample of the sound, <https://youtu.be/1cAy9cmM-LU>.

Lola Barraud, *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, 2025, exhibition view, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.

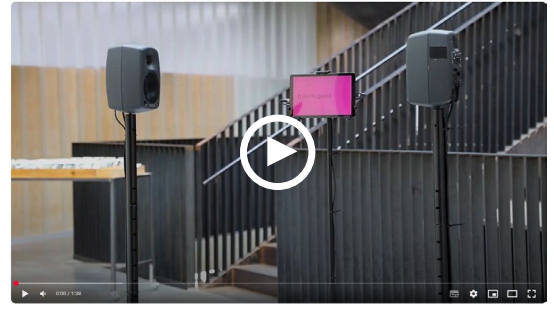


## This Could Be Our Sextape

The second part of my thesis project, *This Could Be Our Sextape*, is an audiovisual installation that investigates the behaviors of the hearts, the organ and the feelings, during an intimate moment between two people. The installation consists of two speakers and a small screen. Each speaker plays a computer generated heartbeat sound. Using pulse sensors to track our bpm (beats per minute), I recorded my partner's, Eelis Kostiainen, and my own heart rate while we had sex. The bpm data of our hearts were used to create an audio version of two hearts beating at the same rhythm as ours did during this recorded moment. The sound recording is then played in a loop. The software and audio for this piece were also made in collaboration with my partner Eelis who is a software engineer.

At the same time, on the screen, a text-based video is played. The text is a fictional discussion between two people talking about their relationship, sexuality, intimacy, and love for each other. In the video, solid-colored backgrounds, alternating between green and pink, are assigned to each person to simulate the dialogue. The video places the hearts we hear back into context. As we read this conversation, filled with worries, questions and affirmations, we gradually start to understand that they are in a relationship of some kind. The nature of the relationship remains unclear as the language shifts from sentences said during sex to existential relationship questions. Through their exchange, these fictional characters also evoke a pulse sensor and hint at what the viewer is listening to. This exchange is inspired by my personal life and relationship.

The speakers and screen are on stands at an average adult eye/ear level (about 160cm high) and installed in a half-circle: the screen in the middle and a loudspeaker on each end of the arch. When standing in front of the screen watching the video, the viewer hears the heartbeat coming from the sides. The work is designed as an experience for a single viewer, one at a time. The viewer must enter this half-circle to read the text because the screen is relatively small (iPad size). The setting provides a delimitation of an intimate space to experience the work while remaining very open as there is no actual physical wall. It plays with the boundary of private and public space.



*This Could Be Our Sextape*, video of the experience and extract of the video, <https://youtu.be/9usTjlm2RAc>.

Lola Barraud, *This Could Be Our Sextape*, 2024, exhibition view, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.



# Chapter 1:

## Love and Relationships: Before

My pondering for love and my life experiences have affected my art. Therefore, as an artist, I am interested in connecting my life experiences to my artworks. I see my work as a way to cope with my feelings, a way to do something with them, a place to try to resolve them. Both works were sparked from my feelings and trying to find a way to understand the loneliness I feel, while addressing societal love-issues I have observed around me. Alongside my personal observations and research into the relationships around me, several social studies, and philosophies, have enlightened how I view the state of love societally. These studies have equally informed and sparked the creation of *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* and *This Could Be Our Sextape*.

### View on society: The End of Love?

#### Liquid Love, Negative Choice

A fundamental concept in my thinking is one put forward by Zygmunt Bauman, who argues that capitalist society is a liquid society. In *Liquid Love*, he explains how relationships are approached in this liquid society. We are looking for strong, contractual ties in an ever-changing society.

Unlinked, people have to connect... However, there's no guarantee that any of the links that fill the void left by absent or moldy links will last. In any case, they must remain floating so that we can detach ourselves again, without delay, at the first change of scenery - and one thing is certain: in liquid modernity, the scenery is always changing,<sup>5</sup>

explains Zygmunt Bauman. In this book, he discusses the phenomenon, such as globalization and capitalism, which has led us to consider our lovers as easily interchangeable.

As a result, we look for people who are capable of making a commitment and maintaining a relationship, whereas we ourselves would not be able to give that commitment to someone, because everything around us is moving, and so we are moving too. Bauman goes on to say that people:

long to “establish relations with others”; and yet the state of “being in relation” makes them hesitate, especially the state of being in relation “for good”, not to mention “forever”, insofar as they fear that this will impose burdens on them and cause them pressures that they feel neither able nor willing to bear and which, therefore, can seriously limit the freedom they need [...] to establish relations.<sup>6</sup>

In the end, we choose not to commit even though we are looking for relationships.

This way of managing relationships in an uncertain world that is not committing, can lead to setting aside feelings in relationships as a way to protect oneself and avoid suffering. This fear of commitment and need to protect the self leads to the creation of “negative social bonds,”<sup>7</sup> to quote Eva Illouz. The idea of a negative choice, brought up by Eva Illouz in *The End of Love*, is a question of making the choice

5 Own free translation, Bauman, *L'amour liquide* [Liquid love], 5.

6 Own free translation, Bauman, *L'amour liquide* [Liquid love], 6.

7 Own free translation, Illouz, *La fin de l'amour* [The end of love].

not to enter into a relationship, to refuse the expression of one's feelings in socialization. In this "liquid" modern world, I wonder whether we are really present for our family, our friends, our loves. **Do we manage to hold relationships together in an individualistic society?** In *Liquid Love*, Bauman explains that this ambivalence between a desire to connect with others and an inability to commit leads to great uncertainty in our relationships. A love affair can end for no apparent reason. A friend can change direction overnight. The family is no longer the absolute place for strong relationships. Indeed, it is much more conceivable to end a relationship with one or more family members if you feel they are not "right" for you.

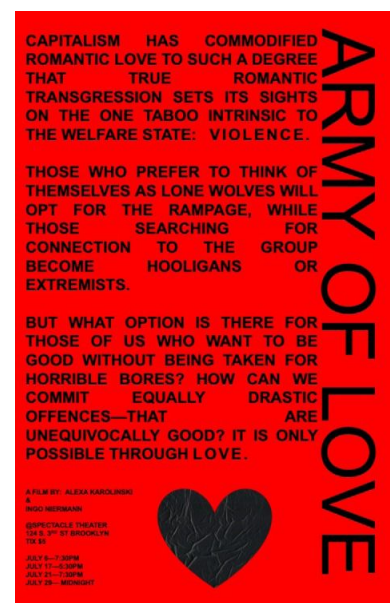
For me now, it is hard to be aware of the good relationships that surround me. My relationship to the love I receive is very unstable. I easily tell myself that I have no friends. Any link can disappear in my mind at the slightest glitch. I will question the veracity of one weakened bond and then all the others. It collapses; it does not hold together. I do not believe in the possibility of constant love. Love can easily evaporate. So, I try to hold on to love as soon as I find it. I sometimes hold on so tightly that I can suffocate people. My relationships are vital to me. Are they vital to other people? If, every day, I choose love as a transformative force, as bell hooks talks about in *All About Love*, would I be alone in making that choice, in having hope? I feel as if loving is also an arduous task for those around me. Perhaps it is easier not looking to bond, but only to satisfy cravings? The choice not to talk about feelings or not to feel is an easier choice to make than the choice to love. It is easier to make a negative choice, the choice not to choose, to use Eva Illouz's term. Choosing to love is scary. In fact, it is almost more reassuring to choose not to love, because relationships are a source of great anxiety. bell hooks says:

A culture of domination [like ours] relies on the fear it cultivates in individuals to ensure their obedience. [...] Fear is the main force supporting structures of domination. It promotes the desire for separation, the desire to remain unknown. When we have always been taught to feel safe in similarity, any difference, whatever it may be, appears as a threat. When we choose to love, we choose to oppose fear, alienation, and separation. Choosing to love is choosing to connect—to find ourselves in the other.<sup>8</sup>

I wonder what it would be like to make a positive choice. That is, to choose to commit and therefore to forge strong, contractual bonds, but in a liberated and fluid environment where everything is constantly changing, as is the case in capitalist society.

## Parental model, Capitalist Love and Sexuality

Our parents are our first vision of love. bell hooks says that we "hear about love from childhood. Whether our homes are happy or chaotic, whether our families are functional or dysfunctional, childhood is the first school of love."<sup>9</sup> This vision has therefore been impacted by the notable evolution of parental models over the last few decades. Women's liberation is one reason for this change, as it has altered the roles of women and men within the home. Sexual liberation has also shaped new parental models, opening relationships to more liberal forms that allow freedom beyond the limits of marriage. This change of freedom to be in relation and leave whenever needed, is positive and important progress made possible by liberation movements. However, it also impacted how children of those free parents view love: something that is unstable



Poster of *Army of Love*, 2016.  
Photo © The Army of Love.

<sup>8</sup> Own free translation, hooks, *À propos d'amour* [All about love], 109-110.

<sup>9</sup> Own free translation, hooks, *À propos d'amour* [All about love], 39.

or even impossible. These new parental models completely change our view of the couple, which is no longer a closed and untouchable entity. Commitment is no longer binding or necessary. Zygmunt Bauman explains: “The romantic definition of love as ‘until death do us part’ has definitely gone out of fashion [...] due to the radical overhaul of the family structures that it served and from which it drew its strength and sufficiency.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, partners multiply, change, or free themselves from their responsibilities. It is now easier to leave someone or move from one relationship to another. But the new parenting models, brought about by the women’s liberation and sexual liberation movements, have been co-opted by capitalist society through a shift in values. It is reflected in the way we approach our relationships as consumer objects, i.e., objects that are interchangeable and not meant to last overtime.

The terms liberation, to “set (someone) free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression,”<sup>11</sup> and liberalization, to “remove or loosen restrictions on (something, typically an economic or political system),”<sup>12</sup> tend to become confused in the struggle for sexual liberation. Where people sought to acquire liberties, the “the state of being free within society from oppressive restrictions imposed by authority on one’s behavior or political views,”<sup>13</sup> these liberties have merged into liberalism, that is, “the set of political doctrines based on the guarantee of individual rights against the arbitrary authority of a government (in particular through the separation of powers) or against pressure from particular groups (economic monopolies, parties, unions).”<sup>14</sup> Eva Illouz explains: “While early liberation movements imagined free sexuality as an essentially non-commercial and non-monetizable dimension of the self, sexuality has become a source of added value, both paid and unpaid, for a significant number of male-controlled industries.”<sup>15</sup> Some artists, such as Alexa Karolinski and Ingo Niermann, criticize this commodification of relationships and propose new alternatives in favor of love. As they explain about their work, *The Army of Love*:

Romantic love is saturated with commoditization. The socialistic premise behind “free love” crumbles when desiring competition gets in the way, and in the age of hook-up apps, the possibility of free sex represents the liberalization, not the liberation, of love.<sup>16</sup>

Alexa Karolinski and Ingo Niermann address these issues in *Army of Love* (2016), a video campaign featuring a diverse group of propositional soldiers of various ages and appearances. These soldiers are tasked with solving the persistent social problem of loneliness. This docu-fictional video is a utopian proposal that questions the foundations of love and justice.

At the time of the sexual and feminist revolutions, the question of freedom became obvious. Sex became increasingly safe, free, and accessible. Scientific advances have made this possible: safe sex practices and contraceptive methods allowed sex to be easily accessible as there are now fewer risks (to the body) in non-committal relationships. It is now safer to have abundant sexuality but is it really healthy for the mind? An overconsumption of bodies in negative relationships puts aside the place given to feelings.

However, the rise of sexual freedom has then been picked up by capitalism, turning bodies into commodities. Today, we are no longer talking about sexual freedom, but sexual liberalism. This liberated sexuality has transformed our vision of love. In our modern society, our feelings and relationships have evolved at the hands of capitalism. Love is now rooted in consumer society.

