



THE SCHOOL OF SHYING A WAY

A COLLABORATION BETWEEN  
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE ARTS, HELSINKI AND  
THE CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART, LAGOS























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# FOUNDATIONS

## NOTE TO THE READER



Why publish a research notebook? Notes are fragile, a shy form of knowledge, easy to discard or discount, and yet most things, big and small, begin with some kind of a note. We tend to expose to the public, both in art and research, that which is completed, shaped and considered. It felt appropriate, to an emergent space, a space finding a name (for the moment) as a ‘School of Shying a Way’, to make itself public in the partially formed state of a book of notes. The School of Shying a Way is not, perhaps not yet nor ever, an institution. It is a precious idea that we have attempted to hold gently and pass carefully between hands.

The School of Shying a Way plays in the aftermath of experiences of schooling and being schooled, both within formal education and its extensions into other forms of socialization. The work draws on perspectives from the Finnish, Nordic and Pan-African regions and is conducted as a collaboration between Uniarts Helsinki’s Academy of Fine Arts and the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos. The School of Shying a Way attempts to craft a space, and provide an ideological support, for a set of resistances: to the collective/individual binary, to the limited consciousness of fixed meaning, to the locating of knowledge as something and somewhere outside of the study and the student.

Research and study are messy. A research notebook like this one, born of three years of being together (as an evolving group of artists and curators with connections to Finland and Africa), should strive to maintain at least some traces of this messiness.

Our aim has been to gather in an open space, with a primary goal of developing trust, learning about our shared and divergent interests and exploring ways of making, studying and being together.

In the end, we inevitably cleaned up some of the ‘mess’ in making this notebook, but we have attempted to retain the messy spirit of open-ended dialogue and co-making, which were core methodologies.

These commitments, to dialog and co-making, are also present in the ways this book was made. In Lagos we assigned the role of co-documentarians to two artist book makers, Rosie Olang’ Odhiambo and Alison Naturale. Together, Rosie and Alison navigated the process of selecting notes (in the form of snippets of dialogue, photos and drawings) from the first gathering around shyness that took place in Lagos, Nigeria in Spring 2023. The goal was not simply to

*make a notebook/publication* but to use *the act of making a publication* to assist us in our thinking. Thus, the selection of the notes contained in this publication, from our gathering in Lagos, emerged from an encounter (through practice) between two book artists. We chose Rosie and Alison for this role because they each brought with them prior embodied experiences of the experimental pedagogies this work draws on (one from a Nordic/Baltic context and the other from a Pan-African one).

In Helsinki, Alyssa Coffin joined the work as our documentarian. She was informed by her own embodied experience of the Uniarts, Helsinki KUNO course Rural Contextual Practice (that grew out of the Nordic/Baltic Studio pedagogy). Alyssa's work, both documenting the Helsinki shyness gathering and making a notebook from that work, was aided by a set of photographs produced by Isaac Gyamfi. Isaac came from Accra, Ghana to join the Helsinki Shyness Workshops as a participant. He chose to inhabit the role of 'participant' by observing the activities through the sensitive eye of his red, silicon-clad camera. Seeing those images, we felt they spoke to the spirit of the work and Isaac generously offered them for this publication. Isaac's photos are joined by those of Ejiro Ese, who was hired to document the Lagos workshops along with 4Tent Media. The final publication came together through the expert graphic design of Research and Development (Daniel Olsson and Jonas Topooco). Coordination was provided throughout by Mary Osaretin Omoregie and Ulla Tissari.

How to read the notes in this notebook? Can we allow ourselves to reside curiously just shy of our smart selves, just shy of any particular subject of study... this is where the School of Shying a Way hangs out.

There are many sticky hands inside the project of editing/forming this notebook, those of Rosie and Alison, of Alyssa and Ama and ours as well. We have been learning a lot about editing from this process, especially about editing a notebook that contains so many voices. These lessons are coming in many forms, but circle around navigating the desire for control; the complex desire to shape and homogenize through the logic and ordering of our own sense making senses. Editing this notebook has afforded us many encounters with the idea that we finally 'know something' and the realization of how partial that knowing is. It has led us into conversations, private and public, around words (scribbled or spoken) and images (fixed or imagined) that we thought we 'understood' and into their necessary resistances to being understood.

This is an important lesson of the School of Shying a Way, not everything speaks in the clearest voice and sometimes that unclear voice is its necessary clarity.

This surfaces in Nontobeko Ntombela's introduction of Carli Coetzee's concept of accentedness, in Bernard Akoi-Jackson's evocation of the critical pedagogy of encountering one's own doubt in the teacher and the teachings, in Meri Linna's undoing and re-making of language through asking us to 'speak clay', in Gesa Piper's staging of a stark return to the experience of being a body seen by others, in Luamba Muinga's quiet evocation of the inseparable relationship between pride and shame, in David Larsson's summoning of 'the things we do as artists' that we do not consider a proper part of our artistic practice, in Odun Orimolade's multiple, uncertain encounter with many worlds, in the space of one movement through the city of Lagos and in Taru Elfving's restaging of the 'university of the arts' in the sites and structures of small arts organizations (throughout Helsinki) on the periphery of the university proper.

The School of Shying a Way is not a pedagogic method, old or new, to be refined, implemented and exported. It is a space that opens, occasionally, and then there it is, intact, reminding us that it was always there, awaiting. Those of us who care to study in this space, who wish for and seek it, all we can hope to do (with our shaping hands and making energies) is to create the conditions for this school to emerge. What are these conditions? They resist reduction and are not intended as a formula. We can apply the pressure releasing qualities of trust and presence. We can make commitments to each other and to the space. Many of these commitments look like 'everyday life' activities (that are so often excluded from the space of university pedagogy) things like cooking for each other, caring for each other's basic needs, sharing responsibility for working through the inevitable conflicts and challenges that emerge in being together over time.

You are welcome.  
Welcome to the School of Shying a Way.

— Daniel Peltz and Oyindamola Faithful  
Nordic/Pan-African Studio Project Co-Leaders

## OVERVIEW



*The School of Shying a Way* is one outgrowth of a multi-year collaboration exploring place-based, experimental artist pedagogies. It was conducted under the title *Nordic/Pan-African Studio* as a collaborative project between Uniarts Helsinki's Academy of Fine Arts and The Centre for Contemporary Art in Lagos (CCA, Lagos). The project was co-directed by Daniel Peltz (Professor of Time and Space Arts at Uniarts, Helsinki) and Oyindamola Faithful (Executive and Creative Director of CCA, Lagos). It was funded as part of the larger project: *Finland-Africa Platform for Innovation* (FAPI). FAPI is an initiative of the University of Turku that, from 2021–24, was funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture.

Presented in this book are fragments from two intensive gatherings that constitute the core work of the *Nordic/Pan-African Studio* project. The first took place in Lagos, Nigeria in 2023, and the second in Helsinki, Finland in 2024. Each gathering brought together a group of artists and curators to explore the theme of *shyness*. Shyness was our surface and our substrate, aiding the research group in noticing our established and emerging pedagogic philosophies.

### ON BEING JUST SHY OF LAGOS THE LAGOS SESSIONS — MAY 2023

A research group composed of artist teachers from the Nordic and African regions gathered in Lagos, Nigeria (for a one-week intensive) to develop *the Lagos Sessions*: a series of experimental approaches to the concept of shyness within artistic practice and pedagogy.

### ON BEING JUST SHY OF HELSINKI THE HELSINKI WORKSHOPS — AUGUST 2024

A research group composed of artist teachers from the Nordic and African regions gathered in Helsinki, Finland (for a two-week intensive) to develop and offer *the Helsinki Workshops*: a series of five workshops exploring dimensions of shyness. Each workshop was co-hosted by a different small arts organization in the Helsinki landscape.

#### HISTORY OF THE COLLABORATION

The collaboration between Uniarts Helsinki and CCA, Lagos began with the idea of creating a study space to explore place-based, artist pedagogies in Nordic and Pan-African contexts. The introduction

The act of displacement is  
'the site' of place-based study.

between the collaborators was made by the Finnish curator Aura Seikkula. The work builds on the history of two experimental pedagogic projects, one in the African context (Àsikò Pan-African Art School) and another in a rural Nordic context (the Nordic/Baltic Studio for Continued Engagement at Rejmyre Art Lab's Center for Peripheral Studies). The project explores the intersection of these two developed pedagogic experiments and lays the groundwork for a hybrid Pan-African/Nordic educational model and platform.

#### ÀSIKÒ ART SCHOOL

Conceived and developed by Bisi Silva, Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, Àsikò Art School is an innovative alternative educational space for African artists and curators. The programme was established to benefit people interested in thinking through the conception and execution of artworks; artists and curators who are curious and interested in experimenting with modes of practice and thought outside of traditional modes of working but not to their total exclusion.

#### NORDIC/BALTIC STUDIO FOR CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT

The Nordic/Baltic Studio was an experimental pedagogic project of Rejmyre Art Lab's Centre for Peripheral Studies (an artist-run project founded in 2009 by Daniel Peltz and Sissi Westerberg). The studio ran from 2010–2017 and hosted a series of post-MFA workshops. It was dedicated to creating a space for recently graduated MFA students, from Nordic and Baltic MFA programs, to gather for collective, thematic, place-based study in the wake of their professional educational formations.

#### VISION FOR THE UNIARTS HELSINKI FINLAND AFRICA PLATFORM FOR INNOVATION PROJECT

The vision of the project has been to develop a sustainable, collaboratively constructed, pedagogic framework for practice-based, site-responsive encounters in African and Finnish contexts. As this work is part of a research process, we aim to articulate and disseminate the pedagogic methodologies developed within this emerging framework in order to impact the present and future of university-level, art pedagogy. The vehicle we chose to co-develop this new pedagogic framework was a multi-year series of gatherings, conscious displacements, in selected

African and Nordic contexts. Artists and curators who have connections to CCA, Lagos and Uniarts Helsinki (and also to Àsikò Art School and the Nordic/Baltic Studio for Continued Engagement) came together for practice-based exchange and collective study of contextual art practice/pedagogy.

#### TIMELINE — PROJECT STAGES

##### INHABITING/ACCOMPANYING

2022 Site-visits  
Uniarts Staff visit Àsikò in Cape Verde  
CCA, Lagos Staff/Àsikò Alumni visit a Uniarts KUNO course in Rejmyre (inspired by the Nordic/Baltic Studio model)  
CCA, Lagos Staff/Àsikò Alumni visit Uniarts Helsinki giving a public presentation of the emerging collaboration and the history of Àsikò at the Academy of Fine Arts

##### MAKING TOGETHER TOWARDS

2023 *On being just shy of Lagos*, Nigeria  
The Lagos Sessions  
2024 *On being just shy of Helsinki*, Finland  
The Helsinki Workshops

##### SHARING WHAT HAS BEEN MADE

2023 Presentation at the *On not knowing: how artists teach* conference, Glasgow School of Art  
2024 Presentation at *Interweave the Spectrum*, Resartis Conference in Taipei, Taiwan  
2024 *On Place-Based Artist Pedagogies* publication released  
2024 *The School of Shying a Way* publication released  
2024 *The School of Shying a Way* events in Venice, Italy (part of the CCA, Lagos Collateral Programme of the 60th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia)



wondering is important, as a form of opposition to  
more instrumentalized or targeted approaches to study

## ON SHYNESS DANIEL PELTZ

Shyness is an often-maligned contemporary character trait, when used with reference to humans, and yet one that is commonly found in art and artists. In a presentation society, we gather to wonder, what ways of knowing, and not knowing, might we find trapped in the resistant posture of shyness? I was first interested in ‘being shy’ as a vaguely pathologized, or at least marginalized, way of being that is shared across art, performance and economic relations.

This nascent curiosity in shyness led me to the shyness of trees.

Crown shyness is a phenomenon in which certain trees, under certain conditions (when spreading out their so-called “crowns” to form a forest canopy) leave space between their crown and those adjacent to them. They do this with their own and differing species. This meeting (without direct physical contact, at the interstices of the forest canopy) involves altering one’s own growth, choosing in fact not to grow, leaving space, and maintaining a subtle awareness of those around you.

From this point of departure, three understandings of shyness have emerged for me. One is shyness as a resistant posture that opens us to counter narratives to that of perpetual growth. The notion of perpetual growth is in particular need of redress as it has led us to some of the many crises that we’re now facing, as a planet and as a civilization.

In the English language, shyness can also be a place or placement, one can refer to being “just shy of” something (like just shy of Lagos, or just shy of being correct). Here “just shy” is an uncertain position, somewhere near, almost at, but always an undetermined, relational position.

All we know about the precise location of *being just shy of Lagos*, for example, is that we are not in Lagos. This is an important position to consider when thinking how we study in an instrumentalized logic system.

What would it mean to insist on studying just shy of a determined subject? What truths are glimpsed, what permissions are accorded, when we come together in Lagos, committed to being together, just shy of Lagos?

We often think in somewhat militaristic language about refining pedagogy to be *targeted on* our subject/object of study. This perspective leads to ques-

tions around how we can *get to what we need to know* as quickly and efficiently as possible. But, art practice and pedagogy remind us that many things cannot be studied in these direct, pointed ways. Studying from the positionality of shyness (alongside, near/by the subject) may be an ideal way to be with many subtle subject matters.

### The third is the idea of shyness as a movement.

The English phrasal verb ‘shying away’ is also connected to this idea of shyness as a resistant posture. There was a playful opening that happened in the Lagos Sessions where I heard ‘shying away’ but parsed it differently as ‘shying a-way.’ This opened the idea that the resistant posture of shyness is, in some critical way, also a movement, a way of moving (and being with in motion). That turned into the idea that what we are creating, at the intersection of these Nordic/Baltic and Pan-African artist pedagogies, is a School of Shying a Way.

We do this work as a group because there is much to learn from how each of us conceives of this concept of shyness; so much emerging between our time together in Lagos and then in Helsinki, shying a-way, wondering, together, through practice.

### A NOTE ON THE METHODOLOGY OF OFFERINGS

*Many of the words in this book come from spoken texts. When a text was spoken, it is preceded by the name of the speaker. Many of the imperfections of spoken text were preserved, reminding us of the dialogic space of the work.*

DANIEL—Each member of the research group was asked to bring with them to the gathering and make *an offering*. These offerings took the form of collective activities (exploring some aspect of shyness) for us to perform as a group. The offerings drew on the languages of our artistic and curatorial practices to wonder together.

In Lagos, these offerings were engaged only amongst our small research group, in 3-hour sessions. In Helsinki, we wrapped them in the frame of ‘workshops’ in order to experiment with how to expand the circle of participation.

I stressed to the group that these offerings could be something very small. What’s most important is that we each approach the topic through our practice and we do this from a space not of *knowing* but *wondering*—noting where our wondering is, in relation to the theme of shyness.

Trust is an important component of this methodology of making offerings, learning to trust (in a similar way to what is required in making an artwork) what’s drawing you towards something, even if the thing itself seems strange or insignificant. In academic study, we often enter with the expectation that we must bring, or find, the best question or best perspective. In the School of Shying a Way, it might not be the most important aspect of shyness that we offer. What’s important is listening to what we are drawn to and what the language or our artistic practices allows us to explore. We are creating a space where our artistic/curatorial practices can be deployed to consider some aspect of this thing called shyness, and one method of this research is to trust in the significance of these offerings.

We gather to wonder, what ways of knowing  
and not knowing, might we find trapped  
in the resistant posture of shyness?

A man and a woman are sitting back-to-back on concrete steps. The man, on the left, is wearing a light blue button-down shirt and grey shorts, looking off to the left. The woman, on the right, is wearing a patterned dress and sandals, looking off to the right. The background features a building with large windows and a potted plant on the right.

# ON BEING JUST SHY OF LAGOS



## LAGOS SHYNESS RESEARCH GROUP

OYINDAMOLA FAITHFUL—Executive and Artistic Director, Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos, Nigeria (CCA, Lagos project-lead)

DANIEL PELTZ—Time and Space Arts, Site and Situation Specific Practices, Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki, Finland (Uniarts Helsinki project-lead)

BERNARD AKOI-JACKSON—Painting and Sculpture, Art and the Built Environment, KNUST, Ghana (facilitator)

MERI LINNA—Visual Artist and Pedagogue, Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki, Finland (facilitator)

DAVID LARSSON—Fine Art, Konstfack University of Arts, Crafts and Design, Stockholm, Sweden (facilitator)

LUAMBA MUIंगा—Independent curator and writer, Luanda, Angola (facilitator)

ODUN ORIMOLADE—Fine Art and Curatorial in the Yaba Art Museum, Yaba College of Technology, Nigeria (facilitator)

ROSIE OLANG' ODHIAMBO—Independent curator, artist and bookmaker, Nairobi, Kenya (documentarian)

ALISON NATURALE—Independent artist and editor, Montreal, Quebec (documentarian)

AMA OFEIBEA TETTEH—Programme Manager for Àsikò Art School, Accra, Ghana (program manager)

## ON BEING JUST SHY OF LAGOS INTRODUCTION

The School of Shying a Way emerged as a construct from this first gathering around the concept of shyness in Lagos, Nigeria in May 2023. We set out to explore and articulate pedagogic approaches and place-based research methods, at the intersection of two site-responsive pedagogic experiments: Àsikò Pan-African Art School and the Nordic/Baltic Studio. Past facilitators and participants from both projects came together for a one-week intensive gathering at G.A.S. Foundation (an artist residency and research center on the Island in Lagos). During the Lagos Shyness gathering, seven facilitating artists/curators made a series of offerings (for more on the structure of of-

ferings see p. 29) that opened and explored various dimensions of the concept of shyness. These offerings were made by and for our small research group in the form of 3-hour sessions that invited us to learn more about each facilitator's personal practice and gave insight into their cultural contexts.

Part of each session was a round of reflections where space was provided to reflect, enquire and expand on what had been offered. All of the facilitators were also participants, which afforded us the opportunity to bring multiple perspectives to the fore and begin to consider how the emerging workshop may be received in different spaces.

The material that follows shares moments from the workshop sessions and the hybrid pedagogic model we are developing. It is presented as a research notebook as it is a collection of notes, conversations, and organic interactions.

## A NOTE FROM THE LAGOS DOCUMENTARIANS

In May 2023, we gathered in Lagos with an open prompt, and the space of eight days to conspire towards: a workshop on workshopping, an exploration of the concept of shyness, a meeting of two site-specific pedagogical programs. The two of us also had a specific brief, as bookmakers who had experienced these programs firsthand—Rosie attending *Asikò* in Praia in 2022, and Alison, the Nordic-Baltic Studio in Reykjavík in 2012.

We were now invited to Lagos to create a collaborative document of the workshop, not as a catalog or promotional piece, but as a research document, a way to try to understand together what had occurred.

For over a year since the workshop, we have continued this collaboration from our respective homes, in Nairobi and Montreal. We spent afternoons assembling fragments and drawings, unfolding mock-up paper books in front of a webcam, and imagining ways to read together in spite of distance. At times, the remove felt insurmountable, as we struggled to capture the workshop as it had occurred, and avoid summing it up too simply.

There is one line that we both kept coming back to, from Daniel's discussion of shyness as a relative position: "We are always kind of 'just shy of' the places we are aiming to study or encounter. And, perhaps, that position of being just shy, as opposed to being a problem, is actually an ideal position from which to study." We wonder still if this provides another way to look at this collaboration and the work of document-

ing the project. Would proximity to the workshop have made our documentation any more true?

## Could there be potential, amidst the impracticalities of our collaboration, in this space that we began to build together just shy of Nairobi, shy of Montreal, shy of Lagos?

Throughout, our tether back to the project has been the audio of our eight days together, a conversation that flowed from one session to the next. We felt it was very important to bring back the words of the participants themselves, to remind people not just of what was concluded, but of some of the ideas that came up along the way.

In these conversations, we heard:

*offerings given and accepted,  
intentions, stated outright or realized after the fact,  
defenses of rest,  
defenses of rigor,  
names for schools, adopted and abandoned,  
connections made and productive misunderstandings  
allowed,  
language shared across cultures  
and the private languages of dreams*

We share these fragments with you now, and wonder what you will hear. What is possible in the in-between spaces? What will you find in this space we have assembled here, just shy of Lagos?

*We extend this invitation.  
Let's go together.  
Alison + Rosie*



## DEAR SEEKER

*Daniel sets the tone for entering into the this week-long intensive gathering by addressing the team with this Whatsapp message:*

Dearest seekers in the space/place of being just shy of Lagos,

On the first flight to Lagos, I found the question of a name, for this workshop model/school we are birthing, coming to mind. A few thoughts surface:

There was something deeply resonant in the name “Àsikò”, this Yoruba word that means time but also refers to a quality and a passing moment, a special moment in time.

I also think there was something important about declaring a little workshop gathering as a “school”.

And then, there is also something about roving and the idea of Pan-Africanism, the ‘Nordic/Baltic region’ and the way a school and its boundaries inevitably construct identities.

What might this thing we are making together be called? Might we discover its name in the “Àsikò” of this workshop on shyness?

On the plane, the notion of calling it a “school” felt important to keep in play, maybe even a university? And then the scope and the notion of the planetary came to mind. Along with it, this concept, from grade school earth science, snuck in of “planetary drift” and “stellar drift”. Might it be some kind of “School of stellar Drifting” or perhaps a “Drifting University of planetary study”?

## LISTENING TO THE SPACE / BREAKING ICE FACILITATOR: DANIEL PELTZ AND BERNARD AKOI-JACKSON

*The space of the workshop was opened through a collective exercise in ‘scripting’ the days to come (through their poetic/psychodynamic potentials). This was followed by a material exercise in ‘breaking the ice’ through actual ice breaking.*

DANIEL — I believe very strongly in the importance of the very, very beginning of anything. For the first session, I felt a lot of pressure, and I thought, part of what I can do is to give it over, to open the task of opening, usually accorded to the organizer, to others.

So, the offering I decided to make was not just mine. We have this whole community of very advanced artists and artists educators, rather than opening a space in one way, what if we discuss the ways in which we each open spaces?



There was a handmade schedule which became a focal point; an almost ritualistic start of each day with notes and amendments being made by hand.

But we're also here to share embodied experiences of the pedagogies we work with, not just to discuss verbally, so we need to practice some of these ways of opening spaces.

Instructions written on a piece of paper on each participants seat:

*you are welcome  
at 10:02am close your eyes and begin to clap  
we will clap for 20 mins  
if your hands can  
listen to the clapping around you  
but also to the walls clapping back*

*clap as fast or as slow as you want  
no need to establish a musical rhythm  
if one appears  
notice it  
and let it go  
just keep clapping*

*if you get tired  
be tired  
try to take a nap  
while clapping*

*if you get bored  
be bored  
how bored can you be?*

*but try not to stop clapping  
if you must stop  
keep your eyes closed and just listen*

I decided to start with a very simple exercise, that I think of as a primal place-based study, where you close your visual sight and clap your hands (as a group) for a sustained period. In this case it was for 20 minutes. You become aware of your own body, the bodies around you, and the space that you're in. It's kind of like charging the space.

I'm really interested in the idea of a space of study in which the author/leader is missing. So rather than sitting in front of the group, and saying, 'I'd like us to now clap,' we arrive, and there's this piece of paper sitting on our chairs, that tells us to do something, and it sets a starting time, two or three minutes after we're supposed to arrive. I'm interested in the navigation, by a group, of a prompt that comes from this slightly less certain place or person.



The second part of the opening came out of a conversation I had with Bernard, who mentioned that he's done an icebreaker, where you actually break ice. I invited him to re-enact that ritual with the group, which also corresponds with his interest, within pedagogic spaces, in constructing our own ritual cultures.



PLEASE COME ALONG  
SLIGHTLY DRESSED TO  
THE T,  
IT'S A RATHER  
"FORMAL AFFAIR"

Bernard talked about this ice breaking ceremony as similar to the Olympics, and asked everyone to be dressed in their best clothes. This felt important to me—very often when we're studying, as artists, we have the sense that what we're doing is very marginal, maybe even insignificant to most people, and this was taking some space to acknowledge that the subtle work we are doing in making art is also very important. And to even exaggerate the scale beyond this workshop on shyness, in a little corner of Lagos. We are going to open it through an Olympic ceremony.

BERNARD — (reflecting on the ceremony he initiated) ...then out of the blue... there appears an enigmatic being, clad in faux-regal apparel, and bearing in both hands, boxes of Prussian or ultramarine blue pigment, (now talk of dressing to the "Ts").

This blue pigment, made from a colloid of ferric ferrocyanide, was sprinkled, gradually and at a deliberately slow pace and in orphic silence, as though in the performance of some profound and obscure rite, by the regal being, onto the blocks of ice laid out on the floor of the compound.

After this ceremonial sprinkling of the blue, co-participants were invited to join in the literal breaking of the ice with any of the tools also laid out. This activity continued till a lot of the ice had been adequately broken and those that remained, continued to melt even more slowly in the warm sun. The melting ice, now turning into shimmering puddles of water, mingled with the blue pigment and started to leave traces of the moment's ice-breaking-opening-ceremony on the grounds...

DANIEL — (addressing the group after the clapping and ice-breaking exercises) I was talking to Ama earlier about this meditative practice referred to as *second attention* and how this practice was important to me in thinking about how we might study shyness together.

I'm most invested in this idea that sometimes the way to study is not to look directly at things, but to hold them very lightly, with a kind of second attention. So, I want to suggest that, for the duration of







the workshop, we hold shyness in the sensation in our hands (produced by the clapping) and sort of study on that plane; study in the space of holding a light, second attention on shyness, or in being just shy of shyness.

#### CO-SCRIPTING THE GATHERING

DANIEL—I wanted to introduce a workshop we did in Rejmyre back in 2014 (as part of a Nordic/Baltic Studio gathering) as a tool to assist us in co-structuring this workshop we have just begun (in Lagos). In Rejmyre, we work with rotating facilitation and some kind of prompt—often similar to the prompts that we give to first year art students, but instead we are working with artists at an advanced stage, agreeing to collectively explore the theme of the workshop through a series of prompts initiated by each member of the study group. The prompts are sometimes simple, sometimes impossible. For example, the first prompt in the 2014 workshop was to ‘make a home, where you will stay forever’.

We come together before the workshop as a group of facilitators and we play together to find the script for the upcoming workshop. For example, for this workshop in 2014, called *Everything you want was already here*, David and I were walking around the barn where the group would later gather. We found a pile of boards, under a tarp, buried beneath some earth. We decided this was significant, in that moment in relation to the theme, and this pile of wood became a prompt for others to act on, the prompt read: *You awake to find the floor is gone.*

DANIEL—Sometimes there are quite beautiful aesthetic moments in what people make in response to the prompts, but it’s not about making great works of art. Everything we make is kind of sacrificial to the larger study.

MERI—My first time in Rejmyre was this workshop, and when I arrived, I found it very mysterious—like you say, it’s not explained at all. But it becomes something which you can use in the way you want, you could go into whatever makes sense in your life, at that very time. But then later, when I was returning as a facilitator, I suddenly realized the importance of these things. At one point, we had this joke—“Oh no, the participants are coming, but we are having such a good time now! I wish it could continue like this.” The joke is not saying that we don’t want the participants to come, that is not what I mean in any way.

But the thing is that I think these preparatory things are the very, at least for me, the very fundamentals of what the pedagogy is, and what separates this pedagogy from any other kind of learning and teaching spaces which I have inhabited.

ODUN—It reminds me of something in Àsìkò—since it is always roving to a new site, when it starts to go, everyone is fresh. Even the coordinators, facilitators— they’re trying to get to know where we’re at. Sometimes there is someone local, but even the local person is in the same bubble as us. And so there is this idea, how can we survive in this place?

*Participants were each asked to write a composition for a script, a score, a protocol, or a poem, for this gathering (here in Lagos, around shyness) —not one necessarily to use in a concrete way, but to share agency and to understand what we’ve brought with us into this study, our preconceptions and curiosities about where this might go.*

DANIEL—What did we imagine was possible here? That might never happen, but is nonetheless a part of this gathering?

*To trust in the work / to listen / to trust our intuition /  
to trust time / to witness its passing in a block of  
ice / translated to shards / to water / to vapour /  
to map its edge with the tip of a brush in blue /  
to leave traces*

## PLAY

### - WARM UP

### - NON-AUDITORY LISTENING EXERCISE

### - IMPROVISATIONAL FLUENCY OF NON-VERBAL LANGUAGE

### - BSM (BODY / SPACE / MATTER)

### DRESSCODE

### - COMFORTABLE + EASY TO WASH CLOTHES ARE RECOMMENDED



## SESSION 1 SPEAKING SHYLY THROUGH CLAY IN LAGOS FACILITATOR: MERI LINNA

*This session explores the role of shyness in multi-language encounters/places through the practice of developing a new 'clay language' and practicing speaking it inside of a future art school of our own creation.*

MERI—I decided to offer this gathering the materiality of clay, body and space. I am hoping to create a language which is not a verbal or spoken language, but a language which is new to all of us.

The first thing that came to mind in this workshop was that I am not a very shy person—shyness is not the first word that would be used to describe me. However, there was an instance where I didn't share a spoken verbal language with those I was with. I was in a country with a language which was not my own and I couldn't speak with anyone, I couldn't communicate. So I found myself in a situation where I was silent all the time and when I did talk, I would go red— that's just the way my body is. This combined with how silent I was, made everybody there perceive me as shy.

People were seeing me in a way I'd never been seen before— and the memory of that has become such a liberating thing for me. The memory of the possibility of being someone else, other than who you are told to be, who you are moulded into being, from the circumstances of your life...that suddenly you can be in a situation where you can be someone else. So after that, I realized maybe there is a shy me, and this shy me is one I have found through silence, partially, or through the act of non-verbal communication.

The exercises we will do in my offering will be in a type of silence—we are not going to communicate through verbal words, we don't have to use verbal signs, we don't have to create words of meaning. English is not the first language for many of us, but it is the language in which we all can make ourselves understood when we want to communicate verbally.

I wanted to find a space where no one is forced to use their second language, where it's not this barrier... to find a language which is of none of ours, but available to all of us to discover together.

I have chosen the medium of clay because this place, Lagos, was very hard for me to imagine before I came here. So I thought, clay is something familiar. I wanted to have something that I could trust.

# SESSION 1

*Participants engage with the clay by passing the block around and manipulating it. They are invited to whisper a feeling or express their shyness in some way to the clay.*

*Next, in smaller groups, participants do a listening exercise. One person is the storyteller—they are given the impossible task of telling their life story nonverbally using clay. The other two participants are challenged to listen.*

*For the final exercise, participants co-imagine the year is 2223. They are old and wise, still alive, or reconnected in a new format. They work at the art school that came out of this workshop and their only language is clay. Participants are asked to perform and play in this new world together.*

The clay will be our language. The clay will speak and that is what you will listen to. Listening is happening through all the senses.

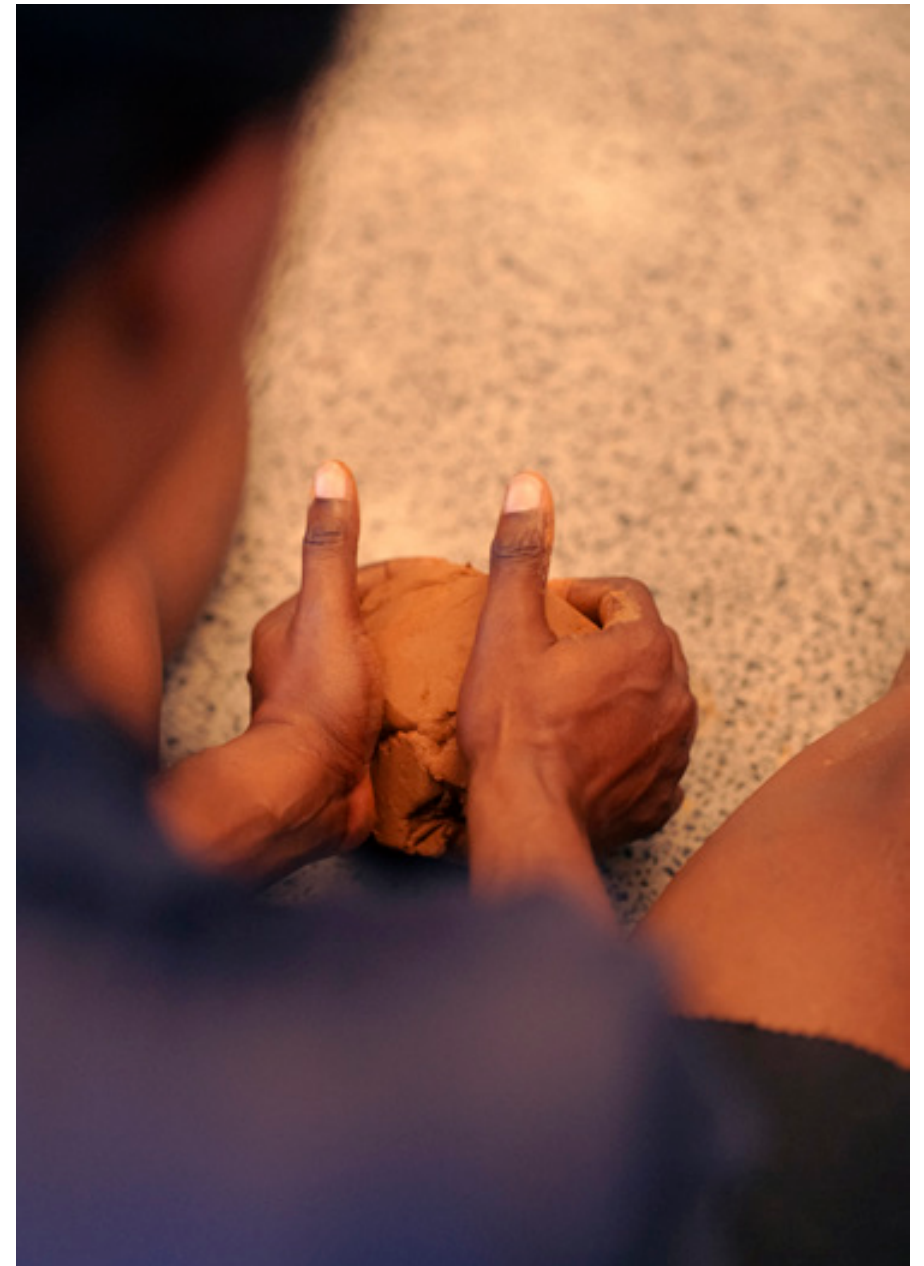
And it's a specific type of listening—like the second attention Daniel mentioned. You don't need to analyze or judge what you're experiencing. You're a witness, a soft witness to an event.

#### ON SPEAKING THROUGH CLAY

DANIEL—When we discussed this workshop before, Meri and I had this interesting conversation about trauma—ways that, when we go back into our life, inevitably we encounter difficulties. When I first did the exercise, what I understood was that traumatic memories can be mediated by the clay. But when using the clay to tell my life story I did it much more with gross motor movements, using whole body gestures. I was left feeling so raw, so exposed, so in the moment of the things I had been working with and it made me think about how often when we study in higher education, we study with fine motor—fine motor mind, fine motor hand—and how little there is of this gross motor space, that activates all kinds of things in the body, especially how little of it there is in higher education.

ALISON—In listening to other people, you're often hearing the facts and then later you find out the emotions behind them. This was very much the reverse—you only got kind of an emotional resonance and were left to wonder about the rest.

AMA—Another thing that was interesting was the idea of incompleteness... You know you have 10 minutes, but there's no end in sight, it's changing as you go. And I really liked that sometimes it seemed as though





a complete object was formed, only to be mashed up again, and again. It felt like a continual process...

#### ON LANGUAGE LEARNING

DANIEL—I had the sense that I was acquiring this language also through experiencing other people's use of the language... when Ama did this thing where she revealed a piece of clay underneath her hand, it was like opening this other way of speaking—okay, so you can speak through hiding things, through revealing things—and it felt very akin to other language learning in that way.

ALISON—I was very aware of the difference between functional communication versus the aesthetics of it—what was looking like a working society, and what was like actually having an exchange. We started playing something like a dice game. And it was very fun, but I was very aware we're just mimicking the actions, there's no sides on the dice. So we're playing that each role means something, but we haven't actually found a shared meaning of it yet. And that would have been a next step, to actually come up with something where we understood the rules together, as opposed to mimicking what it would look like to play a game...

DANIEL—I'm thinking about the way time functioned in both of these exercises... and that question within a pedagogic context.

I felt I could have lived in this society (that speaks only clay) for a couple of days— and wondered what would happen, what kind of space we would need to make to show up for that kind of performance, where we can inhabit these kinds of practices for longer durations? And then create a space that others can enter as well— what would it be like to be a visitor to a two-day space of communication through clay?

Because you said this word, you said we're all fluent now, but no...

#### ON POSSIBLE FUTURES

ODUN— You can't give a date in the future (an art school set in the year 2223) like that and not expect people to think of things like evolution, you know, all sorts of things come to mind. We're grappling with our planetary existence now, and having to imagine what, what that will be at a time where we know we

shouldn't exist anymore. This is a very interesting take for me, because it's like a project that I use in my pictorial composition class with my students, but not in that way.

I give them a 50-year jump, and tell them they didn't (manage to) get out of Lagos. And wait for them to go mad first! It's always interesting, the kinds of discussions that come up. We're supposed to have discussions for two weeks, but I let it run to four weeks, because I'm learning. So it was a really interesting take for me to look at that... Because you already chose the material as a means of communication, you erased the existing language, and then you're forced to imagine how that's supposed to work.

BERNARD—The interesting thing was, even though you proposed a future time possibility, I still read into most of our interactions that are based on what we do in the present and informed by our pasts. So for example, the King and Queen symbol (that Odun created with Luamba), the exchange (as though we're using some sort of currency), the service (or help that we volunteered to each other), because you didn't share the slices only once, this was done repeatedly at different times. All these symbols, as much as they emerged out of non-verbal prompts, spoke to certain conventions. Again, the remnant object that appears on the floor almost looks like a map. It could be a map that is not human-centric, but that maybe as humans, we keep going to processes and techniques and ways of making that we have foreknowledge of. All we do then is try to reshape it somehow. But they keep recurring.

And for me, there were moments in which, even though we didn't have easy modes of communication, two people would notice or recognize something and giggle... for me, it's very nice that in a moment, you can laugh and also the seriousness of trying to get to a point that you don't know. The frustrations would eventually yield some sort of symbolic exchange and be understood.