10 Own free translation, Bauman, *L’amour liquide* [Liquid love], 14.

11 *MOT Oxford Dictionary of English*, “liberate,” website Sanakirja, accessed September 25, 2025, [https://www-sanakirja-fi.ezproxy.uniarts.fi/l\\_oxford\\_english/english-english/liberation](https://www-sanakirja-fi.ezproxy.uniarts.fi/l_oxford_english/english-english/liberation).

12 *MOT Oxford Dictionary of English*, “liberalize,” website Sanakirja, accessed September 25, 2025, [https://www-sanakirja-fi.ezproxy.uniarts.fi/l\\_oxford\\_english/english-english/liberalization](https://www-sanakirja-fi.ezproxy.uniarts.fi/l_oxford_english/english-english/liberalization).

13 *MOT Oxford Dictionary of English*, “liberty,” website Sanakirja, accessed September 25, 2025, [https://www-sanakirja-fi.ezproxy.uniarts.fi/l\\_oxford\\_english/english-english/liberty](https://www-sanakirja-fi.ezproxy.uniarts.fi/l_oxford_english/english-english/liberty).

14 Own free translation, *Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales*, “libéralisme,” accessed September 25, 2025, <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/libéralisme>.

15 Own free translation, Illouz, *La fin de l’amour* [The end of love], 181.

16 Karolinski and Niermann, “Army of Love,” *The Army of Love*, accessed September 25, 2025, <https://thearmyoflove.net/film>.



Alexa Karolinski and Ingo Niermann, *Army of Love*, 2016, video still. Photo © Alexa Karolinski and Ingo Niermann.

Indeed, Eva Illouz, in *The End of Love*, explains that “today, it is virtually impossible to dissociate sexuality and love from the spheres of consumption and technology in which they circulate.”<sup>17</sup> With the progressive liberation of sexuality being recuperated by capitalism, love and sexual relationships are transformed into sales tools. Consumer society has used the image of bodies to sell more. On this subject, Eva Illouz expresses the view that “sexual identity is inscribed in an aestheticization of everyday experience through consumer objects, with the body becoming a visual and aesthetic commodity.”<sup>18</sup> Sexuality is transformed through consumer society: sexual attraction correlates with our looks. The idea of being sexy, according to specific beauty standards, is sold to us as the way to appear attractive to others. Particularly for women, capitalism promises that by buying certain products, we will be able to have relationships by showing off our bodies. Sex sells, from cinema, fashion, and food to everyday objects. As a result, our bodies are “over-sexualized,” sexualized to excess, and our approach to relationships is completely transformed.

Pornography, which is one form that contributed to over-sexualizing bodies, has transformed what is conceived as a “normal” sexuality. It influences a lot of sexual practices, which can become performative by trying to mimic something seen in pornography. In the dialogue of *This Could Be Our Sextape*, I am using sex-related sentences to emphasize the strangeness of the performative aspect of sex. Examples of sentences in the video include “Daddy. Fuck me. It feels good. You feel good. Slut. Tighter. Naughty you.” When bodies are over-sexualized, words also get sexualized. By extracting those sentences from the context where they were said, it also shows the “clichéness” of sex incorporated in us by pop culture and pornography. The work questions societal expectations around a “normal” sexuality.

### Rational or Irrational Choice

In the modern world, we are put to the test of choosing a partner. Nowadays, we can get in touch with anyone, especially via the Internet. Globalization has turned the world’s interactions into a “global village,” as introduced by Marshall McLuhan in the 1960’s.<sup>19</sup> The possibilities for relationships are so numerous that we must choose with whom we want to have a relationship. This is where the concept of a rational choice introduced by Eva Illouz<sup>20</sup> comes into play: having a choice forces us to rationalize feelings, to have a particular reason to enter a relationship with someone. In this way of thinking, we need to evaluate our potential partners to determine who would be the best match for us. Because capitalism has shaped the way we meet people, our way of consuming has infiltrated our way of being and relating. Artist Barbara Kruger expressed this idea with her famous slogan “I shop therefore I am” in 1987. We now tend to gravitate towards and appreciate certain types of people based on what they consume. People who consume in the same way as we do (similar clothes, music, eating habits, etc.) can appear more attractive. “Sharing tastes functions as an affective and sensory platform that forges bonds of intimacy,”<sup>21</sup> explains Eva Illouz.

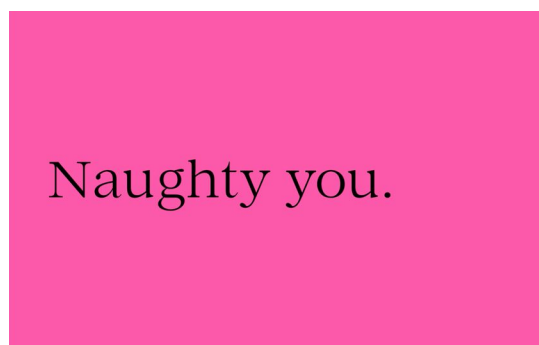
Therefore, this rational choice is made according to criteria and values that are intrinsically linked to our way of consuming. In some cases, these criteria can be very precise, for example red flags or a list of elements we are looking for in a partner. In other cases, these criteria may be more abstract but defined by the imagined

17 Own free translation, Illouz, *La fin de l’amour* [The end of love], 179.

18 Own free translation, Illouz, *La fin de l’amour* [The end of love], 186.



Lola Barraud, *This Could Be Our Sextape*, 2024, video still.



Lola Barraud, *This Could Be Our Sextape*, 2024, video still.

19 Marshall McLuhan, “The ‘Global Village,’” *McLuhan*, July 28, 2023, <https://mcluhan.org/the-global-village/>.

20 Own free translation, Illouz, *La fin de l’amour* [The end of love].

21 Own free translation, Illouz, *La fin de l’amour* [The end of love], 209.

community to which one belongs. In 2022 at the MAC/VAL,<sup>22</sup> I stumbled upon an installation by Annette Messenger that resonated a lot with this process of evaluating partners. *Les hommes que j'aime, les hommes que j'aime pas* (Men I like, men I don't like) (1971-1972) consists of thirty small booklets hung on the wall. Like diaries, these half-open booklets invite visitors to discover portraits of men cut out by the artist from magazines. Annette Messenger delivers a contradictory, fictionalized double commentary on men she does not know: her likes and dislikes are based on the men's imagined personalities. These booklets appeared to me as profiles on dating apps where with the little information we have, we are led to imagine who we think this person might be to decide whether we will match with them or not.

This model of relationship is in line with capitalist consumerism. Eva Illouz explains that “premodern romantic appraisers chose as if they were in an auction house, because they operated under conditions of scarcity. Modern sexual and romantic appraisers choose as if they were in a supermarket: they lack clear reference points, and don't know what they want.”<sup>23</sup> We hope to find the person who matches us perfectly, as in someone who ticks off all our expectations of an ideal partner. If that person does not match our criteria, it is almost easier to change to someone else. The ability to choose a partner to our taste has led to a continuous possibility of “changing for someone better” which can create an effect of over-consumption: we can accumulate relationships. On that note, dating apps encourage you to accumulate matches, date several people and consume ever more non-committal relationships. In the very way these apps work, their aim is to get us to use the apps for as long as possible. The latter are designed to show us certain profiles without matching our search criteria. So, these dating apps are not trying to get us to find love, since that would lead us to uninstall them. This just goes to show that these apps capitalize on non-love. They are responsible for a real “sexual capitalism,”<sup>24</sup> according to Judith Duportail in *Love under algorithm*. Disappointing conquests and one-night stands are piling up. Capitalist consumerism is not only about consuming in quantity, but rather about perpetual renewal. In both objects and relationships, we change for the newest thing, even if everything is working well. If you are in a noncommittal relationship with someone, there is no certainty that you will stay in touch because you could easily be replaced. You never know if you have made the “right” choice. If you decide to commit to a relationship and stop choosing, you still have the option of breaking it off at any time and meeting new people. We know that we are not stuck and that there are other choices, even if our intention is not to leave the relationship.

Rationalizing our choice puts aside the “choice” factor that is uncontrollable: our feelings. *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* gives the possibility of an irrational choice to the audience: a choice to connect that removes rationalization by focusing on a body sensation such as the heart rhythm. The installation also removes the control of choosing to whom the participant is connected as they do not know who they are listening to. The decision has been made for them. Each spot is connected to another one in a specific order that is not changing. My aim in constructing the work is to question the promise made by capitalism that, in a completely open and fluid world like ours, we can meet and connect to anyone. Because it is not entirely true. There are many limitations to whom we can meet, already in the very way dating apps are designed. For example, Tinder's algorithm only shows you certain profiles depending on

22 Exhibition “À mains nues,” MAC/VAL, January 9, 2022–April 2, 2023.



Annette Messenger, *Les hommes que j'aime, les hommes que j'aime pas*, 1971-1972, exh. Adagp, Paris. Photo © Jacques Faujour.

23 Own free translation, Illouz, *La fin de l'amour* [The end of love], 239.

24 Own free translation, Duportail, *L'amour sous algorithme* [Love under algorithm].



Annette Messenger, *Les hommes que j'aime, les hommes que j'aime pas*, 1971-1972, exh. Adagp, Paris. Photo © Jacques Faujour.

your personal grade, according to Judith Duportail in *Love under algorithm*.<sup>25</sup> In the end, we also remain in a group of people with similar identities, consumption practices, and social/economic backgrounds. Our promised freedom is biased.

25 Duportail, *L'amour sous algorithme* [Love under algorithm].

## Lack of connection, Loneliness

### Self in Individualistic Society

In her book *The Reddest Rose*, Liv Strömquist refers to a phenomenon of self-empowerment as a kind of feminism where women are encouraged to be their own strength, without the need of anyone else, “in order to be free and achieve happy love.”<sup>26</sup> In self-empowerment, the self comes before the other. In this way of thinking, we must master our feelings in order to decide when we love someone and when we stop loving them, with the primary aim of protecting ourselves and not suffering because of love. Self-empowerment has a positive aspect, as it enables women to claim independence and gradually free themselves from men’s hold on their lives. But this process is also part of a performance-based society. Where, through self-empowerment, we seek happy love through control of the relationship and our feelings: “Love then no longer has anything magical/inexplainable about it [...] but is about self-performance and self-mastery,”<sup>27</sup> says Liv Strömquist. She continues, referring to Byung-Chul Han, who “argues [...] that this is emblematic of our era of late capitalism, because we live in a society of performance.”<sup>28</sup> We live in a society where we ‘can’ do, not where we ‘must’ do. Byung-Chul Han, transcribed by Liv Strömquist, says “the shift from a ‘must’ society to a ‘can’ society was not generated by people’s will or increased freedom, but because it represented an even more effective way of disciplining people and chaining them to work.”<sup>29</sup> This way the fault lies within ourselves if we fail in a performance-based society. In this doctrine of self-empowerment, this performative obligation also applies to our relationships. So, the fault lies with us if we fail in love.

26 Own free translation, Strömquist, *La rose la plus rouge s'épanouit* [The reddest rose], 102.

27 Own free translation, Strömquist, *La rose la plus rouge s'épanouit* [The reddest rose], 109.

28 Own free translation, Strömquist, *La rose la plus rouge s'épanouit* [The reddest rose], 110.

29 Own free translation, Strömquist, *La rose la plus rouge s'épanouit* [The reddest rose], 111.

Today, a whole culture of solitude as a means of living better than with others is emerging. The *Dazed* article “Why more and more young people are opting for voluntary celibacy” explains that young people are less willing to commit to relationships and that reasons for becoming celibate vary a lot. According to the article, it goes “from a disillusionment with heterosexual hookup culture to a search for spiritual and mental development, the list is endless.”<sup>30</sup> They reject the idea of an overconsumption of relationships. They attach themselves to a few specific friends and stop entering romantic and sexual relationships altogether to focus on themselves. With the COVID-19 confinements, this idea of taking care of oneself has become much more widespread, and more young people are claiming to be self-sufficient, i.e., they do not feel the need to connect so much with others. At the time of the health crisis, our ways of relating were forced to change. A lot of questioning took place around our social and romantic relationships, as well as our ability to live alone. Loneliness has been difficult for some, but it has also become a way of life for others. In the *Anything Goes* podcast, during the episode “alone but not lonely,” the podcaster Emma Chamberlain describes her vision of loneliness as a positive thing.<sup>31</sup> For her, independence allows you to be confident and self-assured. Relationships are no longer ways of healing or gaining confidence. In this way, being in a relationship is absolutely unnecessary. Solitude

30 Halima Jibril, “Why more and more young people are opting for voluntary celibacy,” *Dazed*, February 14, 2023, <https://www.dazeddigital.com/life-culture/article/58185/1/young-people-choosing-voluntary-celibacy-gen-z-attitudes-sex-relationships>.