ODUN—You have a really serious point there...I was doing some research on how knowledge has moved and how we perceive it. And, you know, on the one hand knowledge is promulgated and on the other hand it's discovered. A lot of what is online is promulgated, so to speak. I came across this thing about this discovery of some sort of gadget, in the deepest part of the ocean, and it was something that supposedly couldn't have existed at the time it was made. And you know, this thing about erasing, when civilizations are wiped



*A non-verbal language called: Clay*





away. I mean, our planet has been here for billions of years, and we just have this information to some point that's been formulated... so I'm still just scratching at the surface. But what Bernard said made me think of that, about how something new, that we think is new, and it's nowhere—but it's actually coming from something that already exists, but we don't know where or what...

DAVID—I really took you up on what you said when we began, that we were all working at a future art school... so I started to make a schedule, which you can see the remains of, and then everything now seems to somehow grow out of that, or in relation to that. And it's a very interesting, beautiful process of creating something together in a very short time. We think about how long it takes to create a curriculum for education. I saw quite a lot of respect for what others had done. But that could also just mean that you leave it for a while, then you take it away, or you take maybe part of it away and move it to a better spot or you know—this kind of balance between respecting people's work but also not being afraid of stepping in and trying out new things.

ODUN—Did you also notice that no one rejected anything being offered, so long as it was offered? We sort of just accepted it.

MERI—After the first exercises, I felt it was becoming a little bit too personal, a bit serious, people were going into themselves. I felt it was getting a bit introverted and I wanted to find a way of bringing more play into the picture. So, that was the moment actually where I decided to try something utopian, to make this exercise be about the future. I hadn't planned it to be like that. But I changed it because I felt really strongly that I would like there to be an element of play. So that we wouldn't dwell in our past, but we could together think of the future.

SESSION 2  
THE SCHOOL, THE CHURCH AND THE FACTORY  
FACILITATOR: BERNARD AKOI-JACKSON



*we can collectively initiate  
our own critique of the  
system. To devise our ways  
of navigating them.*

# SESSION 2

*This session, exploring shyness as it manifests in the conventional pedagogy of rote memorization, opens a conversation on the act of recall and the importance of doubting the teacher and the teachings. The school, the church and the 20th century factory, as models for understanding the place of the pedagogic encounter, are explored.*

*We arrive to find a space arranged with chairs in rows, all facing forward. Bernard stands in front and gives us instructions. We are allowed some time to review materials on a table and then seated to take an exam, where we are asked to recall facts from these materials. Our knowledge of African history is tested. Bernard grades our exams and returns them to us along with a certificate that we are asked to certify by inserting our own fingerprints.*

BERNARD—By mimicking bureaucratic structures and ways of thinking and of doing, I bring up the issues that I'm critiquing within society. I hope this helps us see patterns, study society, study ourselves, appreciate the power of systems (or the invisible curriculum) and see how, through humor and their critical engagement, these systems could be perhaps, undone, toppled or turned on their heads.

*NOTE: In this notebook, texts preceded by a first name are transcriptions of spoken text. The name of the speaker is repeated (even if the speaker is the same) to indicate the text is not a continuation of what the speaker was saying, but rather comes from a different moment in the gathering.*

BERNARD—I see my art practice and my teaching as part of each other. So I brought in a situation from my art practice that also resonates with my pedagogic practice.

I selected elements of my work to share that put people through the frustration that I address in my work. My frustration with structure, my frustration with formality, my frustration with the oppression of colonialism—I make it come out through the structuring of the work itself. Here, open endedness becomes a means by which to critique structure, whilst making a pastiche of this very structure.

As an educator, I always think that we are all learning together and so also all presenting something. I'm always conscious of not standing right in front of the class (so as to take up central space), I prefer to go around and work within the lanes because that authority figure can be quite oppressive.

This idea for this exercise is a reinterpretation

of Jacques Rancière’s “ignorant schoolmaster,” as well as more horizontal forms of knowledge exchange in vernacular societies.

BERNARD—The seating arrangement is important for me, because by starting with the guise of the rigid, almost modular, formal classroom setup and then evolving gradually into the more organic circular arrangement, we are able to embody those binary spaces of shyness and confidence.

I tend not to like order—the things I feel most repelled by, are also those things I am in the habit of inviting into my ways of teaching. This is to make people recognize or appreciate the contradictions and paradoxes inherent in society. Sometimes, even though I think it is bad to have overt order, this same order becomes a necessary ingredient for things to work. This is why I like to structure my work to mimic three specific types of our shared spaces: the school, the church, and the 20th century office (not necessarily the production line in a factory), but spaces where administrative duties are usually performed. There’s a certain peculiarity to the format of each of these spaces that facilitates self-censorship amongst the participants.

So, it is intentional that we are sitting in these rows, pews and work-stations to become students, believers and good workers.

*For the second part of the workshop, chairs were returned to a circle and participants discussed the experience of taking the test.*

BERNARD—Most of us only recognize what was happening in school, (the brainwashing, the indoctrination), after we leave the institution. The situations or activities that I present don’t allow for boredom. Participants in it are always expected to be completely engaged. They are continually distracted, such that there is no real time left to pause and reflect.

These are models, with which we are trying to undo the system, and they tend to imitate that very system, albeit in humorous ways. For me, it’s not about outrightly rejecting convention, but to critically over-identify with it and use it as a way of sensitization. Then maybe, we can collectively initiate our own critique of the system. To devise our ways of navigating them.





ON STRUCTURE

DANIEL—I found it meaningful, where you started with this frame of the school, the church, the 20th century office, calling attention to these. I often come back to this understanding that most schools have their origins in one of the two, either religious or commercial interests. So, it was interesting to think of the space between these spaces: school, church, office. I’m wondering which space we are in? Could be a schoolhouse office a church schoolhouse, or maybe this is some kind of an office/church?

The theological aims of schooling have been marginalized in favor of the commercial ones. I often feel like a critical part of the work that we’re doing here, such as developing our own ritual culture as we’ve been discussing, is dipping a toe back into those lost theological motivations.

ON DEFINING KNOWLEDGE

BERNARD—In my teaching, I like to bring texts that are both foreign to and local to my contexts. And I try as much as possible to model the type of work I have done for students. Sometimes when they read books, it seems like it’s only other people who are writing but I also bring things in which I am featured, and people that they know are featured, so they know that it’s possible also in these spaces. It’s not only others who are writing but also us and I try my best to let students also create texts that could later be published so that they can see that it’s possible. Those things are important for building self confidence. It is a similar situation too, when we paint murals together from scratch. These are ways in which we build self confidence.

ODUN—It also made me think about tech, and how we use tech to do searches. Sometimes you think you’re looking for something, and we think it should be online. And then we can’t find it. And it’s hard when you have to accept that you’re going to be the person to put down something incorrect.

AMA—Essentially, what you learn at school is often someone else’s curated knowledge.

I can remember one of the modules on my MA programme was culture and society of West Africa. They



Name:.....

Nationality:.....

Date:.....

1. What significant “globalizing” event do the dates 15<sup>th</sup> November 1884 to 15<sup>th</sup> February 1885 commemorate?

- Kindly circle your choice*  
 a) Christopher Columbus’ *discovery* of America.  
 b) The infamous Berlin conference.  
 c) The establishment of the Gold Coast colony.

2. Who made the statement: “The tragedy of Africa is that the African has not yet fully entered into history” on 26<sup>th</sup> July 2007 in Dakar Senegal?

- Kindly circle your choice*  
 a) Jules Grévy  
 b) Francois Hollande  
 c) Nicholas Sarkozy

3. In 1873, in Kumasi, during the Ashanti campaign, the British unleashed this weapon which will also be used three years later in Ulundi, South Africa. What weapon was this?

- Kindly circle your choice*  
 a) The Brown Bess  
 b) The Gatling gun  
 c) The R5 Assault rifle

4. If this democratic republic of an “Empire” were to be founded, what will be its slogan?

- Kindly circle your choice*  
 a) We can!  
 b) Shall we...  
 c) Amandia!

5. When asked where his newly independent nation-state in West Africa faced politically, he responded: “We neither face East nor West, we face forward.” Who is he?

- Kindly circle your choice*  
 a) Kwame Nkrumah  
 b) Nnamdi Azikiwe  
 c) Chiek Anta Diop

signature:.....  
 (participant)



signature:.....



(Officer: Approved)



taught us something about West Africa stated as fact, which I could certify (as a West African) wasn't necessarily true, to which the lecturer requested a publication that showed otherwise. After expressing that I hadn't come across any books which would support this and how difficult it was to find African authors readily on UK reading lists, she expressed that if you couldn't quote something from a written source then you couldn't argue it to be true. Basically, we'll go with what's written. That reminded me of just how important it is to curate knowledge and share it, the way Àsikò does. It is contextual but certainly not static and important to help perpetuate knowledge that is precious and true.

#### ON GETTING IT RIGHT

DAVID—I got a really strong feeling of being back in school, despite it being a long time ago... and a strong feeling of not knowing the answers to all the questions, and feeling the shame... will I be judged for not knowing? Am I supposed to know?

LUAMBA—I can relate to what you're saying because I felt that pressure. It's interesting how as soon as you gave us the paper, instantly my nervousness about the questions was real. Mostly because some of the topics are the daily bread of being African diasporan. I wondered, why don't I know about this issue that we are facing today in this African diaspora? It's amazing, some names are obvious, you can always remember this person saying that in a speech, but the pressure was because of this format of school. We know the answers, we talk to each other before the test and say all the answers, but after that I just go blank.

ODUN—It was everything that I'm fighting against. It's not a way that I am operating anymore, even in the environment of the university.

I defend not following the rules, you know.

OYINDAMOLA—Actually the questions made me think about ChatGPT, it was recently in the news and I just tested out the software. I began to think about search engine results and how the emphasis needed to be on the questions you asked.

By knowing the right questions to ask you had better odds at getting the right information back, but what if you didn't know the right question to ask?

MERI—When I was in school, memory was considered knowledge. So these things—like using a phone during

the exam were not permitted—what is knowledge today? I think what came to mind for me was very much this thing you said, it's the ability to ask the right questions in order to retrieve the answer.

#### ON FINDING OUT FOR YOURSELF

BERNARD—A lot of the students, at least in my context, have been told what to do (that is, prior to their taking our courses in the Department of Painting and Sculpture). Or have been schooled to know certain responses, which they are expected to regurgitate. So when they come to our institution, for instance, and then we tell them to go find out for themselves. It's like a whole new sense of responsibility is demanded of them. And it can potentially be paralyzing. So we try to leave it at that, no singular answer is correct (per se), and in that way it becomes okay to dare to do new things. To take good risks.

For me also, it's the way in which I want people to learn, because in searching for this answer, you are bound to meet the wrong answers. So there's some information, and with the time that you have, what do you do with this information? So these are the ways in which I model wrong knowledge that is looking for something else.

SESSION 3  
PRACTICING JUST SHY OF PRACTICE  
FACILITATOR: DAVID LARSSON



just shy of an art practice?

# SESSION 3

*In this session, spaces of informal practice, that exist alongside our formal art practices, are explored in this invitation to 'take a walk to the ocean and photograph the horizon'; the concept of the ocean/beach as a 'public place' is interrupted by the logics of public space at play in Lagos.*

DAVID — I was reminded yesterday that sometimes the only possible place to start is where you are in your mind right now.

There could be many reasons why I would suggest that we do what I'm about to suggest that we do. I'm not asking you to do this for me. I'm offering you to join me in doing this - and why? Honestly, because this is something that I just do.

Whenever I find myself close to an ocean, I feel strongly that I need to find the point where I can stand on the shore and see the horizon. It calms me, and the music, that we're going to listen to together before this walk to the beach, is also something that calms me, something I listen to when my mind is too distracted, too overwhelmed.

DAVID — The beach in Lagos, or at least in this part of Lagos, is not really public or 'reachable' in the sense that I'm used to from the Nordic countries. I've done the silent walking part of this before, but I'm also trying to set out a task to achieve with a group—even though you don't really know if it's gonna work out, or how it's going to work out—as a kind of collective exploration.

*Participants listened to an abstract symphony or sound piece, for a little bit more than 40 minutes. They were asked to stay silent after it ended and try to stay in the state of being, that the sound piece evoked, as the group set off on a walk to the ocean, 2 km away.*

*Participants had a task to do when they arrived at the ocean: Take a photograph, using your cell phone, of the ocean and the horizon, nothing else.*

## ON VULNERABILITY

LUAMBA — I'm still processing... the first moment, for me, was like being prepared to be vulnerable and then we went outside, we lost all tools or ways to negotiate properly. That, for me, made me think about the way we can prepare the layers I saw at the sea. For me, the first layer is the body, and the physical, and the

sea is the mind. They say your brain is made of water, and the sky is like the spiritual aspects of our bodies. I think we were not prepared in these layers to deal with the reality outside. And to know how we could prepare one layer and let the other ones be vulnerable. For me, this was the challenge, to balance myself and to negotiate the space, to negotiate the reality.

DANIEL—What you are saying is making me think about this workshop in relation to the act of art education. There's something in this question around how to create a space in which a group can feel vulnerable, how you can equip them with the tools to be able to navigate a range of spaces. The way you frame or negotiate or fail to negotiate the understanding of a teaching space is critical. I often think about that—particularly in the U.S., when I used to teach very international groups, students would come from other countries and we would start doing this thing called 'critique', without ever discussing what the rules are. Like what is this space, this encounter? What are we trying to do in talking about art like this? And you can feel that some of the students were just like, you know, 'what just happened?'

#### ON PUBLIC SPACE

DANIEL—I was thinking back to what Bernard was saying before we came, how it's very hard to disturb public space, or to make a disruptive gesture in Lagos.

So you could say on one hand this (attempting to walk to the ocean and being met by resistance) was successful, very disruptive, but I think it's helpful to realize that this thing you were calling 'the ocean', in this context it's not a public space actually. It's not public for everyone, you know, and that's part of what was being asserted there, they (the men who confronted us and refused to let us go to the beach) were asserting, this is not a public space. So we're going to perform different roles here—could be menace, could be care, and those can move very quickly between each other. They were quite connected in the encounter your workshop engendered.

OYINDAMOLA—Over nearly two decades, I've observed a troubling decline in public spaces across Lagos. This stands in stark contrast to cities like Dakar, where beaches are a vibrant part of daily life, filled with locals who seem to embody a strong sense of ownership. Public parks in Lagos—where people might gather for outdoor play, recreation, or rest—are extremely rare and, when available, are often not free to use. During David's workshop, we attempted to reach the



WE LISTEN  
CAREFULLY TO  
THE COMPLEXITY  
OF THE OCEAN  
BEFORE APPROACHING  
IT IN SILENCE

single file  
down the street

group of guys start talking to us  
talking to us - threat? exchange?  
something inbetween?

much more crowded than  
when we did the walk  
yesterday - shouldn't have  
brought the cameras with

volunteer security  
takes an interest  
in us

feeling taken care of, but  
also powerless.  
this is not what the beach is for.

diverted to a  
different street.

until building  
security gets  
involved



beach but were quickly faced with a harsh reality: very little of Lagos' waterfront remains publicly accessible. Most of the coastline has been privatized, and the few areas not yet sold are controlled by self-appointed guards who charge fees for entry. While festivals and celebrations occasionally provide opportunities for communal gathering, there seems to be a pervasive resistance to making outdoor spaces accessible to the general public. This lack of shared spaces for leisure and connection feels like a significant loss for the city's social fabric.

#### ON FAILURE

DAVID — In my own practice, I give myself a prompt or a task, and then just try to follow through even though it can sometimes turn out to be extremely difficult or challenging.

You aren't trying to fail intentionally, but to set out to do something and commit to it whatever the result may be. I really want it to work out, I really want to do it but it doesn't. So, even though failure is unintentional, maybe that's also partially why I still don't really know what I think about the way the workshop turned out in the end.

DANIEL — What this exercise did, was very different and quite possibly the opposite of what you imagined. But that's okay, that's what happened and I think it's important to see too, that we can understand as much from this (about artist pedagogies) as we can from a very positive experience. Actually, when we bring an object, or a performative gesture, out into the public in Rejmyre, most of the time, it is perceived by the public as worthless. It's not that people don't have respect for what we do but they don't recognize what we do as art.

At the same time, there are social cues, that you know how to navigate there (in Sweden). What constitutes a transgression, for example, that you didn't know how to navigate here and the structure of the prompt made it harder to handle (participants being asked to be silent). And what that does, when a social transgression happens during a work, it does something to the group as well. So, in a sense, it illustrates the fragility of these ways in which we come together. These spaces of study do, in some way, invoke a sense of cohesion amongst the group that is not false, but it's partial, and it's fragile and that's really important for us to see. It can be ruptured by an encounter with another audience who understands what we're doing in a very different way.

Streets are not a public space  
beach is not a public space



BERNARD — From the point of view of teaching, for example, when we teach research, my colleague and I agree, we try our best to emphasize that the research process must not always yield a result or a positive result. Failure must be recognized and accounted for as part of the process.

#### ON FRAMING

BERNARD — I think that the image, or the plan, was to have a horizon that was just the sea and the sky. But the specificity of the site was such that I also got fence bars in the photo. So there is the beauty of what is intended, and then what really materializes, and then you have to deal with it.

DAVID — I tried to go to the shore in Norway, to photograph the ocean, and it was impossible—we got stuck with a car halfway hanging over a ledge... Or, I mean, what's impossible, maybe we could park somewhere else and then walk around. Those are very different ways of getting there, the circumstances are completely different. Yet the photograph would be exactly the same. And I think that's maybe the kind of contrast that I had in my mind.

DAVID — The image is, in a way it is this kind of abstract, beautiful thing, calming, but it's also about what is shut out. That's always what we do, whatever we do, there is always a framing and this shutting out is something I think about in everything I do.

The impossibility of addressing the whole of a situation because the scope of the whole is always so much greater, it's endless.

#### ON THE BOUNDS OF PRACTICE

DANIEL — It feels important this idea you brought up of how we often focus on 'our art practice' as the things that we make. But there are also these *things that we do*, which are not part of *what we make*. And I like that way of beginning where you said, 'this is something that I do, that I want you to do with me.' I resonate with that a lot, in relation to this idea of studying in a space that is just shy of.

And I guess I just wonder, this exercise felt like you wanted us to do it very literally. And I wonder

what this thing would be, if we were actually to do it here. Like how you would do this thing called 'walking to the ocean' in Lagos? Because it felt like this was not that.

Part of the opportunity of 'a roving school', is to recognize that even the most basic things that we see or do, that we think we've identified or recognize, that we need to re-understand them in relation to this place.

The other thing I was thinking about was that within these kinds of gatherings around place-based study, and this engagement with public space and performative pedagogy, questions around permission within performative actions are activated. When you enter a study group, it can be quite an inadvertently coercive, performative environment. I think, as a group, as we take on the question of how we do this work in a myriad of places, it's a really important question for us to sit with—how do we acknowledge that inadvertent coercion? The way that people, within the kind of performative actions that we might want to enact, occupy very different positions and relationships to a given space or assigned role?

SESSION 4  
SHYNESS AND SHAME  
FACILITATOR: LUAMBA MUINGA



# SESSION 4

*In this session shyness and its connections to shame and pride, and the language-resistant logics of dreaming, are explored.*

LUAMBA—I decided to focus on the relationship between shyness and shame, and the different approaches to how we disguise the shame we have with a posture of shyness.

My practice is, as I mentioned, based on history. So my practice, including most of my writings, come from moments of shame.

There are all these moments when we use language. For me, dreams can be the universal language of the 'subconscious', which we can't translate. Sometimes people can't recognise the voices in their dreams. Our limitation is when we wake up, how do we translate it into language?

What language do you often dream in? Whether it's the last dream you had or the first dream you remember in your life. What language do you dream in or what places do you recognize in your dream?

*The following text is a series of short lines from thoughts shared by the participants on dreams and dreaming, unattributed.*

I really don't know if I dream in a specific language... but if I want to share it, then it is translated accordingly.

I dream every night without fail. And I assumed that was the case for everybody.

My dream life is super intense, I actually prefer to rest a lot before going to bed. Because rest is not present in my sleep.

Dream spaces, I don't experience them as singular. But I think that's the best thing about space in dreams, that you can be in a house, and then in another house, and then we are outside, but it's another outside. I find that those homes I've lived in, like where I grew up, and then other homes, becoming one home is more of the space I tend to come to.

I have a lot of connection with a dream and a feeling of time that is not linear as we perceive it in the waking life, but a much more interactive form of meaning-making.



- DREAMS TRANSLATION INTO LANGUAGES AND PLACES
- REFRAMING IMAGERY AND SELF-AWARENESS
- A JOURNEY THROUGH PRIDE AND SHAME

The place I visit in my dream is a reoccurring beach, near a mountain, where I very often visit. And I feel like that dream is loaded with a lot of meaning, relating to large changes in my life or something. I go back often to that specific place and I recognize it in the dream.

*The day before the workshop, Luamba asked each participant to select two photographs and print them out, one that represents a moment they are proud of, and another representing a moment they are ashamed of.*

*Each participant was invited to share the photos and briefly explain the situation, without the details or identifying which photo represents shame and which represents pride. Participants were then asked to write three words associated with each photograph.*

*Afterwards, participants formed groups of two. For twenty minutes they took turns speaking about the photograph they associated with shame. Then they changed partners and took turns speaking about the photograph they associated with pride.*

*For the final exercise, participants were asked to revisit the three words they had written for each photograph and write a different story for them. For the shame photo, participants were asked to write a letter of gratitude, and for the pride moment, they were asked to complicate the narrative, by either adding an element of doubt, or changing the moment to have someone else be the protagonist.*

#### ON LANGUAGE

MERI — (Referring to Luamba's introduction, where he addressed the group in Portuguese, as the only Portuguese speaker in the room) it's not about the words that you wrote but the way you spoke them, something was transmitted to me, even if I didn't understand the words. So maybe this can be an addition to everything that, if you have another language, I find it so interesting to hear it in the way that it's most comfortable for people because it will transmit something.

DAVID — I haven't really heard about this term, feeling language... but for me, I would say that feelings and language are quite far apart.

LUAMBA — If you take all the language out of dreams, maybe we can dream about different places, different situations, where voices are not important. So maybe places, spaces and this situation are more important than understanding? And that's our limitation when we wake up, how to translate it to our language.

## ON SHYNESS

DANIEL — I think this exercise is very rich in relation to shyness.

Pride and shame are both dimensions of shyness, and they're also very culturally specific in what triggers them.

It wasn't until we went around, that I remembered, I mean, you know, I don't feel like I have one country, but I grew up in New York, and now I work with this Finnish institution. And then, I'm here representing Finland and in some way Nordic countries. And the Nordic countries are so explicitly tied up in shame when it comes to pride. It's deep in the culture, sometimes referenced in the Swedish context through the idea of *Jantelagen* (Law of Jante), which is based on a literary code from a book written by Aksel Sandemose, *A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks*. In the book, he satirizes a society in which they have a strict code of conduct meant to ensure an egalitarian society. The code of conduct is deeply connected to experiences of ego shame, 'You're not to think you are anything special, You're not to imagine yourself better than we are, etc..'. And it's profoundly experienced in Nordic countries, there are even workshops, in Sandemose's native Denmark, explicitly to overcome the shame around violating the *Jantelagen*. And it makes me wonder, as we gather groups from different contexts, how this theme of shame and pride could be activated and explored, how it manifests, because it feels like it's resonant in very different ways across cultures.

DANIEL — I think the school (of Shying a Way) probably, maybe every time the school meets, it has a new name. I just wrote down in this one,

‘school of the unacceptable’.

And I was thinking about this, it was really interesting to hear people talk about themselves and the self-censoring around what image to choose (for the selection Luamba asked, one image of shame and another of pride), that people picked an ‘acceptable shame’, one they were willing to share.

LUAMBA — My practice is, as I mentioned, based on re-examining history, be it personal or global and political. Therefore, my curatorial works and fictional writings are reflections on moments of collective or personal pride or shame.

The challenge of choosing an image is precisely for us to write new narratives about it. We share the





narratives associated with the images. The ideal is to go back to the history of the image and rewrite the narratives and feelings of those specific moments. We take a moment of shame from the past and bring it into the present, to make it more relevant. How can I do this?

From time to time, we change our feelings, but the picture remains the same. What initially caused me shame may have a different meaning now. Exploring these feelings allows us to learn more about ourselves, our posture and our shyness.

I liked what you said about finishing a project and not stopping to reflect on what it means. It made me think about the importance of the process versus the end product. Realising what happened and the importance of it, rather than just moving on to the next project, seems to be central.

#### ON VULNERABILITY

MERI — I feel like it was a generous exercise because you didn't force us to share our shame with everyone and instead offered us this intimate moment with one person. Because my immediate response is that I would like to talk about this proud picture like really to everyone, maybe even have a three-hour lecture. By that, I mean I feel like there's trust in this group. So I wouldn't mind talking about this shame, also in this particular group, because I feel like this is like a good environment. But of course, I'd rather talk about that proud thing.

DANIEL — ... that we shared our pride with one person and our shame with another. They actually felt a bit similar to me ... It was helpful having a picture that I felt like you were asking us to look deeper into, not to treat abstractly, really being able to engage with the actual place and all things going on. And it helped me to kind of locate my shame, in a way that if I just proclaimed it, like my shame is sloppiness or laziness or whatever, then it wouldn't. It felt easier, somehow, to reveal it, that I could place my shame in this very specific context. To actually learn something about it through speaking from inside the picture. I hadn't realized that, if I understood this shame with more specificity, with more of an historical lens, that I would really appreciate it.

BERNARD — If you come from a Catholic or Anglican tradition, you go to confession, and speak one-on-one to the priests about your shyness/shame but then I'm

asking, I'm wondering what are we packaging in the context of shyness and what happens in the context of shyness? The sharing of proud moments can make one shy, it can be paralyzing, particularly because what I chose to share can become this moment of adoration.

ODUN — I was happy to share my shame. I really was uncomfortable sharing what I was proud of because I thought that you asked for the very one thing, meaning you asked for the definition of myself. And it wasn't too much to share for me since for a while I've decided to accept, this is who I am, love me or leave me. Even if you don't love me, I'm going to love you. Because time is moving and I want to live. Yeah, you know, so I'm okay with falling on my face. I know I can stand up, I'm okay with falling. That kind of a thing. So talking about my shame was like, this is how I am.

DAVID — It took me a very, very long time to find the images, especially images that bring discomfort. And that's mostly because I didn't have those images, apparently I don't photograph things that make me uncomfortable.

And I think what I ended up sharing was photographs that I knew that I could talk about without being too far down on the shame scale...

OYINDAMOLA — I've always preferred listening to others. Taking the time to describe my own experiences felt like it stretched on forever. I couldn't help but wonder, "Am I talking too much? Is she bored with what I'm saying?"

Thankfully, Meri's attentiveness created a safe and supportive space for me to share both my highs and lows. In the past, whenever I experienced emotions like shame or pride, my instinct was to distance myself from them. But sitting with those feelings, and sharing them with someone else, was a significant shift. It felt like an important step in teaching my body to stay present in those moments, however unfamiliar they might be.

#### ON PROCESS

DAVID — It's also about interest, if your interest is in the process, in trying something out, and figuring out ways to do things, you find all the right tools and the people and the situation. And then it's always in that moment, just before I do it, when I know, okay, this will actually work, that I lose interest. I still want to do it, but after that moment my focus just moves to



something else. It's not very good in terms of career building. But I think it's like that, not for all artists, but for many of us.

You're interested to see if something actually becomes what you think it would become or if it becomes something else, and that process is really interesting, but once it becomes something, then it's kind of dead.

DANIEL — I've had many interesting things shared with me about Bisi, and one of the things that I've noticed is a kind of interesting contradiction in the narratives. On the one hand, she was making (through Àsikó) a new center, a center capable of conferring cultural capital on the African continent, to offer an alternative to the colonial centers of educational capital that many artists went to seeking validation. But also, I've been told that the practitioners that she brought in, many were on the edge of what could even be considered art, weren't central figures, outsiders in many ways, and that was who she was bringing in. So on the one hand, there was this very strong desire to arm a next generation of African artists and curators, to prepare them to go out and take over the centers of the world and she poured herself into people in that way. But then she was bringing in these practices that were very much on the periphery.

ODUN — Bisi was big on the trajectory of things and continued process. She was always wanting to introduce something more to an existing thing. She understood this connectedness of art to everything that made me feel safe. I think that was one of her really strong points aside from being able to switch from hot to cold in the matter of a second. She appreciated doing different things from different points of view. If there were more transdisciplinary and also procedural spaces all over, it might not be the same and it's not for a lack of people that are interested, or maybe they had been oriented in school and that light has been dimmed.

School can be a terrible thing for people, when they've been told how to think and you know, what school is like, you are taught to obey from the very beginning, you're taught, so you're a painter or what not. Then somewhere down the line, everyone knows that there are multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary artists, and they have existed for forever. They always existed, but then the way things are structured, it doesn't make enough space for those kinds of people.

SESSION 5  
STUDYING ABSENT THE TEACHER  
FACILITATOR: DANIEL PELTZ



# SESSION 5

*In this session the practice of an anonymous artist collective is shared through an attentional protocol, the group follows the instructions with no one to ask for clarification, opening a conversation around the ‘absent teacher’ and the role of the teacher who does not know.*

DANIEL — I was really interested also in this idea of working from another artist’s practice, that we don’t know that well, that we’ve experienced or imagined and are curious about, as opposed to the position that teachers often occupy.

One thing I’ve come to understand is that this collective, *the Order of the Third Bird*, if there’s anything unifying about them, is that they seem to share a concern with attention—with the aesthetics of attention. The practices they are sharing seem to be asking what paying attention, as a group, in a particular way, does? That’s what we’re looking at and I want to think about it in relation to shyness, shyness as a way of paying attention, as a kind of attentional protocol inside of our new *School of Shying a Way*. So we can add shyness as a second attention into each of these actions that we’re going to do.

I’m sure we all have questions about this protocol. And it’s hard because I carry with me this idea that as a teacher, I am supposed to know, but I don’t know, this is not my protocol. So there’s no one to ask but ourselves.

They call themselves *the Order of the Third Bird*. And they develop these protocols, including this one that we’re going to practice, and then distribute them. After practicing this protocol, you can then do it with anyone you want. So after this session, we will effectively become birders. As I said, I’m not an expert, I don’t know this practice so well, but I’ve done it a few times, so I’ll introduce you to it as best I can, as I remember it being done.

We will do the practice in silence. We will do each step for seven minutes in relation to an object that I have selected, it could be any object, this is just one I noticed this morning.

The first step is *Encounter*. It says (in the protocol distributed) we ‘walk freely, greet the work and the space and you ask yourself the question: *What have we here?*’



A PROTOCOL OF  
SHY LOOKING/  
ATTENTION IS  
INTRODUCED

A FLOCK CONVENES  
TO PRACTICE  
TOGETHER

Step two is *Attending*. In that action, we ‘step forward, acknowledge, pay attention to the work and ask ourselves the question: *What is?*’

The third stage is referred to as *Negating*. In that stage, we ‘step back, refuse, unmake the work and self and ask the question: *What if not?*’

The fourth stage is referred to as *Realizing*. In that stage, we ‘step forward, be generous, and ask the work what it needs. *What shall?*’

One key element is that we are a flock, we are going to practice these stages together, at the same time, for the same duration. How we practice them is entirely up to each bird to determine.

The only rule that I was offered when introduced to this practice was that after this period, you are a bird, but you cannot practice this alone. You need a flock to practice.

#### ON THE FLOCK

DANIEL—When I participated in this in the past, or have seen it performed, it’s usually been done in a public space, where there were other people who were not part of the flock. My experience has been of a heightened awareness that the flock is paying attention to something, and we’re committed to that, and that other people around us are doing something else (enacting a latent/less conscious attentional protocol).

I’ve felt a sense of community with the others doing this practice in relation to being aware — not in a physical or tactile way — just aware that this act of attention is being shared.

DAVID—We were tasked by the instructions to *unmake the self*, there is something rich and challenging there, because it could be seen that being formed as a flock is also to make *yourself*, and then what is the self? Is it the self that is individual within the flock, or is the flock the self? Which one of those should we unmake?

MERI—What is this flock? What is this collective decision making that is happening in this silent space? What is the negotiation with who is leading, when is a leader formed?

BERNARD—The practitioners or the people who do these different practices... I can imagine that they are sitting in the room somewhere, they are writing in their costume, giggling a lot, because the language sounds almost religious. It sounds mysterious, and like, giving you edicts, this is what you must do, if you want to observe. I think they’re really playing with this idea of a biblical pronouncement that people must follow.

And you see the humor in it—somebody can talk about it as a practice, like a Japanese tea ceremony, it is a practice and when you follow as a believer, you can’t go wrong. But this could also go wrong, and you can laugh at yourself.

And I think the approach is also very generous in the fact that you can do it (independently) with other people on the condition that you form a flock.

#### ON SHYNESS AS A PROTOCOL

DANIEL—Something interesting to me about this practice, that made me want to bring it here, was the way it takes this very primal function, of paying attention to something, and alters it through a kind of collective, sustained protocol and how disruptive that is, as an intervention into the practice of looking at art, or looking at anything, together. Regardless of how you do the stages, there is a sense of community which is formed, to me, just around knowing that everyone’s doing the same stage in whatever way they’re doing it, at this time.

There’s something about the way we tend to think of shyness, as a protocol, in isolation, like it’s something that we are doing separate from others. I guess I wanted to bring this practice in as a way of thinking about how we might see shyness, or work with shyness, as a collective protocol, with an awareness that we’re doing it with others.

As we practice shyness, we can know that around the world, people have started the same stage of that protocol, and are doing it with us, perhaps even for exactly the duration that we’re doing it.







"I was hoping for a lot of things to go wrong"



SESSION 6  
ROVING THROUGH UNCERTAIN ENCOUNTERS  
FACILITATOR: ODUN ORIMOLADE

*In this session a game of collective 'memory compositing' is played (while looking out adjacent windows), an arranged marriage between student and teacher is enacted (officiated by an art object) and our bodies are fused into a collective body. Roving through the city, from the bus, to the art school, to the gallery, we are led through a series of encounters that provoke experiences of shyness.*

ODUN—I'm looking into the myriad of hidden and obvious contexts that come into play in dealing with a marriage, such as the one we're trying to create between these two programs (Àsikò and the Nordic/Baltic Studio).

For my offering, I'm offering roving. I'm going to take the participants on a moving trip through Àsikò's origins in Lagos—in place, in space and in pedagogy. I'm hoping to push people into a heightened state of consciousness about the organic, in appreciating shyness, and how this might play out in a situation of hybridity and encounter.

Being mobile has in many ways changed how I think, how I operate—the exposure to other forms of thinking, cultures, social spaces, individuals, always leaves something. There's some vestige that stays with you—you might not know it, but you end up applying it in whatever it is you're doing. And because I teach, it becomes like I'm a kite, you see it flying all over the place but then there's that thin rope that brings it to a certain point, that I need to fly back, back to base.

And it's not just an empty base, you met what my base looks like today (at Yaba Tech). It's sort of like foraging and coming back, and foraging and coming back...

I was really adamant about anything that happened from 8:30am onward being part of the experience—we're gonna run a little late, you know, those things that come up, randomness, misunderstandings, misinterpretations, renegotiations... all these factors contribute to the breaking of shyness.

*On the bus, participants played an associative word game. The first person would call MARCO, and participants would respond POLO. Then the first person would name something—what they saw out the window or something they were thinking. Then rest of the group would overlay (in their minds) the image of that named thing over what they were currently seeing out the window in the moment it was spoken.*

# SESSION 6

- A BUS ARRIVES  
THIS IS NOT A TOUR  
MARCO POLO IS OVERLAYED  
ALONG THE WAY
- AN ARRANGED MARRIAGE  
HAPPENS, REMEMBER YOUR  
VOWS THE COLLECTION/  
THE WITNESS
- HOODED, WE MOVE  
AS ONE





MARCO  
POLO  
MARCO  
POLO  
MY KIDS

ODUN — The idea of a tour is to see things, but you're already in this experience—you have your own personal experience, you're already engaging others in that experience—and then someone comes and interjects that motion. And it's not a static thing, because we're moving, we've been moving.

Every time someone says a word, you think of an image. So you bring your concentration of whatever it was that you were thinking in the first place. And that image, it's like resonance, your memory and imagination, it just starts building something else in the middle of what you were building in the first place.

*Upon arriving at Yaba Tech, each participant is received by two students, who guide them through the school making two stops. First in the art library (which holds books from CCA Lagos' building that is under renovation) and second at the museum. In the museum we are asked to choose an artwork, together with one of the students who received us, and exchange marriage vows with this student in front of this chosen artwork.*

*At the last stop, the emptied out CCA Lagos building, ready for renovation, the group was asked to put the bags (that had been made for the workshop) over their heads, so they could no longer see. They were instructed to make tight physical links to each other's bodies. As a mass, they were asked to find a way to move across the room from one end to the other, without being allowed to speak.*

ODUN — (spoken to the group before putting on the hoods) Move to the other side. This is not a race, so do not run. Neither is it just a walk. And no, you cannot hide. You cannot let go, if you do so we die, you cannot see, what you see is a lie.

#### ON DEMOCRACY

DAVID — Something that you said on the bus stuck with me: "I know what democracy is, but I've never really experienced it." That phrase stayed with me, and I think I have experienced the rest of the exercise through that framework. One way to think about democracy is that it's the negotiation between the individual and the collective.

When we came here (CCA, Lagos), we lost our eyes and became locked in position. As soon as we started moving together as individuals, but as a collective, I lost all sense of orientation. It only took 10 seconds or something. Are we moving the right way? And then thinking, what we were doing is basically performing some kind of democracy. Where everybody, through their own little will, in negotiation with



the others and the group, are moving somehow. And that everybody just loses direction immediately...

ODUN — The closer you get to a person, more of that person is revealed. The closer you get to research, more of the research is revealed to you. It's just proximity, you know, it brings things up and then you have to think about how you negotiate your ideals.

#### ON THE METAPHOR OF MARRIAGE

DANIEL — After this offering, I find myself trying to figure out what it would mean for two programs, like *Asikò* and Nordic/Baltic Studio, to be married. So in that way the introduction of that metaphor is actually really helpful because it was something I had never heard before or thought about in relation to the gesture of this research.