31 Emma Chamberlain, *Anything Goes*, podcast, “alone but not lonely,” *Ramble*, October 25, 2021, <https://www.deezer.com/fr/show/359962>.

is a new form of relationship in which the self is essential. Taking care of oneself becomes the priority. But to what extent? Is this way of living a solution to improve self-love or a mirage of a new way for capitalism to use our relationships?

I grew up with the interpretation of self-care as the capitalist commercial idea of it. For the most part, I have conceived it as something involving skincare routines, relaxing activities, drinking nice drinks, or shopping. To me, it was a solitary act that meant curling up on your own and becoming a consumer of some sort. It correlates to a society of performance where self-care is based on self-performance. Consumer based self-care and self-empowerment are becoming even more important in an increasingly individualized society. Individual well-being, co-opted by the self-care industry, is now where all our attention is focused.

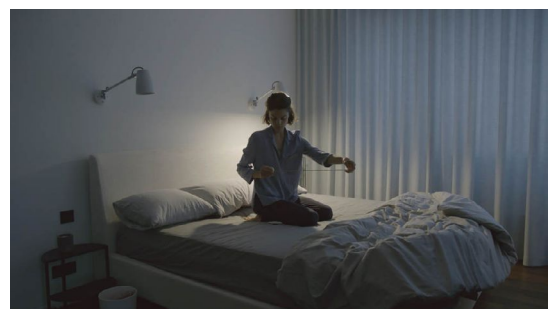
The quest for self-love, via a self-care idea that individualizes us, becomes counterproductive when we completely refuse to enter relationships. The doctrine of self-care that advertises the benefits of being self-sufficient as the key to success in love is a consequence of the individualization of capitalist society. But in the end, this individualistic mindset simply benefits capital. If we reject others, we accept the lonely state to which our society condemns us. This makes us more docile to current policies: by being individual, we lose the transformative power of a united people. By seeking to love ourselves while rejecting others, we condemn ourselves to ever greater loneliness. This specific culture of self-care is an illusion of happiness fueled by the individualistic society it serves. The process of individualization makes us rely on the purchase of objects (goods) to improve our loneliness and reduces human contact to a bonus, something unnecessary. Artist Laura Cemin demonstrates that with the countless tools available on the market, it is now possible to warm oneself up alone, to simulate human presence. The sculptural collage *Persistence of Memory* (2020) is composed of products and devices used in close contact with the body to beautify and warm it: hand warmers, a heated blanket, hot water bottles... The artist is interested in the action of these heat-inducing products and how they behave in relation to different bodies. In connection with these tools, Laura Cemin has devised a *4 minute warm up* (2020), a “how-to” video that describes a routine for “coping” with false intimacy and loneliness. Digital consumerism promises that we can establish relationships without constant effort or emotional investment. But is this really possible? Can we relearn how to spend time together in our bodies and in the warmth of our flesh?<sup>32</sup> This policy of solitary well-being is a way of making us consume more in the quest for a promised happiness that will never come through internalized capitalism.

## Solitude, Distant Bodies

I do not want to be alone, but I feel as if I am forced to be alone now, forced to rely only on me. Knowing how to satisfy myself? How do you do that when you do not want to? How do you create bonds, micro-moments of love? I feel that we are beginning to accept this loneliness. It is becoming a normal state of affairs that is rarely questioned. Artist Yorgos Prinós highlights this state of loneliness in a series of street portraits where the internalization of anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and the loss of social ties appear as characteristics of life in the post-capitalist era. Through his photos, since 2010, Prinós seems to be exploring the psychological and moral



Laura Cemin, *Persistence of Memory*, 2020, exh. Museum für Neue Kunst, Freiburg. Photo © Bernard Strauss.



Laura Cemin, *4 minute warm up*, 2020, video still. Photo © EMST.

32 “Laura Cemin. Persistence of Memory/4 minutes warm up,” *Modern Love - Love in the age of cold intimacies*, exh. cat., EMST, accessed September 25, 2025, <https://www.emst.gr/en/modern-love-love-in-the-age-of-cold-intimacies/228-laura-cemin-persistence-of-memory-4-minutes-warm-up>.

price of the accumulation of wealth and power: an incalculable cost in terms of loneliness.<sup>33</sup> The latter is normalized in an increasingly individualized society. Perhaps one day we will no longer need others? Isn't society based on the fact that we need others in order to exist? We can say that a society is characterized by patterns of social relations/relationships according to the definition of society.<sup>34</sup> Well, I need others to exist.

I always struggled to understand why my friends do not like physical contact. I feel like few people are comfortable with it. I feel alone in wanting to touch people. I was told always that I was clingy or too tactile, and I could see that it bothered my friends. I did not want to make them uncomfortable, so I got into the habit of not touching my friends anymore. But I still find it hard to understand why other people might not consider physical contact essential to relationships. I crave it. I feel like bodies have become more distant and I feel like this is a recent result due to individualistic ways of living. People are more likely to respect others' personal and intimate spaces more. Physical contact is possible with consent. But I feel like maybe, there is something else? It seems to me that for some around me, they would be fine without any physical contact at all with friends and family. Wouldn't our relationship with our bodies and with others be disrupted/transformed if we were never in contact? Laura Cemin reexamined her relationship with other people's bodies in *In Between. The warmth*, a performance from 2017. She hugged her loved ones in order to overcome the discomfort with intimacy she had felt since childhood and to reestablish a physical relationship with them. Each hug lasted for ten seconds, the duration of the timer on the camera taking the photo. The sensation of each body, its temperature and texture, evoked a different material for the artist, which she presented alongside the corresponding photograph. In 2020, after the first lockdown, she repeated the process as soon as she was able to see her friends and family again. "The desire for intimacy had become a universal demand."<sup>35</sup>

Art has one function of conveying a critical view of society. I sincerely believe that through art we can create links, question the political regimes in power and point out what these political choices do to relationships. In response to the lack of relationships and physical distance in an increasingly individualized society, I see around me more art playing with interactivity post COVID-19. As a reaction to the Covid lockdowns, there was a trend toward inviting the public to become part of the artwork, to engage them in the creative process, to create a connection between the work and the visitor, but also between visitors themselves. The lockdowns have called into question the way we relate to each other, as we were confined to our homes without the possibility of seeing our friends, meeting new people, and forming connections. Lockdowns were an opportunity to realize the importance of contact with others. Artists were impacted by this crisis and attempted to explore the issues of connections and long-distance relationships during lockdowns. These questions also took on an important role in post-lockdown creation, in order to find ways to reconnect.

In 2022, I came across an exhibition by Gaëlle Choisine that deeply inspired me in thinking about how art can offer ways to connect people. In the exhibition *Temple of Love - Atopos* at MAC/VAL, Gaëlle Choisine proposes to create connections, inspired by the segment "Atopos" from *A Lover's Discourse* by Roland Barthes. The question of atopos is linked to the question of the other: "I cannot classify him, since he is precisely the Unique One, the singular Image that

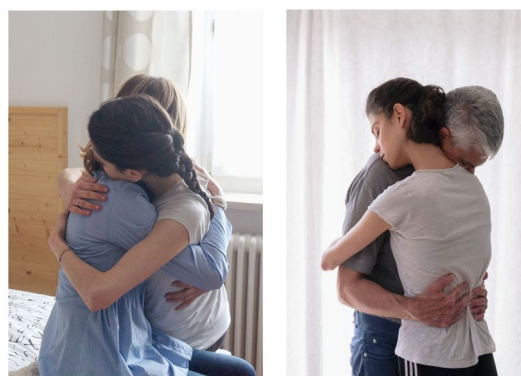
33 "Yorgos Prinos," *Modern Love - Love in the age of cold intimacies*, exh. cat., EMET, accessed September 25, 2025, <https://www.emst.gr/en/modern-love-love-in-the-age-of-cold-intimacies/220-yorgos-prinos>.

34 *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, "Society," accessed September 25, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/society>.



Yorgos Prinos, *Untitled*, 2010-ongoing. Photo © EMET.

35 "Laura Cemin. *In Between*," *Modern Love - Love in the age of cold intimacies*, exh. cat., EMET, accessed September 25, 2025, <https://www.emst.gr/en/modern-love-love-in-the-age-of-cold-intimacies/229-laura-cemin-in-between>.



"Real Temperature 36,4 °C  
Feels like: Glass,"  
Laura Cemin, *In between. The warmth.*, 2017-2020.  
Photo © Laura Cemin.

"Real Temperature 36,0 °C  
Feels like: Wood,"  
Laura Cemin, *In between. The warmth.*, 2017-2020.  
Photo © Laura Cemin.

has miraculously come to respond to the specificity of my desire,”<sup>35</sup> according to Barthes in *A Lover’s Discourse*. According to an interview conducted for the museum,<sup>37</sup> Gaëlle Choisne used this definition as a pretext to celebrate the originality of each human being. Through this exhibition, she sought to collaborate, talk, invite, and care: that is; to connect with others. For example, she set up health trails, which are sculptural devices for physical and sensory training to take care of oneself and love oneself. The works were designed in collaboration with designers, artists, caregivers, and neighborhood associations in order to create a dialogue between different worlds. Guests were scheduled throughout the exhibition to provide connections, such as hand massages and healing workshops. Visitors were also invited to stay in the museum and connect with each other by interacting with the pieces: a living room, an interactive library, stools, and cushions. The goal was to give space back to the people who come to see the works. In this way, she questions the social dimension that a museum should take on.

## Vulnerability

In *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, the audience is part of the work whether they decide to step into the installation or not. It is a choice in both ways. The external eye of the audience circulating around the work and choosing not to step into the sculpture is an important aspect of the work. Their gaze creates and holds the vulnerable state of those lying on the environment: the participants are exposed during the intimate listening exercise. But those standing next to it are also exposed from refusing/negating the experience: we know that they are afraid, not comfortable, they do not want to be vulnerable or simply not interested. Some even expressed out loud their desire not to participate. To me it is proof that it can create an effect and spark a reaction, an emotion, or a thought on the work already from the outside.

Love is often defined as an act in which the self disappears into the other. However, the disintegration of the self into the other (or many others) may appear as a threat. As Eva Illouz says: “Today, it is feelings, not sexuality, that are vectors of anxiety, because they are seen as threatening people’s desire for autonomy.”<sup>38</sup> This is why we do not commit ourselves fully to our relationships. If there is commitment, it is conditional: we agree to invest in a relationship as long as we are not too affected or hurt. But if we decide to share our feelings and commit to a relationship, we expose ourselves to possible non-reciprocity or rejection. One never really knows what the other person is looking for, because they are also uncertain. You can never be sure that the other person will stay. Through vulnerable questions in the dialogue, *This Could Be Our Sextape* reveals societal issues that people are confronted with when trying to connect. Some sentences evoke a fear of being alone/rejected and demonstrate the state of uncertainty in relationships: “You don’t look at me anymore. Do you even like me? Do you still love me? I want to merge with you. Why do you love me?”