I think there's something about the way that you staged this encounter with the students and art objects that is becoming richer as I kind of sit with it, like the way that the art object was positioned as an officiant to a vow and how that connects to this experience.

And the negotiation of this relationship, which, of course, was not a marriage, right? It was like trying to figure out, what is this thing that's being called a marriage?

And it's kind of interesting to think of this process of creating a new program in relation to that. Not to say, "Okay, so we're getting married," but to say "Okay, we're being asked to be married. *What* could be the officiant for that marriage? And how do we negotiate this request?"

#### ON NOT KNOWING

BERNARD — This organic process resonates a lot with what I do—even though it seems like there's a structure that is actually your end, particularly in teaching. A lot of the time students are very confused, if they have to deal with the types of lessons we offer. Because I'm not—as I said, I don't write out the objectives for them, that this is what you must learn—so there are always moments of heavy doubt, and then they have to find out the nuggets within the lesson for themselves. And for me, this is when you find out for yourself what the meaning of that engagement was.



I mean, we can have reflective discussions later, but that process of being in doubt and of not knowing is important, because sometimes, I also don't know exactly what would be. And so we find patterns, then extrapolate these together. We forge some form of knowledge together.

I want to share how we resolve this in the context of CritLab (a structure created in kinship with Àsikò by former participants in Ghana). Because the structure and the content is almost like Àsikò. It's intense. We have people from many places, artists, particularly from incubators, so ego is also very present. But there's also the stress of knowing and not knowing. The content is very much like—oh, there's this text, you have to get through it, so there are those frustrations. At the very beginning, we also say that it's just a space of sharing ideas, you don't need to go through the text and be a master of it, just access it. But it gets to a point where people really feel frustrated and tired. And for us, then we keep emphasizing the fact that there is not a product needed at the end. But being artists and being creative people, they have products in their head. So that's what gets in the way.

#### ON TEACHERS + STUDENTS

DANIEL — This offering that you made, to pair us with your students, that you called 'your kids'—this is very much a gathering of artist teachers, so this was very beautiful and generous and complicated to me... And even though it was supposed to be like a marriage—I was quite nervous about that part and I think the students were too. But I felt like I saw so much joy in people's faces when I got back on the bus.

It brought me back to the dynamics of the encounter between a student and a teacher in the context of art. That is something that both programs, Àsikò and the Nordic/Baltic Studio, are trying to reform or navigate. However, there was something very traditional in the encounter (staged by Odun's workshop), like it took place at a school. Your student said to me, "Doctor Odun, she's like a mom. No, she's better than a mom." and I felt like there's a lot actually in those two statements to me and trying to think about what this relationship is, and how we work within whatever we're creating. Like, sometimes I think we want to deny it in higher education, you want the relationship to not be in that realm, to move out of the parent/child relationship; and yet, there's so much reciprocal learning and love that's exchanged in that space too.

"But Mum, how do we treat them?  
We don't know them"  
So I said "treat them like you  
treat me"



## ON CONFLICT

DANIEL — A friend of mine, who was an inspiration for me as an artist, also does a lot of work in activist communities. He shared with me a quote from one of his teachers, about how when you come together, you're going to need three things: somewhere to eat, somewhere to sit and sleep, and some way to resolve conflicts. I think it's quite interesting to think about what we're making in relation to those questions, to recognize that in this kind of space of vulnerability, that we're waiting for conflict so that we can practice resolving it.

In the script for the Nordic/Baltic Studio gathering (shared with the group earlier as part of Daniel's opening offering), it says, as the main activity on day 2, "a vulnerable event happens". But it probably should have also said "a conflict happens". That should be in every script, as well as how we construct a space that recognizes the inevitability of conflict and comes to it with some sense of like, "you're here, we have this capacity, we were waiting, this is the time to practice."

There's something about the fragility and complexity of the kinds of encounters that we are staging, that really comes to the surface in this offering in a way that I hope we can keep working with, not seeing those qualities as problems. They are the material, they are one important place inside the idea of place-based study.

AMA — Something that Oyindamola and I have spoken about is "how do we measure whether or not we, as faculty or team members, will have the capacity to deal with certain people and or issues." Each individual brings their different perspectives and experiences, some are quite vocal in sharing what they are going through. It's hard to figure out the balance, however I guess the question is, "how much can we fairly preempt?"

We have had to examine our own capabilities and offer the best level of care we can present to the group, its individual's needs, while maintaining a desire to provide emotionally safe spaces for the group to do their best work.

It often comes down to recognising that we are not professional therapists but art workers, who do see care as a big part of our practice.

DANIEL — In sharing stories around conflict resolution, I have this lingering kind of fantasy that I

BAMBOO  
SCAFFOLDING  
SWEETNESS  
FENCE SPIKE

wanted to put out there. I feel like at the core of the Nordic/Baltic Studio project is this idea, that I often speak aloud at the beginning of our gatherings, that "we are all hosting each other". And it's a question, if there is some kind of institution in which these things (conflicts) can be hosted by everyone. Where there is that kind of radical responsibility for the school itself. So there's a moment where proclamations, like "Àsikò has a problem with \_\_\_\_\_" becomes a proclamation we can only make from within, and only take responsibility for, but never separate ourselves from.

BERNARD — In 2015, we had an artist residency in Aburi in the Eastern Region of Ghana, up the mountain, close to Accra. I did one of my performances and this time I painted (myself) in kaolin, so I was all white. My dreads had just started, and I was holding a basket in which there was water but it was not dripping because we had sealed it with silicone. It definitely offered an image of dread! It was almost confrontational—I looked like a traditional priest, no argument, and I'm walking in the Aburi Botanical Garden, doing my art. But people are really agitated and they're saying in Twi that "something is coming." I have a serious face, but everyone in the group is laughing and taking photos. We eventually received a summons from the chief's palace to come and explain what had happened.

On going to the Chief's Palace, we realize that prior to our coming to Aburi, there had been some mysterious deaths of youth in that particular place. They had been wondering what was causing it. And then suddenly, they see this.... So we talked a lot about it, and the chief tells us that when we had arrived, we should have told them what we were going to do, and we probably wouldn't have had that kind of response.

We were fined too — we were fined two bottles of Schnapps. I always perform with two bottles of Schnapps. As a joke, I took it and I said, "we have it already." And then they say, "oh, so they came prepared!"

So in that moment, there was also the recognition and respect, and then the king, actually, who usually does not speak directly, said, "Oh, come more often to do this." So that moment of arbitration is important. If we had been proud artists, and shrugged them off, it would have yielded a less appreciated outcome.

A TOUR OF A SPACE IN TRANSITION  
OYINDAMOLA FAITHFUL



# CLOSING THE SPACE

*A collective recitation of a text written by Bisi Silva is conducted in the shell of the CCA, Lagos building, as it awaits renovation and renewal. A conversation around endings as beginnings emerges.*

*Participants walked through each of the empty spaces, looking through boxes of books and other print materials from the centre's history. They then gathered in the main space, of the former library, and read aloud the words of Bisi Silva's 'Creating Space for a Hundred Flowers to Bloom', passing a book from one to the next.*

OYINDAMOLA—For this closing moment, we return to the Center for Contemporary Art, Lagos, the very place where Àsikó began.

OYINDAMOLA—It's remarkable to think that Àsikó hasn't been back to CCA, Lagos, or even to Lagos as a whole, since 2012. This return is both a homecoming and a farewell. Our building, as it currently exists, will soon close for renovations. So this gathering marks a return, a celebration, and a goodbye all at once.

At the heart of CCA, Lagos has been the library, which was Bisi's original vision. She believed the library was the most impactful way to contribute to the contemporary art space; a resource for artists who might not have the opportunity to travel. Through the books, she wanted them to travel in their minds. The exhibition space was born from this, as a natural extension of the library, a place for artists to show the work that emerged from their research.

For us, the library remains the core of CCA, Lagos' identity. When we reopen, it will be with that focus at the center, everything else radiating outward. I recall visiting a Museum where their stunning library is hidden away in the basement. For CCA, Lagos, we want the library to be front and center, visible to all, a reflection of its importance. The exhibition-making we do here will always find its roots in research.

It's essential to me that we honor Bisi in everything we do. Her voice continues to resonate in our conversations and through her belief in the power of research. For Bisi, research was fundamental to being an artist, and we carry that belief forward.

I also want to take a moment to honor the people who often remain behind the scenes but are central to everything we do. Mr. Lanre, who has been our steadfast security guard throughout; Mama Niyi, who has been with us as our cleaner and Kemi, our Administrator, who keeps us all in check.



A big thank you to our wider team including; Mary, Peter, Nife and Benneth and of course Ama. Further behind the scenes are our board of trustees and artistic board, who provide me with much needed support. These are the people who truly sustain the spirit of the organisation.

As we close this chapter and prepare for the next, we do so with gratitude for all who have been a part of this journey and with a commitment to keeping Bisi's vision alive.

This text is the origin of this organization. So when we find ourselves at this crossroads, an ending and a beginning, I want us to reflect on this text to say "Have we done what we said we would do? Have we achieved what we wanted to achieve?"

#### ON BISI'S LEGACY

BERNARD—For me, what stands out are the references that she made were not just from one field of study. From literature, from photography—there's no hierarchy of references, anybody, anything, any situation that was happening, she articulated. Even if it is something that she's grappling with—it's just these projects are the ones that make sense together. She's articulating them all at once, and as they're coming together, it's building a sense. The other thing for Bisi, which is also evident is the networking—she's strategically networking, across fields, not just one, but across several, making sure that these networks would work even beyond the limits of a field.

DAVID—It is so generous in how it's structured, the tone is just very humbling doing this kind of work could be seen as kind of a call to action, but this is just naming everybody, just laying it all out. It's not forcing a strong narrative, just like this is out there—we have it, and now we start working.

BERNARD—She's also showing you that she's aware of the different regions and what is happening there and then she's pointing out the possibilities, what is coming together. There's the tendency, for example, to say in Ghana, we are the ones doing it, or in Nigeria, Nigeria is doing it. But she is mentioning, if you go across to this place, it's happening. It's happening. It's happening. This is naming it, so that it's not a burden on her alone to say. It's beautiful because she doesn't have to own it. It's owned collectively by everybody who shared the vision.

ROSIE—When you talk about trust, the specific example I heard was, Bisi was supposed to present something in Egypt, and she couldn't make it. So she called Emeka and said you need to go to Egypt. And Emeka is like, what am I supposed to say? She just says, I trust you. And then she calls the folks in Egypt and says, I'm sending a sound artist, he's going to be there. I can see that, with that kind of expansiveness, that's trust.

BERNARD—If you're in this situation, it looks like she's setting you up, like for failure, but it's the trust that also drives you. You know that you have to deliver. I remember because I also experienced that—she was so tough, it's almost scary. Bisi would not mince words, it must be said, but the intention is not to break your spirit, rather to challenge you. In that fear, she's also telling you that I trust that you can do it.

OYINDAMOLA—This book (*Àsikò: On the Future of Artistic and Curatorial Pedagogies in Africa, 2017*), for Bisi, was really a conclusion of the first stage of *Àsikó*. When I talk to Ama I feel like this is the conclusion of the second stage of *Àsikó*, because after this book was published, there were two planned editions of *Àsikó* (prior to Bisi's passing), but ultimately those decisions were Bisi's.

So now we're at this stage of having this art school or art program. And it kind of brings up the question what stage is this? Or is it that we have closed? Has *Àsikó* closed its doors? No. And yes, right, because so much has happened and so much has changed between the first edition of the *Àsikó*, and even the last one in 2017, and in 2022. What does this mean for us? It's the question that we're holding.

OYINDAMOLA—I want to honor Bisi's perspective, while honoring my own. Her starting point was art history and curatorial practice while for me it was health. I'm interested in how people feel and how art can heal. I recall our photographer, earlier in the week, he asked whether we were running "workshops or therapy". The line is somewhat blurry and I look forward to leaning further in to this.

DANIEL—It's really easy to read this (the *Àsikó* book) and question: am I worthy of such a legacy, to even participate? But I recognize that, probably, Bisi is asking herself the same question. We feel in

- A TOUR OF THE  
EMPTY SHELL OF  
THE CCA BRINGS  
AN ERA TO A CLOSE
- IN THIS SPACE  
BISI'S VOICE EMERGES  
FROM EVERY BODY  
AND A NEW ERA  
EMERGES



the text, the sense of deep, calm competence and confidence and knowing, but she actually begins the text from this very humble place of her own fundamental incorrectness of perspective and I take some encouragement from that.

I love that you brought us here, to this space, which is like closing a chapter by trying to envision a new one.

And in understanding Àsikó as an imagining, which has, in some sense, come to an end. It's curious how there are all these parallels between the two programs, almost exactly the same number of editions of each. And actually, this work has helped me to realize that the Nordic/Baltic Studio also came to a close. It wasn't until I was working with Àsikó that I came to accept that actually, this is an end. And it's helped me also to let go, and develop a kind of curiosity. My hope was that coming together in this space, the space would help us to do the work that we're going to do—that we're doing now, that we're going to do tomorrow, of exploring what this is that we've just built, what it might become.

DANIEL — I encourage you, as we go through the rest of today, as you sleep—to listen to the space in the moment and see what kind of openness we can cultivate around what we might already know. In the kitchen the other night, I asked David: what is the structure (of what we are making at the intersection of the Nordic/Baltic Studio and Àsikó)? I don't even know what structure is possible? But actually, even without knowing the structure, I think all of us are in a very unique position right now, to know something about what this is and what it could become, perhaps more so than anyone else on the planet.



## LAGOS DEPARTING THOUGHTS

DANIEL—When this collaboration began, my first thought was, what do we have to offer at Uniarts Helsinki? One of our powers as a university is that we can grant degrees. It occurred to me that it might be useful to Àsìkó, to share that power; if Àsìkó could become an accredited master program, on the African continent, where African artists and curators didn't need to leave the continent to get a 'European' qualification. It was just one idea, but I started to explore it, because I felt that it spoke to some questions that are central in this work. I've been shaped by this articulation of the practice of decolonization, that I encountered in the essay, *Decolonization is not a Metaphor* (Tuck and Yang, 2012), where they articulate an understanding of decolonization as giving up your power without knowing what will happen to you. I'm still processing, living into, the complexity of that call.

And I have a feeling that, this program of the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, aimed at forging collaborations that are innovative between Africa and Finland, is a space where we can think the complexity of a question like that: What does innovation look like, if it means giving up your power without knowing what will happen to you? And how far that question is from the neoliberal understandings of innovation, which you could easily read into any program that calls itself a program for innovation.

But I realized, very quickly upon moving to Finland, that this program was unusual. It wasn't designed looking for new markets and new sources of revenue and was being supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture in a very open and expansive way. I think, of all the countries in the world that I've encountered, I felt like Finland could be a place where we could really live into the complexity of what innovation might be, as part of a project decolonization. Particularly because Finland occupies a very unusual position in relationship to colonial histories. And this was something I was realizing while we were in Praia (for our first encounter around this collaboration) is that Finland is largely unknown on the continent. When African artists think about 'leaving', which is a dominant narrative of success, to leave Africa, usually for Europe or the U.S. (but often for Europe), their thinking is almost universally oriented around the former colonial powers.

Finland is a very special place in the Nordic Region having been under both Russian and Swedish domination. So it has a history, in relation to colonization, that's quite rare in Northern Europe. I realized that as a European partner, Finland had perhaps a unique capacity to think this project of decolonization in higher education in the arts.

OYINDAMOLA — I'd like to speak a bit about something I want to bring from that text (Bisi's writings on the origin of the CCA, Lagos) to this partnership—the idea of changing a frame, or just shifting the center. We're bringing two scenes together: Nordic context and the African context, and trying to find the center within this conversation, or multiple centers.

One thing that we have spoken a lot about is learning to unlearn. And so having, in a European context, unlearning of their art school system, there's also an unlearning for our art school system here, and it's coming to the forefront in the conversation.

Where does our school (one outcome of the project has been a proposal for a school, a School of Shying a-Way) fit into the history of art schools? How are we going to talk about this, in the future, what will be centered? We already have two kind of points, the origin we have in the Nordic/Baltic Studio and *Àsikó* but in this global art school, how do we center this new construct? I think it goes back to the legacy as well, because we don't know yet how many years the program will run for, what will be the legacy of what we do here or what we do with our program?

DANIEL — What I really appreciate about the four-year frame of this funding program (the Finland Africa Platform for Innovation), is that it has allowed us the time/space to really not know—to explore and inhabit uncertainty, at least for a period, without making something. The value of this time and space cannot be overstated in this historical moment. We're already co-creating some books and films, that share the work that we've been doing. So there are several outputs in that sense, but it has allowed us to explore something more substantial, of longer duration that could come out of this.

One of the things I've been thinking about (inside this charge to innovate) is the notion of our creating a new school, or model for a school—The School of Shying a Way. Part of what drew me to move from the U.S. to Finland was the structure of Northern European art professorships, many of which have historically not been tenured. They were five to ten-year

appointments. An artist was brought in to the academy and given a lot of autonomy to construct what an education in art should be—freedom to ask, what do artists need right now that can be called a study program?

I was particularly inspired by what I've seen done in the Danish context where, at the Royal Academy, instead of coming into a department or a study area, the professors form a temporary 'school'. The opportunity to work as an artist at—or at least imply working at—this kind of institutional scale, but to think of an institution, not as one that operates in perpetuity, but one with a running clock, a five-year school.

I think that's a really important contribution to make to contemporary higher education and the arts, not to think of 'schools' as institutions that need to exist in perpetuity, but as experiments in constructing a space of study that is in flux and time-delimited. And those can be structures that renew themselves, you form a school for five years, and then, in the fourth year, you begin the process of formulating the next school or inviting the next group in to formulate the next school...

Another idea that's become important comes out of the work I've been doing in Rejmyre over the past fifteen years. I've come into contact with, and reached out to, many other artist and curator initiated pedagogic experiments, and I see those projects as a tremendous resource in education. I would love to build a school, together with the CCA, that can tap into that resource and also support it. A school that recognizes that these artist and curator-run, pedagogic initiatives often operate with very few resources. And they're doing deeply important and innovative work. So creating a school that benefits from that work, but also helps build and recognize the work of those micro-institutions.

In a way it's (the idea of a school built out of many small school-like structures) kind of connected to my initial feelings as an artist. I was trained as a filmmaker. At some point, I realized, the world doesn't need any more media, maybe the work of the contemporary media maker is just to rearrange what's already there. And I would say that maybe we also don't need more schools or universities, maybe we need structures that arrange these existing initiatives, and make them accessible and meaningful to various groups of people.

Right now we're thinking about a model that's inspired in part by the things I've just been talking



about, and the movement towards independent study programs, which have largely come out of art institutions more than universities (notable examples include the Whitney Museum of American Art's ISP, Independent Study Program and the interdisciplinary ISP at MACBA in Barcelona). They're very exciting spaces for interdisciplinary study. Not just in terms of the topics that students are exploring, but the actual fields that students are coming from—people studying together in the space of art education, but coming from sociology, urban planning, architecture, a range of different fields, counseling, as well as visual artists and curators. And these independent study programs have done important work in figuring out how to gather groups for advanced study, that is integrated into the structure of a busy life and still creates rigorous spaces of study. They are often topical and come together around a series of short, intensive gatherings.

We are adding to those existing models, this notion of roving, that this school could take place in many sites, as opposed to the traditional model where a school exists in one place and becomes identified with that geographic position.

One of my hopes for the future of our work is to develop a Nordic/Pan African independent study program, that creates a framework for intensive study spaces, where artists and curators—along with people from other fields—could come together and meet in, and in relation to, specific places and organizations.

This would draw on one of the deep knowledges embedded in the Àsìkó and the Nordic/Baltic Studio pedagogies, that when you gather in a place to study anything, you are also always also studying the place where you have gathered and, by extension, how to study a place.

And (in the model we are exploring) you conduct this place-based study by repeating this structure of gathering and dispersing with a cohort, in three different places. The learning happens through this repetition: gathering, time passing, the same group gathering again in a new place, recognizing both the study group and the act of studying a place, time passing again, reforming again, the same group, now in some third place.

I think there's also a really important connection in merging this idea of 'a roving school' with the value placed on 'return' and 'commitment to a place', that was central to the pedagogy we were developing in Rejmyre. Our current thinking is that we're not always going to new places, we have a core set that

we're moving between and returning to. And then, maybe every third or fourth time, we reach out and explore new places. But we keep returning to a core set and, in doing so, we develop a capacity to work in these different sites—and our staff develops that capacity. One of the not-very-fascinating but important lessons that we're learning, in how to build experimental study spaces, is that the staff who support them are vital. And they need to feel that something is in their control, to build some capacity. If everything is new every time, it's too much to handle.

AMA — I don't have an immediately clear answer as to what comes out of this workshop. How do we extract whatever we get from this week and make it into a workshop, something doable by others? Some kind of framework or toolkit? And I'm still not sure of the answer. But I'm looking forward to uncovering that, and I think the beauty of this partnership, that we've been fortunate enough to do with Daniel and Uniarts Helsinki, is that it's okay to take time to think things through. I'm hopeful that it can be something that's used by a lot of people and just another step in kind of challenging how we see arts education, and just broadening the horizon. In both Africa and in Europe, I think we've created something of value, and I'm really keen to share that.

OYINDAMOLA — I feel like in this week's workshop, there's a seriousness because there's a commitment to the work, but also a playfulness. I enjoyed being able to play but seriously play and to produce in the workshop setting, because to me, workshops are actually adult play.

That's something I'm taking away from this now, as adults, that maybe it's important to get people into workshops so that they can play, and learn through play. Because it wasn't just play to relax or de-stress, it was structured, we set out to learn something, to work through an idea and were using this medium to do it.

For me, it represented what we want to do with Àsìkó—we want to take people who don't have these kind of opportunities and bring them into these really curated, strong conceptual workshops, so that they can take that practice back to where they're going. And that's what I want, to open that up to more artists and curators on the continent, these opportunities to conceptualize their work, to test things out, to network and to expand the horizons of what art is. I think it's still quite a narrow lens of like painting and



traditional sculpture, for many, so allowing them to discover new ways of art making—bringing performance, participation, and collaboration, into that practice. That’s what I really want to do on a broader scale.

For some time, I’ve felt like CCA is an educational organization. Most people come to me because they think I’m a gallerist, they think it’s about sales. They don’t come to me from the perspective where I see us sitting, with a focus on arts education. I feel like by really getting deep into arts education, the impact that we could have on the availability of arts education on the continent, I realize would just be amazing.

#### ON PRINCIPLES EMERGING FROM THE LAGOS GATHERING

DANIEL — One of the things that has been very alive to me, from the beginning of this engagement with shyness, is the phenomenon of crown shyness amongst trees, which seemed to speak to one of the more profound challenges we’re facing, as a civilization, around narratives of perpetual economic growth, and the need to imagine, construct and inhabit, new narrative spaces.

Somehow this poorly understood space—the way trees restrict their own growth, intentionally in order to allow for the passage of light through the forest canopy—felt like a really generous offering the trees were making. It seemed important for us to be able to imagine what that would look like in the human environment. And I think it’s actually quite connected to the statement I made about decolonization earlier—this idea of giving up your power without knowing what will happen to you.

But as I started to live with the idea for longer, I also felt that this concept opened up in this encounter between Nordic and Pan-African cultures.

The idea of shyness as a value, or as a character trait, had a lot of variation across those cultures and geographies. And there was a very powerful organic pedagogy in creating a meeting across those differences, particularly knowing that we were going to be working here in Nigeria.

When I mentioned it to Oyindamola, she said, ‘I think I’m the most shy Nigerian I know.’ Shyness as a character trait has been marginalized in the art world, and yet, is often associated with artists—as artists we find expression in languages other than and alongside the verbal and many of us can be quite shy.

There was also something about the relationship between shyness and art practice, reclaiming the

positive potential of the space of shyness to be a state that is resistant to the incessant demands of late capitalism to be constantly productive and presenting. Shyness emerges as a kind of subversive, passive resistance through a posture that looks like a withdrawal that actually allows for another kind of inhabitation of the world.

## That position allows more space for one’s internal world and internal experience.

So it was quite multiple, my initial interest in shyness, and I then started to become very interested in shyness as a positionality, where shyness is always relative. It’s never fixed, and it’s always connected to something else—this notion of being just shy of. This position that was always relational, also speaks to my investments and curiosities in place-based research and practice. It is perhaps like a declaration of, or a kind of philosophical articulation of our position in relation to place.

We are always kind of ‘just shy of’ the places we are aiming to study or encounter. And, perhaps, that position of being just shy, as opposed to being a problem, is actually an ideal position from which to study.

Through the workshop, a third way of thinking about shyness was revealed to me. And that was one of the biggest things I feel like I took from this. It came from a number of different conversations, stemming from something I heard, where Luamba used the phrase shying away. Shying away is a very common notion of withdrawal... but it’s a very particular way to withdraw. It’s a slow one. It’s one that maybe happens over time. It’s not forceful. But it’s a clear decision to move away from something. When I heard him say that, I wrote it down as ‘shying a-way’ and I realized in this resuscitation of shying, that there was also a critical doubleness in this notion—where shying became a movement, a direction, a path. One way of exploring a place could be to shy away *into* it. This understanding of the complexity of positionality in study, as something which is always in relation, but never quite at or on and also a path—an expansive path or an opening as opposed to a restriction or withdrawal.

DAVID — This is what I think happened, I told you about this opening exercise that I did once which accidentally became successful, though things just happened (not according to plan). When I tried to do it again, it certainly wasn’t the same thing.



This variable quality in pedagogy, or in a workshop, is important. What happened somehow just shy of the actual activities that were planned. It is a quality that you can't force to happen or plan for in an intentional way.

You instead have to figure out a way of just leaving room for it... allowing it to happen rather than trying to make it happen. And then trust that it, that it actually will happen...

DANIEL — I'd say I feel good about what's happened here this week, it's been unexpected and surprising, and yet, we've held the frame as a group, in a generous way, which I think speaks to the two programs we are building on in this work. There could have easily been more uncertainty, or ambivalence, that frequently surfaces when you bring groups together. There are a lot of things at play in this space, and a lot of asymmetries, so it could have been very easy to be like, 'This is Alison's offering, I'm gonna sit back, kind of pretty far back, and we'll watch this a little bit.' But from the beginning, there was a real sense of trusting each other and accepting the offerings.

DANIEL — One important principle that is emerging for me is allowing for misunderstanding—the example in Bernard's opening, with the way his prompt to come "slightly dressed to a T," had all these different, sometimes contradictory meanings, that were all correct.

Another is leaving room — leaving room for silence, doubt, second chances, the passing of time. A third was developing our own shared languages and, in that work, this idea of fluency as a spectrum disorder. How, even though Meri's exercise opened a set of critical questions around language and shyness and the possibility of creating a new common language and learning to speak it together, clay wasn't a neutral language. We didn't all share the same degree of fluency.

Another important principle was maintaining an awareness of the peripheral. Noticing and acknowledging the peripheral—such as the edges of the schedule or the plans for the workshop—and developing our own shared rituals. Sometimes this happens as a conscious act, that we create and repeat, like Bernard's ice breaking ceremony, but it also involves acknowledging and noticing the informal rituals that emerge within the space time of any gathering.

*For more on the evolution and development of the concept of shyness, see page: 35 and 272.*



ON BEING JUST SHY  
OF HELSINKI

## HELSINKI SHYNESS RESEARCH GROUP

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BERNARD AKOI-JACKSON—Painting and Sculpture, Art and the Built Environment, KNUST, Kumasi, Ghana (facilitator)

MERI LINNA—Visual Artist and Pedagogue, Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki, Finland (facilitator)

NONTOBEKO NTOMBELA—Curatorial, Publics and Visual Cultures, Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa (facilitator)

ODUN ORIMOLADE—Fine Art and Curatorial in the Yaba Art Museum, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, Nigeria (facilitator)

GESA PIPER—Dancer and Dance Pedagogue, Theatre Academy, Helsinki, Finland (facilitator)

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ALYSSA COFFIN—Interdisciplinary Artist, Helsinki, Finland (documentarian)

### VISITING PARTICIPANTS

AKOSUA ODEIBEA AMOAH-YEBOAH—Takoradi, Ghana nominated by Exit Fram

ISAAC GYAMFI—Accra, Ghana nominated by Exit Frame

DUDUETSANG LAMOLA—Johannesburg, South Africa nominated by LAPA

NOURHAN MAAYOUF—Cairo, Egypt nominated by ARD Art Institution

MINA NASR—Cairo, Egypt, nominated by LAPA

OFEM UBI—Lagos, Nigeria nominated by G.A.S. Foundation



## ON BEING JUST SHY OF HELSINKI INTRODUCTION

Following on the Lagos Shyness sessions in 2023, we reconvened as a research group in Helsinki in August 2024. Some members of the group remained the same, others changed. The aim was to maintain a consistent core group, while expanding representation from across Uniarts Helsinki's study areas/academies and adding collaborators from North and South Africa.

In Lagos, we made a series of offerings exploring the concept of shyness. These offerings were made by and for our small, 10-person research team (for more on the concept of offerings and this stage of the project, see Foundations and Lagos Shyness sessions). For the Helsinki edition, we expanded the scope of this work, experimenting with offerings for a wider circle of participants. We also explored ways of translating this evolving work into the local context of Helsinki.

We opted for a distributed engagement (rather than hosting the workshops all at the University of the Arts' campus), drawing on a group of local art organizations to serve as hosts for each workshop and for each facilitator's offering. We conducted five workshops over a two-week period. The workshops consisted of facilitating artist/curator-initiated exercises that opened and explored varied dimensions of the concept of shyness.

Participants were invited to reflect on their own cultural and personal perceptions of what 'shyness' is/might be and to collaboratively develop artistic gestures that explored these emerging understandings.

The workshops were attended by a group of invited participants from across Africa and were open to the public, by invitation from the host organizations, and to a wide-range of material practices and modes of working. The research group met after each workshop to notice and explore the progress of the work.

### OVERVIEW

- Five workshops produced in collaboration with six local arts organizations in Helsinki exploring varied dimensions of the concept of shyness
- Six participants from the African continent nominated by local arts organizations in Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa
- Finland-based participant artists and curators invited by the local host organizations

## ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE HELSINKI SHYNESS WORKSHOPS

TARU—What does it mean to come together specifically in Helsinki? We decided to connect with Helsinki through working with small, local arts organizations/initiatives. These smaller, emergent spaces and projects are developing new methods and practices around artistic pedagogy, public programming, and engagement with different publics. Their diverse, often international, communities of arts practitioners are a kind of expanded field of the arts. Each host organization opened the workshop to their communities by inviting participants from their local networks to join the workshop together with the artists who were nominated by the smaller arts organizations across the African continent. The selected organizations/initiatives included:

Helsinki International Artist program (HIAP),  
Art School Maa, Publics, Globe Art Point (GAP),  
Museum of Impossible Forms (MIF) and Myymälä2

These organizations were chosen partly because of their different profiles, how they are working in diverse ways and reaching a wide community of practitioners. We considered what would be a good match for the facilitators, which workshop would make sense for the local organization's program and how they could both gain something meaningful out of this collaboration.

## ON SELECTING THE VISITING AFRICAN PARTICIPANTS

OYINDAMOLA—For the Helsinki stage of the work, we wanted to focus on the role of artist/curator-run initiatives and artist residency programs as informal sites of artist education both in the Nordic region and in Africa. We decided to use this moment to develop our connections and relationships with these informal learning spaces.

In my conversations with Daniel, we began to realize how important it was to focus on these spaces in developing our collaboration, as these spaces reflected CCA, Lagos's own model of operation, just shy of formal education. Most of the arts education on the continent appears to be happening through independent artist-run spaces and the residency programs they operate. Many of the artists that go to these residencies are self-taught and have been able to lean on these programs to build up their personal and professional practice. Artist residencies, in an African

We have chocolate from Ghana

dates from Egypt

mints from Sweden

liquorice from Finland





context, are generally independent initiatives of commercially successful artists, who fund them through income from their own practices. These artists create residencies to allow for their learning to come back into their communities, G.A.S Foundation and EXIT FRAME are examples of this.

We worked based on recommendations from the residency directors to select artists to join us as guest participants in Helsinki. The selected spaces included:

### G.A.S. Foundation, Exit Frame, LAPA and ARD Art Institution

I will share a bit about the organizations I selected and expand on why we welcomed these partnerships:

The first organization that I selected was G.A.S. Foundation (Guest Artist Space), which is where we held the Lagos Shyness workshops last year. Àsíko Art School held its first edition at the CCA, Lagos building in 2010. I would have loved to have hosted the Lagos Shyness workshops back in our space but the building was in the early stage of a large renovation project. Yinka Shonibare, artist and founder of G.A.S. Foundation, founded his residency in Lagos as a result of his interaction with Bisi and the CCA. When we moved out of our building, G.A.S. foundation offered us an Institutional Residency, which allowed us to continue to run programming and to work closely with their team. It therefore felt very good to continue the partnership with G.A.S. as the shyness programme, which had its first iteration at their space, moved on to Helsinki.

The second partner I selected was Exit Frame. I felt that we would benefit from their knowledge and their relationship with KNUST, a higher education institution in Ghana. The experience of the members, as alumni of Àsíko, also felt important, EXIT Frame runs a crit lab that was based on the early model within Àsíko.

The third partner was LAPA, which is an artist residency initiated by the Goethe-Institut Johannesburg. I had previously joined the jury for the residency programme, alongside Bernard, and so already had a working relationship with the organization.

Finally, I wanted to make sure that we had an organization based in North Africa as we continually contextualise ourselves as Pan-African. *ARD Art Institution* in Cairo is a relatively new arts institution which has cross-cultural relations at the heart of the way it was founded. I recognize that much of the work we do in the international residency space is cultural relations work.

These four organizations are unique in the ways that they offer residency programs and have strengths to bring to this international project because of their experience and knowledge of their local ecosystems.

## A NOTE FROM THE HELSINKI DOCUMENTARIAN ALYSSA COFFIN

My role in this project was multifaceted, making it difficult to know where to give my attention at any moment and how to situate myself within the group. One of my tasks was collecting documentation, for the purpose of creating this book. I realized that my natural propensity for shyness could be an asset and could teach me something about how to inhabit this role of listening, witnessing, and gathering in.

Shyness manifests in me as social anxiety and perceived vocal ineptness, making me feel ostracized in an outwardly expressive group.

But in this context, where I was asked to work behind the scenes, I could embrace my shyness as a powerful potential that allowed me to be content being silent, on the periphery of the group, for the purpose of listening closely.

The sieve on my head, during the exercise on the first day of the workshops, became a metaphorical tool to relax into a sifting process—I didn't need to verbally perform my thoughts as a knowing, instead, I could be a receptor. I let all the surrounding voices, articulating rich thoughts, filter into and through my mindbody and then sieved them back out into this book.

This process looked like my hand frantically scribbling notes or pressing record on my phone or camera, and, occasionally, Ndalo (the child of two of the facilitators) taking command of my pencil and inserting his marks into my notebook. The noise and distractions kept me present in the nonverbal happenings of the moment—perhaps a state for the truest documentation.

Consequently, this text is an assemblage of transcriptions from interviews (conducted by Daniel with each of the facilitators and visiting participants), my own memories and notes from conversations with the team and participants, and texts written in response to my requests for speakers to clarify their quotes in writing. It also attempts to include what was communicated with nonverbal language, as captured in the photographs and scans of handwriting and drawings.

In this web of sources, it is my hope that each voice is felt in its multiplicity and in the aliveness of

our embodied gathering. May the words stay just shy of touching, stay reaching for potential meaning, to hold space between them, for you, reader, to listen in and leak back out.

Sense of ownership - in what the  
out of exp. driving the spe  
Unknowledge.  
missing dimension to  
own agency constituted? dis  
position in relation to structure  
learning environment - institutions  
lead by participants. weight  
false, relationships formed,  
building a history together,  
what is sidelined & invisible  
cannot ignore we are a big  
feeding back into it. (St)

## WELCOME TO JUST SHY OF HELSINKI

*Daniel opens the space by first telling about a part of his meditation practice and then of a recent experience leading a 2-week intensive course in far northern Finland:*



I've been doing this very basic meditation practice for about 25 years. It begins with the simple act of bringing your attention to your right foot and, somehow, every day, I still have trouble with this most basic knowing of right from left. I find I must ask myself each time, which is the right, right foot? Oh yes, that one, not the other one, and, of course, it is hard to remember because it is only a relative truth. As soon as I locate myself in that truth, firmly sure that I have identified the right foot, I have lost sight of other important ways of locating and dislocating.

I just came back from co-teaching a course in Kilpisjärvi in far northern Finland. Along with two colleagues, we spent a lot of energy carefully planning a complex exploration of the role of imagination in site-responsive art practice. I thought we came up with a beautiful plan... and then the students came and undid it all.

When we arrived at the research center that hosted the course, we realized it was right at the base of one of the region's tallest mountains and a very popular hiking site. The night before a scheduled early AM round of presentations, a growing group of students had the simple desire to climb the mountain of Saana and to wait for the sun to rise, as part of the process of discovering what is often referred to in this region as 'the land of the midnight sun'. They had a nice climb and waited until about 1 AM for the sunrise, that came and greeted them with splendour. They then discovered that if you walk down the mountain at just the right pace (read very slowly) you can experience the rare disorienting phenomenon of the sun rising four times, one spectacular moment of confused time after another. And I thought I needed to 'design the course'.

Now, as an artist who has dedicated their work and teaching to responsive making, who should be more open than me, when the students revolt against the designed curriculum and discover, of course, another obvious curriculum staring us in the face? But, I must admit, it was hard in that moment, to face the fact that despite our well intentioned plans and wishes for the encounter with this place, there was something else waiting, something else calling to this group in this landscape, so intelligently so irresistibly. And yes, they were exhausted when they got home at 3am and were less than fully present for the 10am morning session but they had found another path through this site and I could not discount the wisdom of that path.

...the discoveries we are seeking, in this gathering just shy of Helsinki, are resistant to structuring and are sitting there, latent in the physical, psychological, social and political landscapes that we make all this effort to shape and hold... in order to make those discoveries we must let go of all the kilos of gold, all of the millions of years of stored energy, that have been used up to make this space of study, because study already existed right next door.

This is what is at stake in place-based artistic practice. You have come this far, you have displaced yourself, and in that displacement, there will be some discomfort... How to be where we find ourselves?