Relationships are created on a constant game of feelings. Everything becomes a sign of an expression of feelings because it is never clear. A “like” on an Instagram story of a photo of yourself is potentially a sign that this person likes you. The expression of feelings is therefore sometimes minimal and uncertain. We try to connect with the other person, but in a measured way. It is much safer to be cautious by holding back on our feelings. It is better not to try anything until we

36 Own free translation, Barthes, *Fragments d’un discours amoureux* [A lover’s discourse], 43.

37 Gaëlle Choisne, “Temple of Love - Atopos,” interview, MAC/VAL, December 9, 2021, <https://www.macval.fr/Temple-of-Love-Atopos-par-Gaelle-Choisne>.



Gaëlle Choisne, *Pimp My Heart*, 2022, exh. “Temple of Love - Atopos,” MAC/VAL, Vitry-sur-Seine. Photo © Aurélien Mole.



Gaëlle Choisne, *La main flemme*, 2021, exh. “Temple of Love - Atopos,” MAC/VAL, Vitry-sur-Seine. Photo © Aurélien Mole.

38 Own free translation, Illouz, *La fin de l’amour* [The end of love], 153-154.



Lola Barraud, *This Could Be Our Sextape*, 2024, video still.

know that it will be reciprocated. A similar effect appears in *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* and *This Could Be Our Sextape*, the choice to enter the work can feel frightening because the viewer is placed in a vulnerable position where they can be seen from every angle. When encountering art, especially interactive art, the audience can feel vulnerable. People are watching us, and we do not know what is expected from us: the experience is uncertain. The path is not clear as often the choice of how to experience the work is left to the viewer. Are we doing the right thing? In the case of art, is it safer not to engage with a work than to risk “doing it wrong”?



I want to merge  
with you.

Lola Barraud, *This Could Be Our Sextape*, 2024, video still.

## Attempt to Connection

### Positive Choice

When I started researching and writing on love, I thought I was writing about the constant absence of love, but through my writing it made me want to point out what I feel may be going wrong in society and give new possibilities of love through my art. Writing made me want to believe again in relationships that stand the test of a liquid world. At the time I wrote on the possibility of love, I was finishing Zygmunt Bauman's book *Liquid Love*. The conclusion of this book is not very cheerful, with Bauman arguing that relationships are increasingly being dismantled to the point that it could affect human rights. He, however, points out that nothing is impossible and that it is possible to recreate links even if global political choices point to an opposite direction. bell hooks speaks of this possibility of love in *All About Love*: “Although I have experienced many disappointments in my quest to love and be loved, I still believe in the transformative power of love. Disappointment has not led me to close my heart. However, the more I talk to the people around me, the more I see the extent of this disappointment, which leads many to adopt a deeply cynical attitude towards love.”<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Own free translation, hooks, *À propos d'amour* [All about love], 188.

It was while observing this same cynicism, described by bell hooks, that I wondered what this absence of love and disinterest in it actually is? What prompted me to write about it in the first place was my insecurity about my own relationships. Friendships and lovers were areas of great anxiety in my mind. Having abandonment issues and experienced extreme loneliness, it makes me question the veracity of my relationships. In writing about love, I wanted to find a reason for this feeling of never having truly powerful relationships to fill my emptiness. Above all, I wanted to show that it was partly our society's fault for preventing these relationships from flourishing. I wanted to find someone to blame. In the end, I have learned more about myself and realized that relationships are possible. I am just very broken, but I am repairing myself. So, I wonder about my words, is this really the end of love? I think its meaning has changed in society, but love is not dead.

What if we gave love a new meaning by becoming fluid in expressing our feelings? The definition of love as micro-moments of connection has enabled me to make my love for others more fluid; to say “I love you” more easily, because this feeling is less frightening when we know it's only temporary but very real. So, we can love in “fluidified” relationships in a way that values all kinds of relationships, such as with strangers, friends, family or lovers. By not focusing on one main (love) relationship, we can experience our feelings in a liberating way. What would happen if we chose to forge bonds, to feel emotions

that can often be set aside? I decided to do this. As I am afraid of losing the people I love or of them abandoning me, I am trying to accept this fear because I will inevitably lose people. So, I choose to love fully before a potential loss. Uncertainty reigns around me, so I want to at least be certain of what I feel and affirm it rather than minimize my feelings. In my creative process, I invited people to create bonds in order to break free from the negative choices that our society imposes on us.

## Verner Panton and Conversation Pits

The original shape of *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* was inspired by Verner Panton's domestic landscape *Visiona 2*.<sup>40</sup> The designer was commissioned by the chemist Bayer to create a piece using a new textile for a piece in a boat. He then made an environment; an installation covered from floor to ceiling with fabric. He wanted to highlight the flexibility and durability of the fabric. The room installation was filled with bumps and holes creating a sci-fi decor/environment. The organic landscape doubled as a space for resting and socializing: you could sit and lay down on the bumps shaped for human positions. Made in the 70s, it reminds me of conversation pits that were popular at the time and made to host a group of people. Conversation pits were a place that highly encouraged the possibility to spend time in communities and extend our caring capacities further than the restricted circle of the family.<sup>41</sup> Conversation pits have now disappeared from homes, following a hyper tendency to individualism. With *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, I wanted to recreate a sort of conversation pit, a sort of other environment, a sci-fi unknown space for humans to explore and connect differently, like Verner Panton's domestic landscapes. The difference with the conversation pits from the 70s is that *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* takes into account the challenges of today's society. It is not anymore a utopian space of the 70s but a realistic place of a late-capitalist era.

Indeed, *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* mimics certain traits of an individualistic society. The work gives a possibility to connect to someone else in an intimate way and to make the choice to spend time in community. But it also keeps you separate from other bodies as you have your own spot, creating an individual space inside a social setting. Physical touch is removed from the attempt to connect: you do not have to touch anyone because the technology (sensors and speakers) is doing it for you. I use technology as a tool to be more precise by trying to capture the heartbeat accurately to create a moment of connection. But it also acts as barrier to connection because it lies in between the bodies. In fact, when you are on the installation, you feel alone and exposed.

*12/06: I cannot move from the spot. The foam is soft and cozy. The fabric is cold but soft. It feels warm beneath me. The room around me is quiet. There is no choice left but to look inside myself for an answer. In front of me, I can see Nelly Toussaint's work Past, present, future (self-portrait with children) (2025) from where I lay. "Profoundly intensely alone" resonates a lot with me. I feel this way about the installation. I don't want to connect. Somehow, I feel ashamed.*

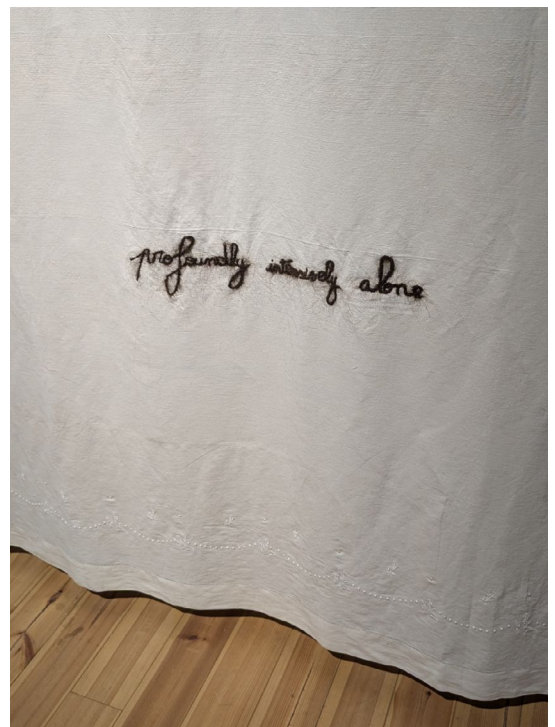
Throughout the rest of the thesis, journal entries written during the process will appear as above.



Verner Panton, *Visiona 2*, 1970, exh. Cologne Furniture Fair. Photo © Verner Panton Design AG, Basel.

40 "Verner Panton - Visiona 1970," *Divisare*, June 30, 2016, <https://divisare.com/projects/321180-verner-panton-visiona-1970>.

41 As treated in The Care Collective, "Caring Kinships," *The Care Manifesto*.

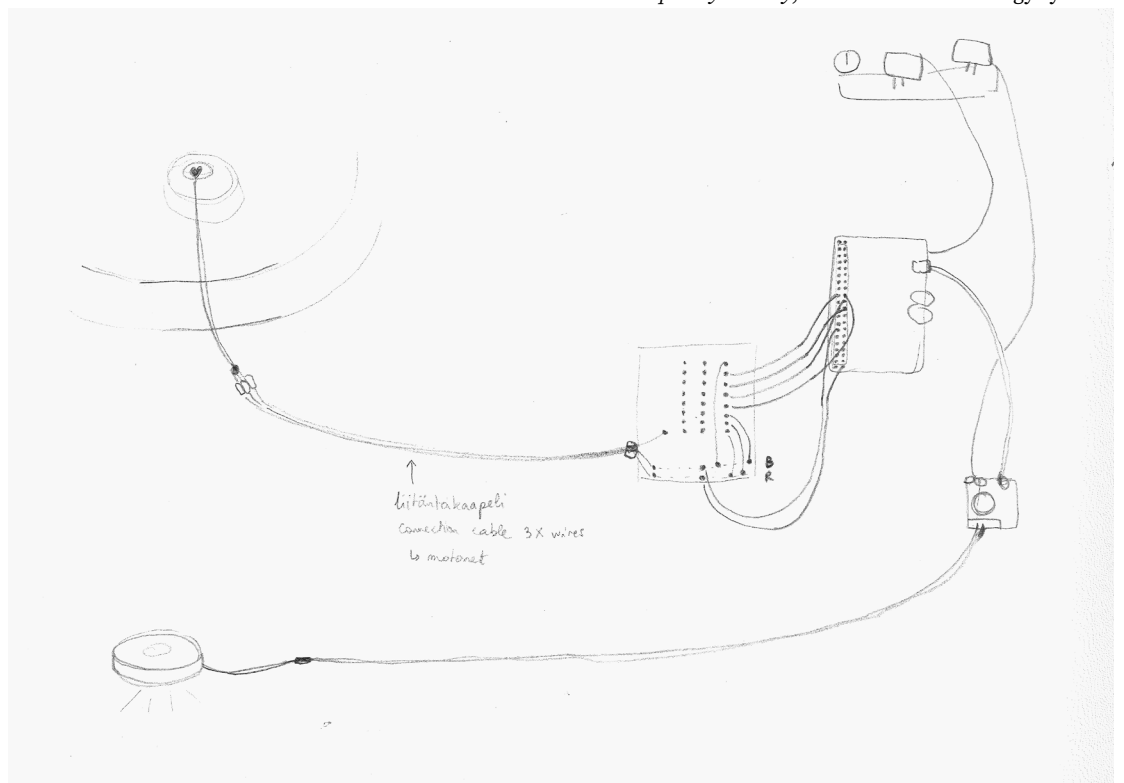


Nelly Toussaint, *Past, present, future (self-portrait with children)*, 2025, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.



Lola Barraud, *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, 2025, exhibition view with audience, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.

*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, sketch of the technology system.



## Chapter 2: Heart Organ: In Process and After

### Uncanny Heart, Mortality

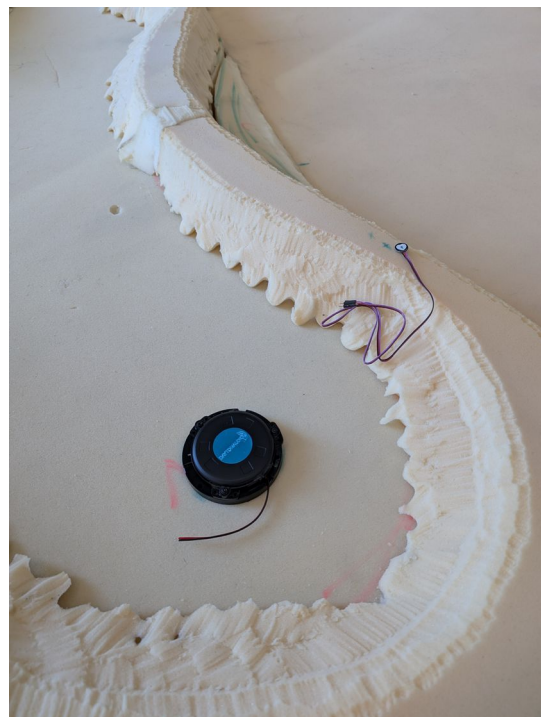
#### Uncanny heart: from sound to materiality

23/01: Today I cannot stop hearing my blood flowing in my body. It is unbearable. I need to move all the time to find a position where the blood flows silently.