In this work, shyness has been a great teacher, the attention we have given it... but shyness is not into centering.

If we want to know where we are, if we want to know how to be where we are, we can never only be there but also just shy of there.

Welcome to the School of Shying a Way

**OPENING EXERCISE**  
**FINDING THE SYLLABUS IN THE LANDSCAPE**  
**FACILITATOR: DANIEL PELTZ**

DANIEL — Rather than making a syllabus and bringing it to the site, I invite everyone to simply look around us, notice, and trust that within the site, the syllabus is contained.

*Daniel sends the group out in pairs to find 'props', lying latent in our surroundings, to use as tools to perform this place-based study and to help us in our study of shyness.*

*People brought back all kinds of things...*

*A table saw push stick*

*A spider web across a window*

*A dried plant called 'rabbit tail'*

*Safety glasses, a scraper, a sieve*

*A fan, a box*

*A bundle of small boards held together by tape on which the words "speaker supports" are written*

*We take turns sharing about our objects.*

*During our discussion Ndalo (Nontobeko and Bernard's child) picks up objects in the room — a pen, a phone, a paper — and carries them between us in a continuous redistribution of objects.*

trust that the place will provide all that we need to study









DANIEL — A table saw push stick is always just shy of the blade; it never touches it but is always in relation to it.

*How to study just shy of shyness?*

BERNARD — We were noticing spider webs across a window where other windows have shutters—barriers to the space. The web is a fragile veil that protects and traps.

*What are (shy) ways of claiming and inhabiting space?*

TARU — We found this particular dried, reed-like plant, I think it's called 'rabbit tail', which was tremendously responsive to its environment.

*Shy is not retreated, insular, shut away. Shy is sensitive, mediating, responsive.*

DANIEL — The plant is so aware, connected to the subtle airflows within this space. It is such a beautiful syllabus, such a beautiful metaphor for what we're doing with this place-based study.

BERNARD — What about the texture of shyness in one place versus another with divergent qualities?

*How does shyness respond to the environment of Africa versus Finland?*

*In the Lagos workshop, Meri recalled being misperceived as shy when silent in a country with a language which she could not yet (fully) speak.*

TARU — I'm thinking about silence in connection with shyness. Silence is often something that we try to fill because it's uncomfortable or reveals something. I know that I fill that space because of my shyness—to try to escape it instead of dwell in it.

DANIEL — It does feel like there's an aspect of Finnish culture in which there's more of a comfort in silence than in many places. I sometimes feel self-conscious for the group when there is a break in conversation... then realize it's me who's uncomfortable with this silence not them.

TARU — Here in Finland there's more silence to begin to fill, to be the one who voices something, that is not

so present in other cultures. If there's an interesting talk and then there are questions — everyone's silent. It can be taken as impolite that people are being unresponsive.

OYINDAMOLA — I was thinking about politeness and how it may not always be positive.

MERI — It can actually be rude. By not voicing your needs, you're damaging something.

*Some examples where politeness has caused harm are shared. One member of the group expresses how shyness in many countries is a privilege. In Finland there's a tendency to be reserved, polite, waiting to speak.*

GESA — I recall a visitor here perceived Finnish people being shy as very privileged. He pointed out that people who are not supported by the dominant structures need to make an effort to connect and can't necessarily 'afford' shyness.

NONTOBEKO — Bisi often said to me—you have to put yourself out there, you cannot afford to be shy. In other contexts, this way of being (shy) would mean nothing would happen.

*Where and how does the body portray different social cultural abnormalities which evoke a desire to shy away from being visible in the public sphere?*

## trembling hands... blushing...

ALYSSA — 'Shy' doesn't feel comfortable in its own skin. I wanted a tool to scrape off all the heat and red-flush, so I picked up the scraper.

*Daniel recalls back to the self-consciousnesses of trembling hands as a child. Two instances of the body being out of our control, of being perceived as abnormal. When reflecting with Alyssa about the format of going around and sharing in a circle, Dudu tells how her heart was racing awaiting her turn.*

DUDU — After sharing comes the inner critic evaluating my performance. I get hot, sweaty—blood rushing to cheeks: it's a mini trauma.

NONTOBEKO — Even when your complexion doesn't reveal the color of a blush, you're convinced people can see it, that you have become especially visible.

*Shame is a theme that resurfaces. We recall Luamba's offering in Lagos on the relationship between shyness and shame. We remember how when we shared our shameful memory, many of us realized it was not so personal—it's culturally and collectively rooted.*

ALYSSA — I put the sieve on my head instinctively. Now I understand it is perhaps because the sieve acts to fragment my singularity so that I become less an individual self that can be judged and shamed, and more in the exchange of the multiplicity of voices. I imagine a passing in two directions through the holes — the sieve mediates between my inner space and the outer voices.

DANIEL — How can we inhabit this space of shyness together, shyness as a collective state.

*Dudu notes how the animals she's used to in South Africa don't really exhibit shyness. In Finland, most animals evade human encounter and are rarely seen. How do the animal behaviors in our home country influence the way we behave in our social relations and in how we understand shyness?*

TARU — Rabbits put their ears down to protect themselves, becoming a ball in the grass, but now humans have cut the long grasses that used to hide them. They still believe, by their posture, that they can hide, disappear, be not here...

*Be somewhere just shy of here.*

ALYSSA — I don't care that I might be perceived as looking ridiculous wearing my tools because this object costume allows an imaginary shying away from public visibility—the "hat" and glasses, fogged by breath, create a mental/emotional sense of protection.

When my vision is softened, I feel less singular and more merged into the visual field of the group. If I am shielded from vulnerable, direct eye contact, then I can become partially invisible. To see is to be seen. To avert my eyes is survival.

BERNARD — Culturally, for the masquerade we must protect the make-believe. Even if we know it is you behind the mask...

*What does the mask allow us to share?*

BERNARD — Throughout Lagos and now here in Helsinki, I have been thinking of the relationship

*Somewhere just shy of here*



between shyness and caution, particularly in practices, like performance art, where people always see you. What are the strategies one can develop to literally hide in public space? The obvious ones are through costuming or masking, of course. But how can one be invisible in a very public place? How can the subject self-negate such that, a generalized body, or being, becomes what is encountered?

*Nontobeko tells a story about her daughter, a purple wig, a special dress, attention, a compliment.*

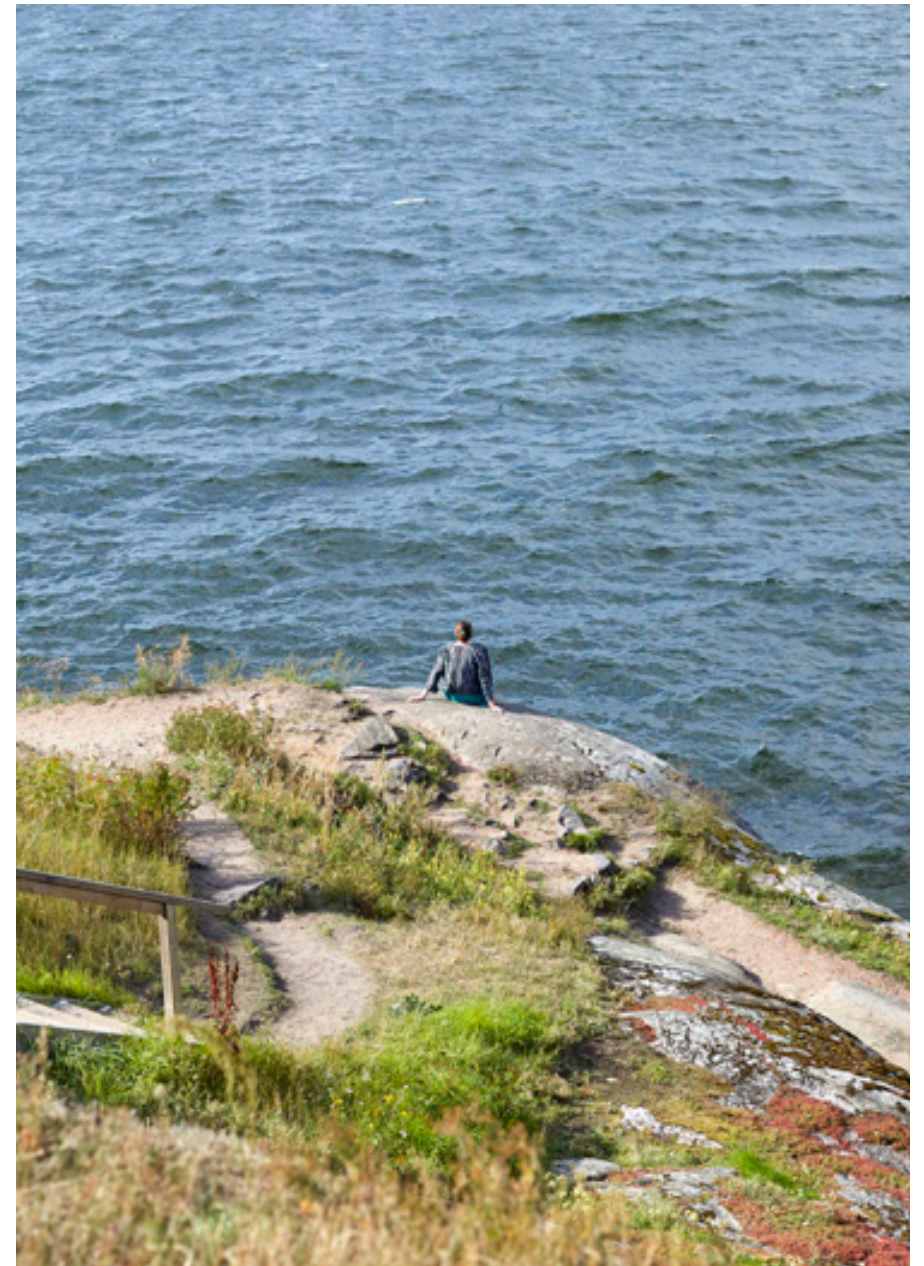
GESA — It's a privilege to be able to choose to be invisible. Invisibility is a story I tell myself, but really I'm always an image in public space.

*How is the mask of shyness different in the public space of Lagos versus Helsinki?*

*Daniel picks up the "speaker support" (a bundle of small boards tied together by a paper-tape label) — we wonder together how we might need to be supported to share our voice, to coax out what is dormant and shy within us; to dare to speak up or dare to remain silent...*

ALYSSA — I notice I instinctively sit with my chair set back from the circle of the group. Am I left out? Less visible? Or is this position just shy of the circle the best for observing and listening? — to gather verbalized thoughts back into an inner archive.

*When shyness is liberated from being pathologized, what powers does it inherit?*



WORKSHOP 1  
SPEAKING SHYLY THROUGH CLAY IN HELSINKI  
FACILITATOR: MERI LINNA  
IN COLLABORATION WITH ART SCHOOL MAA



# WORKSHOP 1

*This workshop explores shyness through the materiality of clay, body and space. Through simple exercises we warm up. Together we are invited to create a new, non-verbal language called: Clay. Often, we find ourselves in a situation where we are not able to communicate through our first language. Even though we get accustomed to these situations through experience, they often provoke a shyness in us and set up asymmetrical power dynamics. This workshop challenges these dynamics by rejecting spoken language all together and instead playfully introduces a non-verbal language, new to everyone, to be developed together as a group.*

*'Speaking shyly through clay' began with a visit to Art School Maa's facilities on Suomenlinna island. The workshop continued the following day at the studios of the Academy of Fine Arts.*

WORKSHOP HOST SITE VISIT:  
ART SCHOOL MAA

H (Headmaster of Art School Maa)—Art School Maa has a nearly 40-year history as a space of alternative art education. As a self-organised school outside the structures of formal art education, it focuses on artist-led pedagogies and community practices. The school's status and meaning is often much more recognised in the local art field than in institutional environments.

MERI—My desire to work with Art School Maa, as a host for this first workshop, is rooted in an understanding of the critical contributions these spaces have to make to thinking about the future of education in the arts, particularly higher education.

DANIEL—There is a value to working in smaller institutions and contexts. By force of their scale, they are more connected to their site, in this case, an island. Art school Maa on Suomenlinna is an example of this situatedness.

DANIEL—In thinking about place-based artist pedagogies—How does the location of Suomenlinna inform the educational space of Art School Maa?

H—To get to Suomenlinna from the mainland you have to take a ferry and then walk. The total journey takes about 30 mins. People who have studied or wor-

*the clay is also shy*

ked at Maa have claimed that studying on the island suggests that in order to hear your own voice you need to travel—you need to make some sort of journey or move. There is a capitalist dimension to this claim, the city is so busy, I need to get out of it to make art.

But I feel the reading of this claim that is reflected in the pedagogical thinking is more that when we choose to travel to a place we are giving it attention. What kind of noticing happens when we choose a site? The sea, the walks, the plants, this building's architecture; all of it informs what we're doing.

Very often when there's a new teacher they might be confused about time. They have huge plans and then are only able to do a fraction of what they planned. Here there's a different understanding of time because you travel. Something happens to the body; you prepare yourself in a different way when you come here.

DANIEL (to our group)—We can make craft of the ferry ride— it can be our ritual of coming together.

H—Students seem to be questioning the bigger institutions... in a reading of the current educational system as individualistic, they are saying they require community to be artists—"I need other people to be able to work as an artist." Here at Art School Maa, we have "do-it-yourself structures"...we begin with the idea of sharing space as a community.

MERI—In a large institution, you might feel invisible and it's harder to be heard which can affect your possibility of directly connecting to things that you are personally interested in.

You have an idea, and you need to make something happen at your own pace, not one month from now by filling in an application to ask— could I possibly use this space? This is much easier to do in smaller organizations. There's the possibility to directly address the right person, you know who they are, or they are even part of the work group alongside you.

H—Time and place play a big role: you understand every material differently when you have to bring it to the island. And then there's accessibility—who is able to come to this space? There are many restrictions. You want to work with lots of plywood—how are you going to do that? If you're in a space with 20 other people, you're not going to create anything too big

because you will affect other people's space. So there's a reading of matter that comes in.

MERI—In my experience, when in a smaller setting where choices are limited, it is easier to be seen and heard. I think by being put in a setting where choices are limited, even though it might appear like a contradiction, limitations can help you explore aspects which you otherwise might not consider, both of yourself and of the way you communicate and work with others and for your own artistic practice. What happens when there is a set of limitations that you have to navigate within without losing that which makes you the special art maker of such a project? I am convinced that the feeling of belonging in an arts institution and access to resources must not exclude each other. What is the work to be done to create a space of study where both of these needs are attended to?

*We move from Suomenlinna to the Academy of Fine Arts.*

#### OFFERING

*Elements of Meri's offering in Lagos were now repeated in the Helsinki workshop.*

MERI — I also offer a version of this workshop as part of my regular teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts— so I've done it several times in different educational contexts. In this context of research, I felt it reached a new level. There was this possibility of in-depth thinking and discussing together with so many professional artists and researchers, to ask: What does this workshop mean?

DANIEL — There is so much value in repeated exercises, repeated in different sites at different times.

In university pedagogic logics, repetition is usually excluded from acknowledged study—you can take a course again, but you can't get credit again.

BERNARD — Different contexts bring deeper meaning to something you thought you knew.

TARU — Even exactly the same context and people—it will be something different, you will process it differently.

DANIEL — Here we can explore this idea of a pedagogy that is built on the value of repetition.

*The research team reflects about the nature of clay.*

*A non-verbal language called: Clay*



TARU—Cultures have grown to work with, and been molded by, local, specific materials. This is why so much is lost in industrialization—when those tendencies are somehow forced out of the material... Where is this clay taking us, how is it guiding or directing us?

DANIEL—There is a connection between this forcing out of local, specific tendencies and shyness, as it relates to normative social codes. As an outsider in a society, trying to assimilate, there is a shyness that emerges when these unincorporated tendencies emerge.

MERI—To what extent has the clay been deadened and neutralized for artists to manipulate it according to their own will?

Where does the clay come from for my workshop?—well it just comes from Vesa (the school's technician). I ask him for clay and then it appears (Meri smiles).

*We wonder together how this disconnect from the material's source, and its place-based qualitative information, affects how the clay is speaking to us.*

MERI—If you roll a ball of clay and make it flat, fold it once, and then flatten it back, then when it dries it will remember the shape that you made it. Clay has some kind of capacity for memory. Language needs memory, as well as repetition, which is essential for meaning to emerge and become understandable.

MERI—We didn't use clay as it is normally used, where you make an object to be kept. It was molded by all of us together, to play with the idea that this could be a common language. Through the imagined capacity of memory, possessed by clay, we added fragments of what the topic of shyness meant to each of us.

#### FLOW OF THE DAY

MERI—Our bodies, regardless of our personal relationship to them, will be an important medium today. They will allow us to perceive our experience with the clay during this workshop.

*We begin with a warm-up exercise of stretching, where each person offers a movement that the group mimics.*

MERI—Whisper to the clay something that you think about, or want to relate to the clay, about shyness.

*We pass around the blocks of clay.*

*Next, we divide into groups of three to do a listening exercise. To speak any language, you need to learn to listen. We are asked to take turns, each for 10 mins, sharing our life story in clay, by manipulating it to communicate this story. The other two actively listen with their eyes, silently watching the clay. (This exercise was repeated from Lagos.)*

ODUN (remotely commenting via WhatsApp)—I thought about how a life story told in ten minutes could be condensed and focused into a good story. Knowing we cannot fit our life into ten minutes as we have lived years, what would one want to share in that brief time? We might look at the clay as something expressive enough to hide the things we don't want to share and to highlight the things we think are important.

*Then the clay is gathered into one mound back in the center of the room and sealed in a bag. We recognize it is now charged with the memory of our collective stories.*

*We break for lunch.*

*When we return, Nonto is still in the room having stayed with her sleeping child.*

*She suggests that something happened while we were away.*

*Only when the clay was alone in the bag could it speak, because the clay is also shy.*

*The clay is then divided into 14 pieces; we each take one. For 7 mins we listen to the clay and ask if it would reveal its name to us.*

*Does the clay reveal its name? Is its name in a language that can be spoken? What if its name takes 7 mins to say? We are often named by other people—what does the name mean to those people/say about how they perceive us? Is the clay receptive to us naming it?*

ODUN—naming is a ritual—there is a process and activity around it that takes time.

ODUN—Our interaction with the clay charges the material with stories as a form of animism. I relate



what Meri said about the name of the clay to ideas of the name in Yoruba culture—there is always a secret name. All things have life if they are from the universe; they are one and connected. Thus, if you know the ontological name of something from its source, in Yoruba science, you can converse with it and it will respond to you.

*Now, after the clay has gotten to know all of us, and we have gotten to know the clay through touch, we do an improvisation exercise where body, clay, and space are on equal terms. This hour-long exercise is without verbal language, instead, clay is the method of communication.*

#### REFLECTION DISCUSSION

*The group notices how the large mass of clay in the center of the room became a locus of activity from which other centers could be created. The clay mass became aesthetic; like a statue or a sacred mound.*

**NONTOBEKO**—Could we define some African monuments as shy? They don't necessarily intrude into space like a big monument in the western sense. It could just be a pile of rocks, but everyone knows what they signify.

**ÖZGÜ** (participant from Art School Maa)—The clay has a strong way of collecting—the molecules of water want to come together. It goes to the center because of this moisture condition, because if it's together, it dries slower. So, there's a kind of constant magnetism there.