05/06: I am sitting at my desk in my studio. It is on the second floor of the school, the same floor where my work, *This Could Be Our Sextape*, is installed. From here, I can hear my heartbeat resonating through the walls. The rhythm is subtle, but the low-frequency beats are impossible for me to ignore. They fill the space around me. I feel it vibrating in my body and at the back of my head. When I asked my friends if they could hear the sound coming from my work, they couldn't until they paid close attention to it. Because I pay close attention to my work, I always hear the piece's sound pulses wherever I am in the building. I am always keeping my ear open for the low rhythm. The sound of the pulse makes me imagine that the piece is the heart of the building. Sometimes I wonder if I really hear it or if I am just imagining the pulsation sensation in my head. I also wonder if I might be listening to my real heart. Because one of the sounds is a recording of my own heart, I compare it to the sensation of being aware of my own heartbeat. It acts the same way our body awareness works. It feels like my brain cannot filter out the sound of the heart in the piece *This Could Be Our Sextape*.

During the process of building *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* and through my previous projects using heartbeats, I realized that a lot of people are uncomfortable with the sound of a heart. The uncanny effect of the sound of a heart plays a significant role in my pieces. In *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, I wanted to use a realistic heart sound because it allowed me to explore how people feel towards the heart. I wondered: why do many people experience a feeling of discomfort when they hear a heartbeat? One reason might be that it reminds us of our mortality: if this alien-like organ within us stops pumping, we die. The heart could be considered an alien as it can be seen as a foreign body living inside of us. Because we often are disconnected from our bodies, especially our internal organs; the ever-present movement in our chest can seem foreign. For some, it can evoke unwanted feelings such as anxiety or even be perceived as an intrusive noise, akin to misophonia. When looking at texts and definitions, I realized that the emotion that one might feel when hearing a heart aligns with the concept of the uncanny. Ernst Jentsch, in *On the Psychology of the Uncanny*, describes the uncanny as a sense of uncertainty regarding whether something is alive or not: "doubt as to whether an apparently living being really is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate – and more precisely, when this doubt only makes itself felt obscurely in one's consciousness."<sup>42</sup>

Both works (*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* and *This Could Be Our Sextape*) rely on this sense of uncertainty to evoke a feeling in the viewer. Someone encountering the work without any context might not recognize immediately the sound of a heart. It can be confusing to know if we are listening to ourselves or to someone else, if it is a



*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, photo in process, bass shaker and pulse sensor on foam base.

42 Jentsch, *On the Psychology of the Uncanny*, 8.

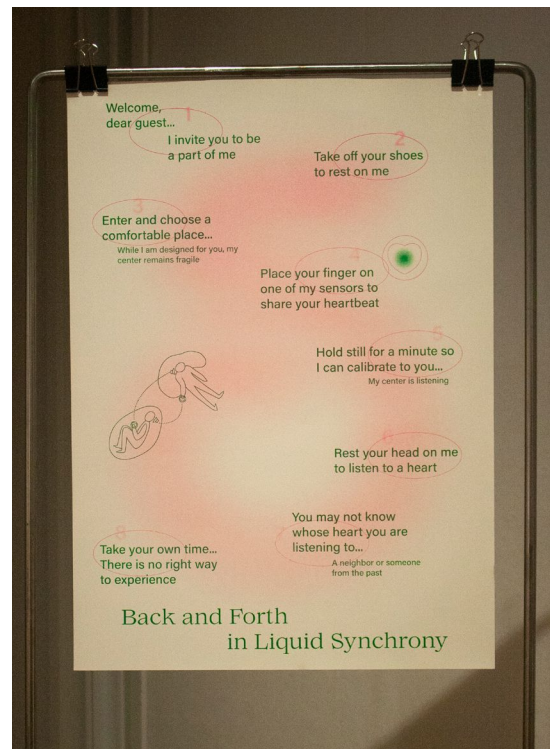
recorded heart, or a real time transmission, if the sound is real or made on a computer. All of which can create a feeling of uncertainty and potentially of the uncanny. For *This Could Be Our Sextape* and *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, I worked for a long time with my partner, Eelis Kostianen, to create the artificial heart sounds. For *This Could Be Our Sextape*, the heart sound was less realistic and more amplified on the bass so that the body can feel it as much as hearing it. For *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, we tried to recreate a heart sound as real as possible. Eelis recreated the sound shape of a heart with one slightly louder sound and a second sound quieter. It was difficult to find the correct range of hertz to mimic those of a heart. To amplify the effect, I chose a speaker called a bass shaker that makes it possible to feel the vibrations because they travel well through the foam. But, when testing with my thesis supervisor Dafna Maimon, we realized that we could not feel with our hand and listen with our ears at the same time: when listening, the vibrations effect felt with the hand disappeared. I could feel the vibrations with my entire body, but it was hard to feel and hear the vibrations at the same time. If the sound was too loud, then you cannot feel the vibrations anymore as the sound overpowers the other sensations. The multi-sensorial experience I was hoping for was difficult to calibrate. It had to be at the perfect point where we can feel the vibrations in the foam and hear the sound correctly. If the bass sound was at the correct volume, it created this effect.

15/06: *There is no one in the room with me. I can now here a few of the hearts playing at the same time. Maybe it would be interesting if they were louder. That we could hear them from afar.*

In the installation tests of *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, when choosing the correct volume, if it was too loud you started to hear the other heart sounds on the installation a lot, and it was also very audible from the outside. If I would have chosen to keep the sound loud, it might have made the experience more uncanny because the audience would hear loud beatings invading them, which is maybe what I was missing to put the audience on an edge, not fully at ease. But, I wanted to keep the sound almost as a surprise for the external audience. Therefore, I decided to keep the heart sound at a low volume so that the sudden awareness of the heartbeat might cause the viewer to question whether the object itself is actually alive or at least to not be fully sure what they are going to hear and feel before stepping on the installation. As Jentsch notes: “This is done in such a way that the uncertainty does not appear directly at the focal point of his attention, so that he is not given the occasion to investigate and clarify the matter straight away; for the particular emotional effect, as we said, would hereby be quickly dissipated.”<sup>43</sup> The labels, texts and instructions of the works explain how the pieces were made but I am hoping that they still left gaps for the audience to question what it was.

Although the works are ultimately artifices, they draw attention to our own heart. Feeling or hearing your own heartbeat can be an uncanny experience. As Nicole LaMarco discusses,

A 2016 study suggests this may be because your brain blocks out the sensation of your heart beating so that it can focus on other senses such as sight, sound, and touch. But when your heart begins beating abnormally, your brain starts to pick up on that, and you eventually become aware of it. This uncomfortable awareness of your heartbeat is known as heart palpitations.<sup>44</sup>



Lola Barraud, *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, 2025, instructions poster, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.



Lola Barraud, *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, 2025, booklets with explanation of the work, feedback notes, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.

43 Jentsch, *On the Psychology of the Uncanny*, 11.

44 LaMarco, “What Does It Mean When You Can Feel Your Heartbeat?” *PsychCentral*, September 14, 2022, <https://psychcentral.com/anxiety/what-is-hypervigilance-and-how-can-it-cause-anxiety>.

Once the repressed sound of the heartbeat emerges, we may question whether something is wrong with our heart rhythm. Freud, in *The “Uncanny,”* writes that “the uncanny proceeds from something familiar that has been repressed.”<sup>45</sup> Thus, interoception, feeling the body from the inside, can be an uncanny sensation. When we pay close attention to our heartbeat, we become aware of this foreign presence within us, which can be strangely beautiful, but also reminds us of our mortality.

45 Freud, *The “Uncanny,”* 16.

This uncanniness arises in part because we may struggle to associate the sound we hear with ourselves, that the heart is a part of us. It lies in the boundary between the familiar and the unknown: “a correlation ‘new/foreign/hostile’ corresponds to the psychological association of ‘old/known/familiar,’”<sup>46</sup> according to Jentsch on the uncanny. However, once we realize the heart is our own, the uncanny situation often resolves. Interestingly, not everyone feels their heart in the same way. As research suggests that emotions are linked to sensations in the body, “people with greater interoceptive accuracy—who can feel their heartbeat more—have more emotional intensity.”<sup>47</sup> Different levels of interoception can also affect how much empathy you have for others. Yet, according to Sarah Garfinkel, interoception can be improved, which may help dissolve the uncanny aspect and increase empathy.

46 Jentsch, *On the Psychology of the Uncanny*, 4.

47 Love, “Can You Feel Your Heartbeat? The Answer Says a Lot About You,” *Vice*, February 3, 2020, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/connection-between-heartbeat-anxiety/>.

12/06: *Behind me, the paintings of Anna Emilia Järvinen. They speak to me because they hold something uncanny: something from the inside of the body revealed through the paintings, especially the painting The screaming torment in the womb, going to play in the grave (2024). She pictured exactly what I think might still be missing from my work. In Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony, the uncanny/disgusting insides are well kept hidden. The stained and used yellow foam is covered by a unifying slick fabric skin. The heart is brought outside of the body and amplified but kept at an enjoyable volume and hidden again in the foam.*



*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, photo in process, foam structure.

48 Royle, “Preface,” *The uncanny*, vii.

Another border at play here is indeed the skin, the divide between the inside and outside of our bodies. According to Nicholas Royle, in *The uncanny*, “Uncanniness [...] is often to be associated with experience of the threshold, liminality, margins, borders, frontiers.”<sup>48</sup> The soft pink/beige fabric covering the sculpture of *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* refers to this notion of skin as a border. The color pulls the work together, it attracts you with its softness, but it hides something inside. You can see the rough cuts of the foam sticking out. When making the catalogue of the exhibition, Isa Lumme (a colleague at the Academy of Fine Arts), wrote about a piece of mattress foam I presented to her related to my artworks:

Lola Barraud peels away the white fabric around a mattress to show the object: foam. It is a familiar material, but seldom on display in this state. Foam is often close to us, but it hides under various layers. Many have laid down and rested supported by it. In an out of place setting, stripped of its protective cover and revealed as a lumpy and plastic material, foam can seem strange, even gross. Sometimes it is more pleasant to look at things from a distance and through another layer. While foam is one of the essential materials in Barraud’s works, the thematic focus in her practice has become the heart. Like foam, it is mostly hidden, concealed inside.

Her text had an important impact on my work, as it clearly exposed to me the notions of skin as a divider and the grossness of what is hidden underneath.



Anna Emilia Järvinen, *The screaming torment in the womb, going to play in the grave*, 2024, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.

The work is concerned with the question of beauty, as this notion is shattered beyond the skin: only the exterior can be considered beautiful. As Umberto Eco states, in *The Name of the Rose*, “The beauty of the body stops at the skin. If men could see what is beneath the skin, as with the lynx of Boeotia, they would shudder at the sight of a woman. All that grace consists of mucus and blood, humors, and bile. If you think of what is hidden in the nostrils, in the throat, and in the belly, you will find only filth.”<sup>49</sup> Beyond the skin, the heart contains a strange and disgusting beauty. This quality of the heart also speaks of the abject. According to Julia Kristeva’s concept of the abject in *Powers of Horror*, the abject questions the limits of the body and transgresses our boundaries. The inside of our bodies is unknown to us, making us strangers to ourselves. And we must get rid of the abject within us in order to become “I.” Thus, the unveiling of the heart violates our boundaries.

49 Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, 1986, 195.



*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, photo in process, shaping the foam structure.



*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, photo in process, installation of the foam structure.

## Past to present: Death

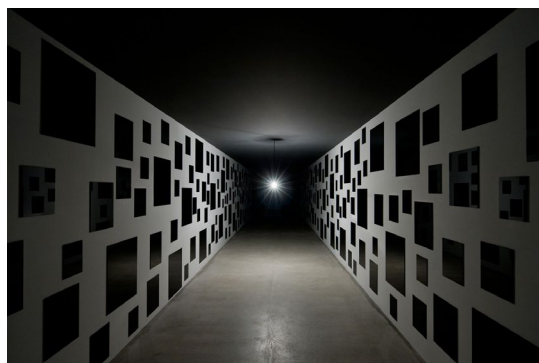
The uncanny quality of the heart will continue to nourish my artistic practice. While researching on the subject, it revealed to me an aspect of my interest for the heart that I didn’t yet consider enough. This heart organ fascinates me not only because it symbolizes love, but also because it exists on the very threshold between life and death. It made me think of my father and the letter I wrote to him. What if I could still listen to my father’s heart?

It is a wish that I wanted to explore in my work. So, in *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, when someone leaves the installation, their heartbeat continues to play until someone else comes along. I consider the possibility of listening to a heart from the past as an homage to my father. It gives me the possibility to listen to a dead heart. Which is not something I was able to do. Within this setting, I was able to touch on the process of grieving by blurring the line between a living and a dead state.

During the exhibition, while experiencing *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, someone shared this thought: “I thought about wanting to record my mom’s heart so that I could hold on to it later.” It made me think of Sophie Calle’s work, *Pas pu saisir la mort* (Couldn’t Capture



Sophie Calle, *Pas pu saisir la mort*, 2007.  
Photo © <https://fisunguner.com/shes-lost-control-sophie-calle-whitechapel-gallery/>.



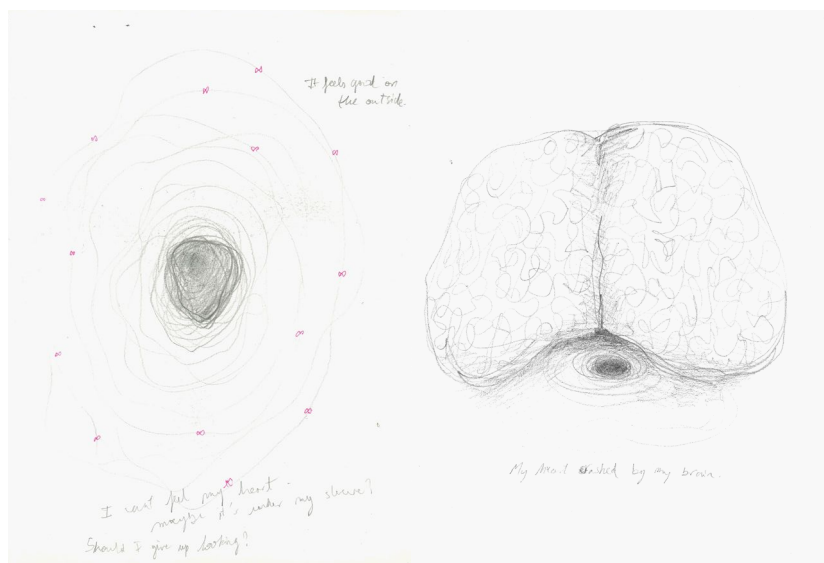
Christian Boltanski, *Les Archives du Coeur*, 2010, exh. Benesse Art Site Naoshima. Photo © Benesse Art Site Naoshima.

*Death* (2007), in which she records her mother's passing and tries to capture her last breath. This piece is important to me as it resonates with my own struggles. On the same topic, the works of Christian Boltanski, especially *The Heart* (2005) or *The Archive of the Heart* (2008) have also deeply informed my practice. In the exhibition at la maison rouge,<sup>50</sup> there was first a room where you could see a light flickering to the rhythm of Boltanski's heart. In a second room the audience could record their own heart, and if desired one could bring back home a recording of one's heart. This project continues to this day: in the south of Japan, on Teshima Island, you can listen to Christian Boltanski's heart<sup>51</sup> and record your heart or listen to someone else's heart. What interests me here is not so much connected to love but more to a question of death and life. Because, when listening to a heart you do not know if the person is still alive or not, which is very much what Boltanski's work is usually about: life and death, but also memory. This big database of hearts is also a database of human lives. For his last artwork, *The Life of C.B.* (2010-2021), he made a deal to give his life to an art collector. He sold his life as a life annuity to the collector, David Walsh. In 2010, they started filming day and night the studio of Christian Boltanski. This work was not accessible to the collector until the death of the artist. And visitors could buy a minute of this video, or then a minute of Christian Boltanski's life.<sup>52</sup>

50 "Christian Boltanski, Les archives du cœur," exh. cat., *la maison rouge*, accessed September 26, 2025, <https://archives.lamaisonrouge.org/fr/expositions-archives-detail/activites/christian-boltanski-archives-du-coeur/>.

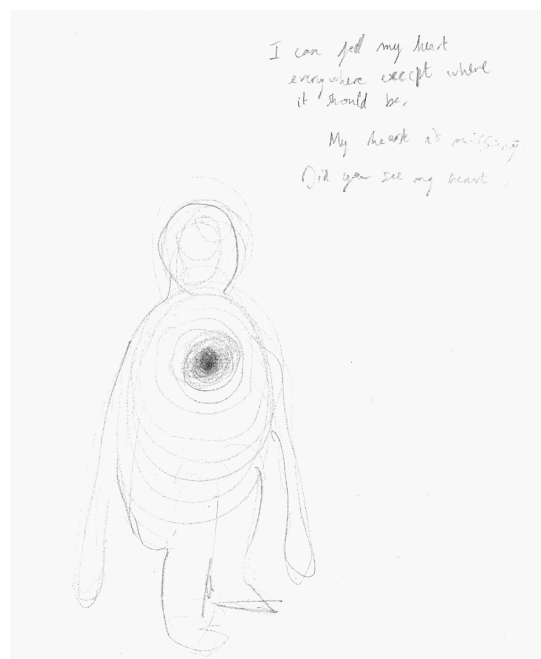
51 "Les Archives du Cœur," exh. cat., *Benesse Art Site Naoshima*, accessed September 26, 2025, <https://benesse-artsite.jp/en/art/boltanski.html>.

52 Nicole Pietri, "Une vie en boîte : The Life of C.B.," *fabula*, June 2019, <https://doi.org/10.58282/1ht.2344>.



"It feels good on the outside," sketch from Body Mind Centering class, January 2025.

"My heart crashed by my brain," sketch from Body Mind Centering class, January 2025.



"I can feel my heart everywhere except where it should be," sketch from Body Mind Centering class, January 2025.

## Inside the Heart Organ

### Body Mind Centering

In January, I did a Body Mind Centering (BMC) class that focused on paying attention to the heart. I was prompted to feel it in the body, to feel the blood flowing and to connect to that energy. In the session, I could feel my heart everywhere except where it should be: "My heart is missing. Did you see my heart? It feels good on the outside. I can't feel my heart. Maybe it's under my sleeve? Should I give up looking?" It felt like I was overthinking it by trying to absolutely feel my heart in my chest. I wrote: "My heart crashed by my brain."



*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, sketch of the sculpture's shape, January 2024.

The exercise was important as this experience shaped the foam structure I was envisioning for *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*. I felt that if my heart was missing, the structure should also be missing something. So, I made a hole in the middle and made the installation round. This hole in the middle became important to me as I did not want the installation to be only a place of hope for connection but also a place that makes it impossible, contradictory, or incomplete. As we hope for connection, we are missing something. Even in connection, it does not feel right. I wanted the installation to represent me. With the graphic element of something missing, I wanted to give this idea of an impossible task.

The hole then took the shape of a heart (the symbol). I placed the technology needed for the work in the center, because it gave easier access if something broke. It also served as an allegory for the organ. Underneath the installation, cables are transmitting the data, back and forth, to the central computers. It operates like a heart, keeping alive external hearts. To protect the technology, I placed a black transparent plexiglass covering the hole. I wanted the technology to not be too present. The dark plexiglass made it disappear a bit but also left it visible through its transparency. From a distance, the plexiglass gave the illusion of dark still water.

*12/06: The hole in the center is glowing. From my point of view, I don't see the inside. It makes me want to look. I know what is there, but I still feel curious. I sit down. From here, I can see the heart of the piece. It does look like water. A sad black liquid at the center. It cannot move. It is trapped in there. Underneath is the river. Nothing moves. We see lights flickering sometimes. All the information goes to the center, "My center is listening" says the poster, and then again extend to the "organs." The heart shaped center really appears as a living heart to me. It is my heart if I had to picture it.*

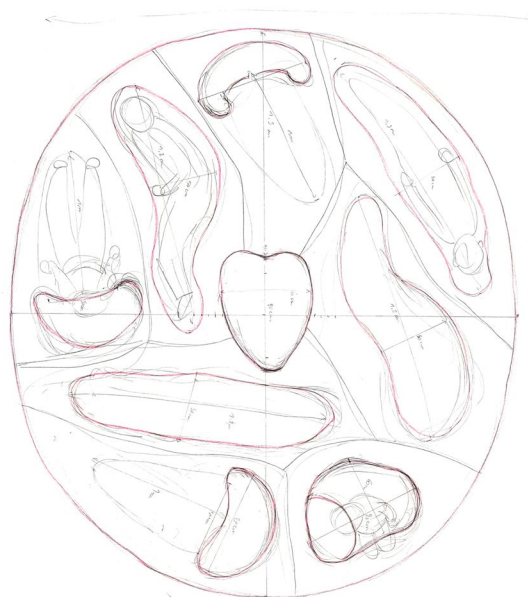
## Heart Anatomy

*15/06: Where I am sitting, the heart sound is coming from behind me. I could barely hear it before sitting in close contact with the bump in my back. Now the sound envelopes me. For me, it is very pleasant to feel the heart from my back. It makes my body perspective and proprioception more alive. I am more conscious of my body from a 3D perspective. We forget a lot about the back. I have never seen an anatomical drawing from the back. How well do we know our own bodies? Especially the inside? I have no clue how it works.*

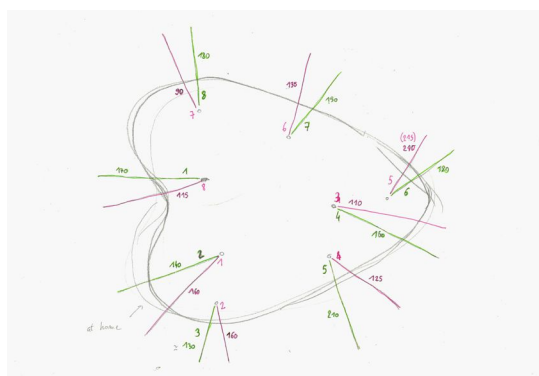
So, I researched what constitutes the heart exactly. The Heart Research Institute explains it this way: The heart muscle is made up of walls, chambers, valves, blood vessels, and an electrical conduction system. The entire heart is surrounded by a protective sac called the pericardium that produces fluids to lubricate and protect the heart from rubbing against other organs. The heart's muscular walls contract and relax to pump blood around the body. These walls are made of three layers: an inner layer, a middle muscular layer, and an outer protective layer that is also part of the protective sac. The heart contains four chambers that receive deoxygenated blood from the veins and pump oxygenated blood throughout the body. Four valves act like doors, controlling blood flow to each chamber and ensuring that blood moves in the correct direction. The heart pumps blood through three main types of blood vessels: arteries, veins, and capillaries. It receives its own supply of oxygen-rich blood through a network of arteries running along its



Lola Barraud, *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, 2025, detail of the center, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.



*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, plan of the sculpture's shape.

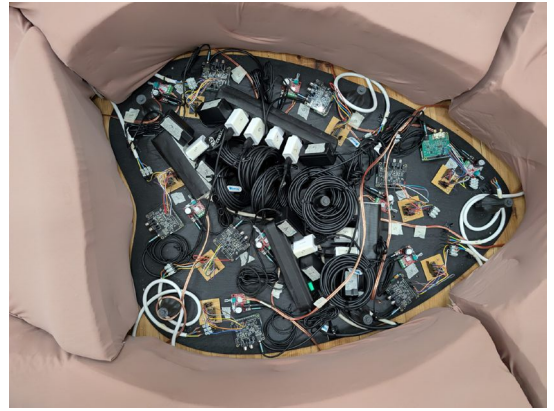


*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, sketch of the connections between pulse sensors and loudspeakers.

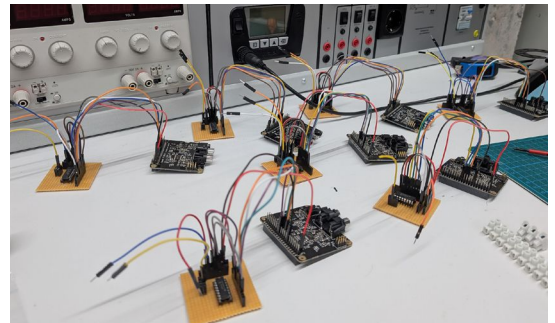
surface. The heart has an electrical conduction system that powers its contractions, which keep blood circulating through the body. Heartbeats are triggered by electrical impulses that travel through this system. These impulses occur when the heart contracts and relaxes. The heart's main function is to continuously exchange oxygen-rich blood for oxygen-poor blood. This exchange provides all the body's systems with the oxygen and nutrients they need to function properly. However, the heart depends on other organs to control blood pressure, heart rate, and other bodily functions.<sup>53</sup>

The way the heart is built and works has informed the making of these works a lot. *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* functions as an organ, a technological organ where blood is replaced by electricity. To me, the installation is a strange, organ-like alien made of eight heartbeats. Similar to the effect made by the organic sculpture of *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, I wanted *This Could Be Our Sextape* to appear as a "living" being. For this effect, I chose not to cut the ends of the zip ties used to attach the cables to the stands of the installation's speakers and screen. The spiky zip ties along the straight poles made the stands look more organic, as if they had a spine.

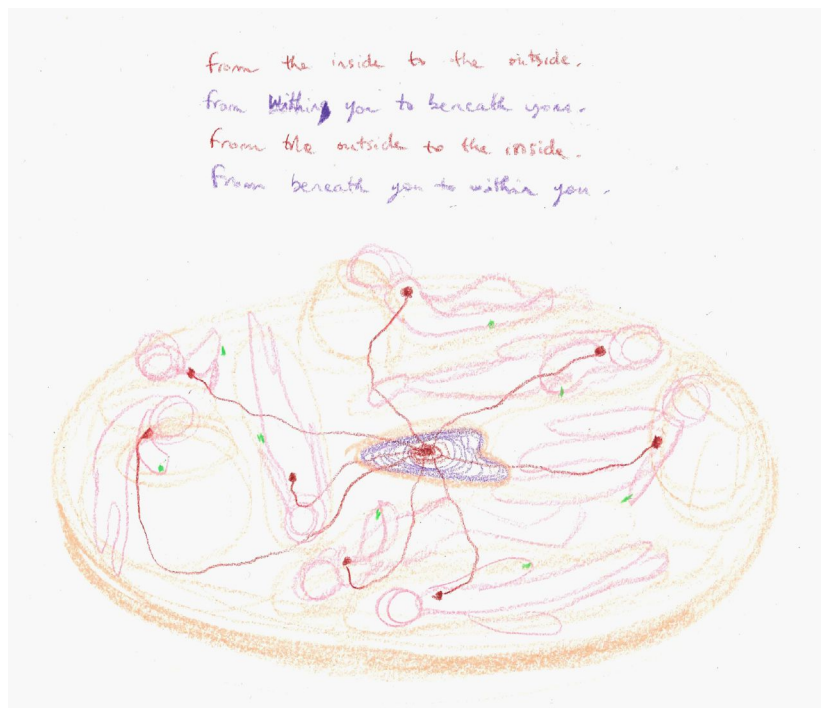
*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* appears as a sleeping beast activated with people: they are the extensions of the heart. When they lay on the structure, they stick to it. The beast is feeding itself from their presence. Participants take the role of parasites: small species living on a bigger one that hosts them. The parasite and the host feed each other. Similarly, this installation is like an alien that needs humans to survive: it does not eat them; they just exchange information. But it is a passive alien. Most people walk around and choose not to lay down or even touch it.



*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, photo in process, installation of the technology in the center.



*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, photo in process, assembling of the technology.



*Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, drawing of the piece after a workshop.



Lola Barraud, *This Could Be Our Sextape*, 2024, detail of the stands with zip ties, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.

## Workshop

06/06: I have been wondering what effects I was expecting that Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony would have on the public. As the piece asks the audience to engage with the work in order to activate it, the piece is not complete without the audience. I received a lot of feedback from people telling me how relaxing the experience was. I was conflicted because I was not aiming to create a relaxing place. I realized that the work really needs to be approached with the guidance of someone to experience the work to its fullest. The context of an exhibition makes it hard to work on its own. During the workshops I host, I can see that people are more comfortable interacting deeply with the piece and exploring more their bodily sensations and emotions. I realized that I was more interested in people that were disgusted, anxious or fighting with the experience of listening to another heart.

During the exhibition, I offered eight workshops in which I was guiding a group through the experience of *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*. The workshops were structured in three parts. We were beginning with a focus on each individual's inner body rhythms. During this phase, the computers were off so we could focus only on ourselves. I was giving prompts inviting individuals to pay attention to their breathing and pulsing rhythms, to try to locate their heart: the shape, color, and location in the body. They were then invited to focus on their relation to the other participants around them. Then, the second phase started where I turned on the computers. Participants were first invited to listen to the heart of someone from the past. I then asked them to place their finger on the sensor so that they can take part in the heart synchronization exercise, in which they listened to another person's heartbeat. During this phase, I was still guiding them: they were invited to try to locate whose heart they are listening to and to pay attention to where the heart sound resonates in their body. I wanted to bring to the workshops the experience I had during my Body Mind Centering class in January. During the guided session, I was prompting the group to pay attention to their blood circulation, and I was comparing it to the electricity flowing under them. I also encouraged the participants to think of the broad idea of "outside" and "inside." Inside could be inside the organ, inside the body or inside the installation. And outside could mean outside the heart, outside of the body or outside of the installation. Finally, the sessions ended with a group discussion of the experience.

## Experience, Personal to Public Space

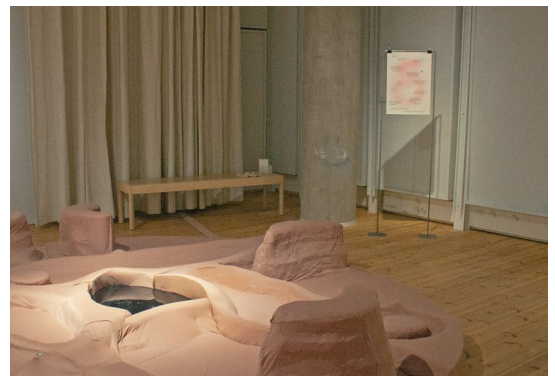
### Experiential art

When preparing the labels for the artworks, it was suggested to me to define *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* as an experiential artwork. I did not know about this definition of art. According to Kate Wellham on *Immersive Experience Network*, it can be defined as such:

Experiential art is a contemporary art form that emphasizes direct engagement and interaction between the artwork and its audience. [...] experiential art invites participants to become an integral part of the art itself, often blurring the lines between the artist, the artwork, and the observer. This form of art can encompass a wide range of mediums, including installations, digital art, performance art, and interactive sculptures, all designed



Lola Barraud, *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, 2025, installation view with audience, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.



Lola Barraud, *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, 2025, sculpture, instructions stand, and bench, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.

to create a multisensory experience that evokes emotional, cognitive, or physical responses.<sup>54</sup>

This way of defining this work was exactly how I viewed the piece. I refined the definition on the label of the work to “experiential installation.” I talk about my work as an installation because I take into consideration the space around the piece. The space around is part of the work. I also use the term “sculpture” for the foam piece, but I consider only the foam shape to be sculpture. The installation includes the foam sculpture, the sound work, the performative aspect of the bodies on the foam space, the bodies watching from outside, the instructions, the bench.

## Space, Intimacy

*This Could Be Our Sextape* and *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* are questioning space. In my practice in general, I search to play with/in the space in order to transport the experiencer<sup>55</sup> in a new, different, or alternative space. Both works change the audience’s perception of the space around them, as the works create an intimate bubble within a larger public space.

*24/02: I am happy about the place I will have in the exhibition for Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony. I am hoping to have a light right on top of the sculpture that will light up the entire installation and a corridor around. If the room is dark enough, it will give the impression of a separate space when inside the piece. Outside of this round warm light, the room will somehow disappear in the darkness, making the experience more intimate. But from the outside, the participants on the mattress will be highlighted in this fragile moment.*

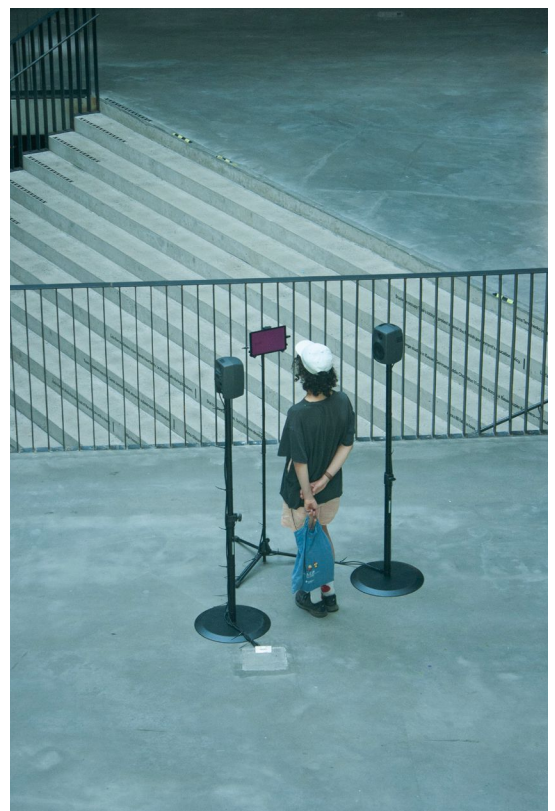
In contrast to my expectations of how the space of the installation would appear (as indicated in the journal entry above), there was more ambient light in the room. As a result, you were fully aware, when lying in the work, that you were being seen by others outside the installation. The room did not disappear in the darkness. But the effect of a separate space was still present through the sound. Indeed, one can forget the room around because the heart sound helps distancing oneself by dimming the surrounding sounds. It transports us somewhere else, inside the body.

*12/06: When I am laying down, I forget about the “outside” world. It feels secure. I can curl in a ball and be with myself, in my spot. I claim this place to be mine for this time being. I close my eyes. The sound of the heart is textured. I hear a lot of different things. I move around to feel the sound and vibration differently. It vibrates in my hand, in my neck and in the back of my head. The sound protects me from the “outside.” If I move my head, I hear too much the audience. I am alone now on the foam. I feel more vulnerable, so I count on the sound to support me.*

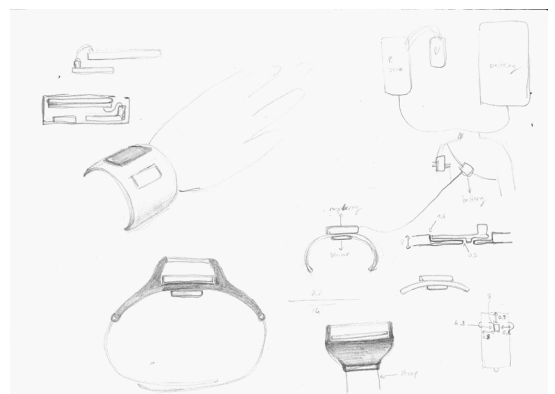
A similar effect is done with *This Could Be Our Sextape*. The sound coming from the speaker also pulls you into a different more intimate environment, making you hear only the heart sounds. When the body is placed at the right spot, the heart sound fully envelops your ears and gives the same impression as being in a tunnel or at high altitudes. The bass of the sound block most of the surrounding noises. The sound creates an invisible barrier, separating the viewer from the outside public space. The work arranged in a semi-circle also helps to create this border and to invite viewers into this intimate public space.

54 Kate Wellham, “Experiential Art,” *Immersive Experience Network*, February 26, 2024, <https://immersiveexperience.network/articles/experiential-art/>.

55 A person or thing that experiences.



Lola Barraud, *This Could Be Our Sextape*, 2024, exhibition view with audience, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.



*This Could Be Our Sextape*, sketch of the 3D printed bracelets for the pulse sensors and microcomputers.

When installing *This Could Be Our Sextape*, I found it fitting to display an intimate moment in the middle of a public space. The creation of this work was a very personal experience on many points because it was made with my partner Eelis. To record our hearts, I created the hardware: 3D printed bracelets with a pulse sensor and a microcomputer linked via Wi-Fi to a software that records the data. He programmed the microcomputer and the software to record our heartbeat, as well as transforming the data into sound. Because the heart sounds were recordings of my partner's and my heart while we were having sex and the dialogue was also inspired by my own life, it felt as if I was exposing my sex life. But I wanted to question the limits of a private moment: How much intimacy can I share?

The installation consisted of three black stands, two gray speakers and a small black screen. It blended perfectly with the background of the stairs. I wanted the setting of the work to be very minimal: to only show the result of the experience, to only show the sensation of a connection. But despite the intimate process, the result felt foreign and stripped of any vulnerability. This echo of a past moment of connection felt detached and unreal. The striking contrast between the dialogue on the screen and the surrounding context highlighted the tension between intimate and foreign: bright flashy colors alternating between pink and green and behind the screen, gray metallic stairs. A very personal interaction set against a sterile environment: sensitive, vulnerable questions are posed against the bold steady shapes of the building. I could not dream of a better place/context to explore the limits of intimacy.

In *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, the foam sculpture itself creates a space that divides from the surroundings. The way of moving on the foam structure is different so the body needs to adapt to it, creating a shift from outside (a vertical body) to inside (a horizontal body). As much as I am interested in the exploration between public and private, I wanted this work to be focused on the experience. I wanted people to feel comfortable enough to try the experience and share what happens. It was hard to find the right balance where I would not discourage people from lying down. *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* is built as an environment where everybody is situated differently from one another. Participants can choose a spot that feels comfortable for them: in the middle, on the side, looking at somebody or away from people's gaze. The spots are also made for different kinds of being: lying down on the back or on the side, fully stretched or hunched up, sitting on the floor or sitting at a certain height (in regard to accessibility of bodies who cannot sit on the floor).

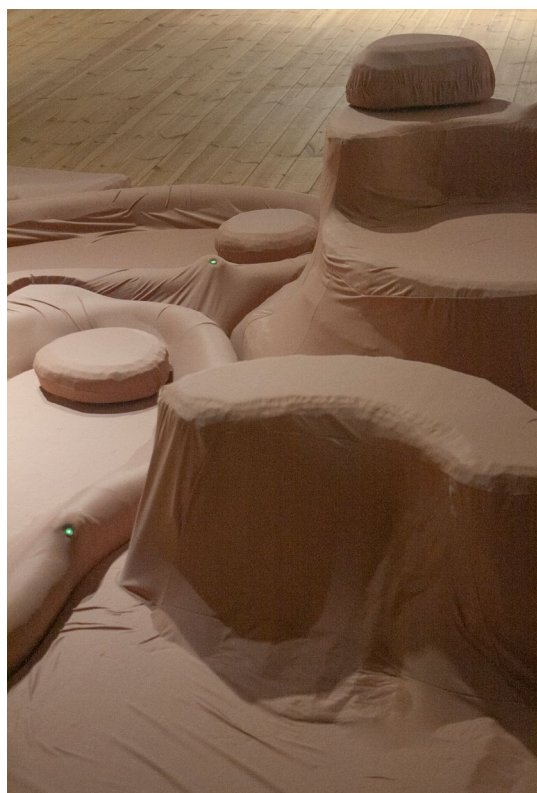
## Experiences of the Audience

During the workshops of *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, I recorded the participants' thoughts and responses through a series of questions I asked at the end of the experience. I would like to conclude the thesis with their reflections as they were in line with what I was trying to convey through the works. Their comments supported the writing of this thesis and came as indication that the work maybe did carry what I intended for.

Participants often described the act of listening to heartbeats as something intimate. Some thought of the sensation of listening to their partner's chest. It also raised the observation that we normally do not hear people's heart as one must be really close, physically



Lola Barraud, *This Could Be Our Sextape*, 2024, detail of the screen, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.



Lola Barraud, *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, 2025, detail of the different sitting and laying positions, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.

and sentimentally, to someone to hear their heart. Even friends are not that close: this listening activity is often reserved to the sphere of love relationship. Maybe listening to another's heart could be one solution to make love more fluid and accessible (as it sparks the feeling of intimacy). Yet, it also shows the gap between people.

Some participants felt a tension between being part of a group and being isolated in their own bodily experience. For them, feeling connected to the rest of the group was not important to their experience. While being alone was pleasant to some, it also made other people self-conscious and vulnerable under the gaze of external visitors: *"It was difficult to concentrate because there were so many people at that moment. And I felt very much also as a part of the work because I felt that people were watching me. And I felt stiff."*

When someone was listening to a heartbeat very different from their own rhythm, they found it hard to connect. They often experienced an effect where they were "fighting" this other heart, leaving them alone with a strange feeling. In this situation, many struggled to identify their own heartbeat because the other's heart overpowered their own. This uncanny experience made them question whether their heart was alive or not. Some wondered if something was wrong with this other heart because it was so different from theirs, which added to the uncanny experience of the heart. Some participants felt anxious, as if the sound was too raw or exposed, while others precisely described the experience as unsettling yet oddly familiar: *"At first it felt a little silly, then strange. In the end, it felt familiar... To something? To a person? I'm not sure."*

For some, the heartbeat naturally made them think of other relatives (passed or alive) in their lives. *"I'm thinking about people in my life and whether they are alive or dead. I'm just thinking like, oh, their heart is beating or [...] not. Yeah, strange. So, this person, for example, that I'm thinking about, their heart is beating somewhere, maybe very far."* The heartbeat was described as both a sign of life and a reminder of its absence. It made people question the state of a "dead beat": *"someone from the past is like kind of the dead world."*

Many participants engaged deeply with the embodied dimension of the experience, feeling their heart in different places in the body and visualizing the organ through various shapes, textures, and colors. *"It feels like I really feel the weight and the shape of the organ more than I could feel the pulse. Yeah, there's some sort of bodily intuition that was really powerful that I've never attuned to before."* I personally pictured my heart through different forms during the workshops: an orange heart shaped like a chestnut shell, a purple velvet heart, a green jade stone, a blue heart, a little ball very light and nothing. But some struggled to visualize their heart through their intuition and relied on what they knew. *"I was picturing more of an anatomically correct heart. And I find it interesting how, with a lot of things that we know, we've never seen them before: same with outer space or Antarctica and all our inside parts. This is something we're told that it is there."*

The experience was, for some, meditative: *"I was so relaxed that I was in some other space than the other people walking around. I could hear them, but they were not here, they were somewhere else."* The effect of escaping the space of the exhibition into a different one may also be due to the structure of the workshop, that starts from connecting to ourselves before turning to the group: *"I feel like your thoughts are really evolving because you begin with yourself then it gets bigger than the space."* Many participants reported moments

of perceived synchronization, creating a sense of collective body or shared rhythm among participants: as if the entire group was, for a moment, synchronized. However, some people wondered if they were actually syncing with one another or if they felt connected, not necessarily to the group, but to the sound or the installation: *“I realized that I was on the same rhythm at some point [...] but it felt like I was synchronized to something down here and not someone else here.”*

Several participants compared the experience to being in a womb, as if they were a baby hearing their mother’s heart: *“Somehow, I felt I was alone. There was no one else. But at the same time, the heartbeat was there. I was connected to [it]. [...] It was something like if I were a baby and I’m hearing my mother’s heartbeat. And then the fetus doesn’t know anything. It’s just having all this around. But everything else was like somehow emptiness.”* *“I wonder when you are a baby inside your mother’s belly, do you feel the heartbeat of your mother? [...] Yeah, I thought the same that it felt like being in a womb, hearing the mother’s heartbeat. Your mother’s heartbeat that is feeling you: It’s not you, but it’s you also.”* One imagined as if we were all eight babies in the same womb. Others imagined a collective super-organ, a *“larger organ world”*, with many hearts merging into one: *“It made me think that we are one big heart [...], that they are a little bit different rhythms, basically sort of one heart pumping [...]: kind of connected to everybody present with this work.”*

Lola Barraud, *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*, 2025, exhibition view from a workshop session, exh. Kuvan Kevät 2025, Helsinki. Own photo.



## Conclusion

This thesis began with personal questions about love and its absence, shaped by societal issues. Theoretical perspectives from Bauman, Illouz, hooks, and others framed this inquiry, but the practice itself expanded their arguments by translating them into embodied encounters. Through *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* and *This Could Be Our Sextape*, I explored how love and our relationship practices have been transformed and used by capitalism. In a social context where individualistic ways of living are taking over, both works offer tools and gestures for potential new ways of relating. However, the works have a dual effect highlighting the complexity of love; they are attempts for connection while showing disconnection. In this way, the thesis opened new paths: toward artworks that make space for vulnerability, which hold both togetherness and separation, and that still insist on the possibility of love. In the works, this led me to examine the vulnerable limits of private and public space and question how intimacy is perceived. Through the works and the writing, questions of space and place of the audience confirmed to me that my practice thus positions itself as experiential, audience-centered, and attentive to the invisible spaces between people.

In the making, I discovered an uncanny aspect of the heart that formed an important part of *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony*. My interest in understanding the body and its organs grew throughout the making of the works and writing. In the future, I want to understand deeper how the organ heart functions through sculptural experimentations mimicking how the heart operates. I will also continue to explore meanings behind the symbol of the heart and its shape. I aim to experiment more with sculptural forms and materials that evoke qualities of the heart: foam, cups, shapes of the heart, liquids, pulse sensors. Looking forward, I envision enlarging *Back and Forth in Liquid Synchrony* to create immersive environments exploring an idea of a “sleeping beast.” The making of organic “living” sculptures will also be a way to focus on the notion of uncanny by blurring the limit between alive and dead. Through the works, I started to question the link between my father’s death and my fascination for the organ heart and inquiry of love. The thesis project inspired me for the future to create a film retracing my quest for my relationship with my deceased father through archival materials of his presence.

## Afterwords

*15/06: Today is the last day of the exhibition. I came to spend some time with my work before the end. I wonder when I will be able to activate it again. The eight hearted creature will be put to rest tonight. My thoughts go to my father today as I am listening to the heart of someone from the past. Today is also Father’s Day. It is an important ceremonial day for me because I am saying goodbye to two things today. The death of my dad happened to be on Father’s Day. So, every year on that day, I write to him by leaving a paper boat in the water. I will do that later today.*

*Dad, I don’t know if you received them, but I have been sending you paper boats every year on the day you died.*

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