**TARU**—Our skin is really dry, so the clay is sucking moisture from us... grease, hairs, and skin cells get mixed up in it.

**MERI**—I started to feel that the clay is a much more active component. It was a combination of several things that were said—about the clay being shy and it having agency.

**It didn't feel like an object for us to manipulate, but that it can manipulate us.**

That was what I felt was happening with this composition that was created with the bodies merging with the central mass of clay. It really felt like the clay was so decorative, and those human bodies were as decorative as the clay. There was no division between the clay and the materiality of the body.





*We notice how Ndalo (Nonto and Bernard's child) participated with his own language, breaking the silence with his free vocal expressions. He became an element that combined all of us in the space, as he traveled from one person to another, carrying clay between us.*

GESA — there was something in close relationship to intimacy, which is kind of a bit controversial because shyness might be a space that seeks to withdraw. There was a moment that I put this little ball into someone's hands, and I observed it for a long time—it was so fascinating seeing the residue of clay on their hands. And then I took it back and it was warm... suddenly it dawned on me—I'm the total voyeur! Then I put clay on Meri's ear and there was this realization that there is already a language between us, that is also an unspoken language, but it is there because we know one another from before this workshop. Maybe that language, the many languages, are already part of all that is here.

**DANIEL** — The clay in my experience was not visual, but somehow it was like its language was moisture...

At one point I was offering clay to people and one person, instead of taking something or giving something, blew on the clay objects. And I thought—that's speaking to the language of this material!

H — I was thinking about this clay language, and about pedagogy—how we understand the use of materials. Then I revisited the thought that I don't often actually have good words for working with materials. The words that I have learned and that I am struggling with, for instance in teaching, are words that in English have some sort of very strong hierarchical relationship to the material. What word would you use for that collaboration in the blowing gesture? It's not necessarily blowing because there were two people and there was an interaction.

**GESA** — There were so many different ways to relate to the clay as language. Sometimes it was an agent, like communication between people, and then there was this inner clay language...it took me so long to get in touch with other people.

For such a long time, it was just the clay—trying to listen into the language of the clay itself.

*H and Gesa both share how clay is not a medium they are used to working with which produces a different way of relating to it.*

**GESA**—There is a shyness in somehow not actually doing something to the clay but just letting it do me.

**OYINDAMOLA**—In Lagos, there was this introduction of the idea of a clay currency (to the social space of speaking clay).

**DUDU**—I think currency is an incentive to move beyond ourselves... I was remembering this moment in the first exercise where we all had to go around the circle and it was very individualistic. Then these incentives, like passing the clay, became a collective language that opened up the circle... passing the clay became the thing that activated everybody.

**MERI**—(In the Lagos Shyness Workshops) We kind of came together like, okay, we're building this city. We started even taking on roles. This time we didn't have that end in mind.

**DANIEL**—(In the Lagos Shyness Workshops) There was also that frame that we were in a future art school where we all only spoke clay. Meri framed the work differently, around how do you say your name in this clay language? Naming became our very first use of this new language and that located us in an idea of self.

**GESA**—How do collaborative choices open possibilities? Like the possibilities of how vocabulary grows. Maybe acknowledging that this word has been on a journey. For example, someone throws a clay ball and I don't even need to know who that person is or which direction it comes from. But somehow there is a proposal that opens the possibility to me that this ball can be thrown. And then I take this ball and put it into someone's toes...

**ÖZGÜ**—Shyness is more like a possibility that is not activated, a passive energy, you haven't chosen a way, haven't penetrated all the possible ways.

**MERI**—It's tricky as a facilitator—where do you actually open possibilities through prompts and where do prompts become manipulative and basically narrow? When I think of doing this exercise for 3 hours, the language could grow. But then when you don't give possibilities, do you deprive proposals from growing?

**BERNARD**—I am thinking about the temporality of it—how you could engage and step back. Sometimes it was almost mischievous to come back and see what had been lost, what somebody had come and destroyed. At one point, I was just lying down, I fell asleep, and then suddenly woke up and the clay interaction was still going on. So, we can have this trust that people keep working on this collective language; it's not all about us to keep it moving.

**TARU**—When talking about learning, it's like we have to predefine and determine teaching through learning outcomes, and that is what the courses are then supposed to be aiming at. But isn't it crazy that we kind of predetermine the end, and then everything must be already towards that end? So, where's the learning happening?

## ON EDUCATION AND ACCREDITATION

**OYINDAMOLA**—What's important for me is equity. There's big value in recognizing that both Àsikò and the Nordic Baltic Studio have brought something really important to the project.

While Finland is known for world class education, we do not want to perpetuate the negative stereotypes that places western accreditation above that of peer organizations across the continent. We want to highlight that this pedagogical model is being developed through the unity and equitable relationship between CCA, Lagos and Uniarts that we've built over the past few years.

**DANIEL**—One of Àsikò's aims is to counter this narrative that in order to be a successful artist in Africa, you have to leave Africa, and then, ironically, not only leave, but leave to go to the former colonial powers. It's a somewhat devastating narrative, and yet a very prevalent narrative. Part of what we're trying to do is build a program of higher education that takes place both on the African continent and here in northern Europe, but where you can get a higher education degree without leaving your home place. (for more on this model see p. 281)



WORKSHOP 2  
PUBLIC INTROVERTS: ON CURATORIAL SHYNESS  
FACILITATOR: NONTOBEKO NTOMBELA  
IN COLLABORATION WITH PUBLICS



handwriting is another form of accentuatedness

# WORKSHOP 2

*This workshop explores a complex understanding of curatorial identity and practice as one of public introvertedness. Using the modality of zine making, the workshop asks participants to navigate the extroverted world of exhibitions and public engagement, in curatorial work, through curating a story shared from the life of one other participant. Making public of private stories is investigated as a moment to perform a coming out from the shy character of the curatorial research process.*

## ON WORKING WITH PUBLICS

NONTOBEKO—While I may not know the intricate details and history of Publics, my view of it is that it is a space that offers many potentialities. Responsive and flexible in its understanding of where curatorial knowledge resides, unlike a university context—where the library functions in support of the larger pedagogical project through instruction—I see Publics as a space where knowledge is sought out and is best realized in practice and reference.

Its offerings are beyond the formal, which in turn makes it a library that is an embodied experience. In that way, participating in this library is about being part of knowledge building and making it accessible and tangible to everyone who interacts with this space. It is a library that defines praxis, where the power of intent and unconscious (un)learning is actualized. Publics is an embodiment of the formal and informal institution coexisting; one space that draws upon both possibilities of pedagogy.

DANIEL—I found it significant that the library at Publics was hidden behind sliding doors and that it gets revealed.... I had the feeling that I wish I could live here for a while. In this case, the library is more of a reading room. CCA, Lagos began as a library and then grew into an arts center and then a kind of school.

## OFFERING

NONTOBEKO—For my workshop, I proposed the idea of curatorial introvertedness and shyness. Introvertedness is not the same as shyness, but it is often understood to mean the same thing. Introversion refers to a tendency to become overstimulated, the need for solitude, and a preference for quiet.

Curatorial practice exists in a world where it continuously interfaces with the public in many different ways. This kind of interface influences how curators appear and are perceived in the world. It assumes a practice of public presence and appearances by people who are always extroverted, boisterous, and confident.

This workshop proposes a curator who may identify with public introvertedness or shyness, not only as a personality trait, but as a way of working. It suggests a quiet mode of working that challenges the negative perception of being shy.

Instead, curatorial practice can be viewed as a quiet process that highlights the negotiation of, and allowance for, different positions within artistic practices, allowing them to realize their full potential in curatorial presentations.

The workshop explores how the extroverted world of exhibitions and public engagement in curatorial work can be understood as a moment to perform a coming out of the shy shell in social situations. It explores the concept of curatorial quiet—shyness and introvertedness—and how this may manifest in the curatorial process, from concept development to audience interaction.

To theorize this understanding of curatorial introvertedness and shyness, I link to theorist Carli Coetzee's concept of *accentedness*.

Accentedness articulates not the way we speak with an 'accent' but accents as multiple forms of storytelling, even if those accounts might be conflicting. While Coetzee proposes accentedness that is grounded in linguistic translation and draws largely from the history of apartheid—looking at ways histories get told beyond the binaries of victims and victors—here I consider how accentedness might be considered within storytelling through curatorial practice.

Coetzee proposes that we think about a history where there will never be one single story. The concept of *accentedness* offers a unique approach to storytelling, challenging how the same histories can be told from different perspectives contrapuntally. In this light, accentedness then becomes a theoretical framework and a practice of critical thinking, hearing, and listening through curatorial researching, archiving and storytelling. In what ways do we create space for multiple dimensions of thinking and point-of-views to coexist within a curatorial project? How do we hold space for diverse stories to co-exist?

For me, this theoretical framework and practice is also a way to think about shyness from the ecologi-

How do we hold space for diverse stories to co-exist?





cal perspective—the coexistence of trees where they allow light to shine between their crowns—in relation to accents and the environment of the workshop.

I see this theory and practice as related to the challenge of facilitating a space where different stories, different ways of being, and different personalities can co-exist.

For the workshop, the zine became a mold to explore this framework. Participants were paired to tell each other their stories towards making a zine. Zines have a powerful historical relevance to pamphlets that have allowed different ways of thinking to circulate and information to be distributed that counter dictating ideologies of more public facing political domains.

The zine also takes into consideration how curators have to work in precarious contexts, sometimes with limited resources to tell these stories, and how they have to navigate archival/historical inaccuracies or misinterpretations of narratives. I thought this tool could be easily engaged with and is a poignant mechanism to speak about the possibilities of accentedness.

**The workshop asks—How can shyness as a form of accentedness contribute to diverse ways of presenting ideas and narratives?**

Thought of in another way, if curatorial shyness is then accented, how can shyness and accentedness propose ways of working that might include ideas of curatorial listening and (un)learning?

#### FLOW OF THE DAY

NONTOBEKO (reflecting back on the workshop)—There were moments of truthful presence; people were available for a difficult conversation, for holding a space of confusion, for a space in which there was laughter without judgment.

When introducing a conversation that is about accents, we usually draw on the primary, simplistic understanding of “you are different from me.” In this space, I felt that people really broke that wall of “you are different” and therefore we are distanced.

*We watch a video of Trevor Noah performing a multitude of accents. We take turns reading aloud from the book 'Accented Futures' by Carli Coetzee, followed by a short discussion and unpacking of reading.*

*After lunch, we move into the zine making session. We go off in pairs. Each taking turns sharing a story—a personal narrative or a story gathered from our lives. We interpret the stories as we heard them, visually curating them into zines.*

#### REFLECTION DISCUSSION AFTER READING

NONTOBEKO (reflecting back on the workshop)—As we took turns reading out loud, our voices became more and more assertive and comfortable. The framework of accentedness, that held this exercise, allowed for incorrectness and different accents and pronunciations to coexist. It didn't matter whether your pronunciation was correct or not; we were able to enjoy each other's differences. By speaking and reading out loud, it became more about listening. This kind of co-creation and co-teaching opens space for wider participation, sharing of voices, and a holding of space together.

NONTOBEKO—How we experience a text is through the lens of the author—their prejudices and references—at the same time we insert our own lens and pre-conceptions.

There is an intermingling of voices and accents, which immediately reveals the multiplicity and layers of the story being told (writer and reader) and where they speak from.

MERI—It was very generous to take the time to go through the text together. Not everyone has the same ability to internalize the text when by themselves. It's a way to provide a safe space for that kind of shyness; I'm always shy about academic texts because I feel inferior to them, because I'm not sure if I understand all the things that I should know and the references which can make the text impenetrable.

NONTOBEKO—In the idea of “accentedness” is that we are able to read between what is, or is not, available in the text, to allow different accents to coexist, for different utterances and meanings to shift. A text is what it is, until you read it and then meaning emerges. In that moment intertextuality also emerges. Intertextuality is the concept that texts are not isolated entities but rather exist in relation to other texts. It refers to the way texts reference, allude to, or echo other texts, creating a web of connections between them. When we read, we each walk away with a different interpretation, and they are all valid. When we

# Shyness as a form of accentedness



enter conversations with other people, we bring our accents, we bring our references to a conversation—that is also intertextuality. How do we hold that space for both reader’s and author’s references to exist at the same time?

PAUL — It’s very difficult for me to speak in my own current accent to people that I grew up with. It’s difficult, not for us to understand each other in what we say, but in terms of where we come from. There’s something about class and academia where there’s the question of how you retain your uniqueness with either your working-class accent or your Irish accent or your identity as an accent, and then assimilating that into kind of the middle class, and you’re never one nor the other.

TARU — I kept on being asked where my accent is from, and I still get that. Because nobody can locate me by how I sound. There is this question of “okay, so where are you from?”

I think it’s interesting to think of how that might be a possibility of refusal to locate. The accent can be very powerful in that sense of keeping us rooted and linking us to communities.

But then how do we answer that “from” question?

DANIEL — I’m thinking about my own language learning process... learning French through the force of shame; how tied up correctness of accent was to being able to be accepted or listened to.

There’s both this question of class, but there’s also this limit of access to power that comes with it. Often people will be celebrated as perfectly assimilated based on fluency—the power of having a perfect accent. The lack of that power is also a real barrier to access within society.

NONTOBEKO — Where do we speak from? In a way, the accentedness is saying that you can be speaking from many places, laying bare different kinds of ideologies and backgrounds, allowing the person reading access beyond the first layer of the accent and allows a kind of multiplicity of self.

To think of accentedness from this point of view means we can even walk out of this workshop each having different interpretations. That doesn’t mean that the workshop was any different, we just all received it differently, thus unhomogenized.

## REFLECTION DISCUSSION AFTER MAKING ZINES

*In Meri's workshop we told our life stories in clay. Now, we discover different stories surfacing and being told through the making of a zine. Some of the participants comments from this workshop are shared here anonymously.*

**WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT**—There is a process here that's important for the healing of a community — that it's not about getting the facts of a story right and arriving at an absolute truth. Stories are multiple and suspended without a need to be translated.

**DANIEL**—I am realizing that handwriting is another form of accentedness, looking at the zine I produced, remembering my mother's analytic notebooks full of traces of intimate thoughts shared and recorded in indecipherable scrawl.

**DANIEL**—Knowing we had the weight of remediating each other's stories, we started by considering how we entered that. Isaac went back to Meri's workshop where we had exchanged life stories in clay and began by asking me about a moment when I was telling my story through clay.

**PAUL**—Our zine was more like a little shared notebook. We decided to map our stories onto each other from the beginning as a methodology. That approach caused us to look for the commonalities and intersections, the moments of convergence rather than divergence.

*Many people in the group express feeling powerful resonances, the way the experience or story of one person speaks to each of us. Some of the stories that surfaced in the pairs were meant only for that one listener.*

**WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT**—My story is the kind of story that needs to be told from one person to another. It is not the kind of story I would be comfortable sharing with a group.

**MERI**—Our zine was about the limits that the words of the story are placing on the complexities the story contains. When I was listening to what was being told, there was this feeling that it's in human nature to limit reality, in order to be able to grasp it. We wanted to visualize that with our zine, so we made cutouts in the paper that limit your view.

What is available for you to look at is already there, but then when you look through these limits that we have set, represented by these shapes cut out

of the paper, then reality will look different, but behind them is the real thing. When we change the shape of the frame (the paper cutout), we start to see something else, but also something else is hidden.

*The group discusses how the zine is an object, and the object is about itself, not just a representation of the story heard. It is about the person holding the object and how the body engages it.*

**WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT**—A text is never just words; it's also a material.

**BERNARD**—I was interpreting Ndalo's story into my zine and then at one point he was sleeping, so I was catching parts of other stories I was overhearing. The zine opens and unfolds into multiple directions and some blank pages are silences that sort of become ways of being.

*The group discusses negative spaces and acknowledging what is unwritten, unrepresented; the parts of the story that are not there.*

## VISAS AND REMOTE PARTICIPATION

**DANIEL**—It's critical to begin with who is in the room, and how exclusions are part of place-based study. For example, this art academy (the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki) is predicated on the idea that 2% of people get into the program. We get 1000 applications. We wind up with 20 people. There's 980 people who are here, but not here.

When inclusion is based on such an arbitrary system like the visa process, which is not just arbitrary, but also fraught with injustices and inequalities, it leaves a mark on a place, it is in the room with us.

**DANIEL (to Ofem)**—Because your visa was delayed, you weren't able to join us until the second week. This is your first day in person. We've been trying to think, inside of this School of Shying a Way, about that position in a slightly different way; not pragmatically or functionally, as in, for example, remote learning, but more from a philosophical viewpoint. If you're going to study in place, in situ, that in situ also contains those who are not there. I felt you were playing a very important role where we would bring you in and it was so clear that you reignited our awareness of what was happening in this space, because you came in from somewhere else, and yet you had clearly been understanding what was going on.



OFEM—I think my experience was a bit different, but also exciting, because of having to understand and engage with the workshops without being there in person. What that did for me, was that I could begin to find alternative ways to explore what was going on in order to make contributions.

For example, the workshop with clay was thinking about language. It was also thinking about language from the poetic point of view, understanding that language goes beyond dialect, goes beyond text. Maybe the language of clay is moisture, like you (Daniel) suggested, but also it might be silence. Silence in itself is a language as well.

So how am I able to interrogate and interact with all of these different forms when I'm not able to touch the clay, like everyone else did. I could see the physical interaction from the video, but it's not the same as understanding by experiencing the engagement. It exposed me to myriad possibilities. The question that I asked myself was— how do you imbibe and transfer what you've learned from this workshop into your own practice as well?

AKOSUA—I wished there had been ample time to retable my visa application after I was rejected. I was devastated that I missed an opportunity to experience a new environment, people, and a piloted form of pedagogy sampled from different continents and merged into a new curriculum. My experience of the workshop as a virtual participant was highly limited. It was challenging without a stable internet connection or in instances where the workshop was fully practical, immersive and in need of the total attention of both facilitators and participants.

I thought of how to be present in Helsinki in my absence, deducing my experience of the session of the workshop through imagination. Doing this felt a bit uncomfortable as I lacked physical experience with people. At the same time, it was a comfortable situation because I stayed in my “Image-Nation” (my comfort zone) and learned from other artists, participants, and facilitators from varied countries with different histories, backgrounds, and experiences through the virtual world.

WORKSHOP 3  
SHYNESS AS POTENTIALITY  
FACILITATOR: GESA PIPER  
IN COLLABORATION WITH GLOBE ART POINT



# WORKSHOP 3

*In this workshop, we explore how to listen into the participants' own and shared psychophysical space through and with multiple "towards-nesses" from an embodied place. We tune various body systems and sense perceptions through which psychophysical states of shyness can be observed and studied, as well as dynamics that accompany, evoke, complement, balance or counter dynamics of shyness.*

*The Shyness as Potentiality workshop was offered in collaboration with Globe Art Point but held in the building of the Theatre Academy, University of the Arts, Helsinki.*

## ON WORKING WITH GAP

GESA—I chose Globe Art point as my host partner. It's an organization that supports international or foreign-born artists in Finland that often don't yet have a platform. They work as an advocate for those who might not yet make it to the visibility of the art scene. I think this corresponds with the theme of shyness, bringing artists who are less visible and offering them spaces and stages.

I see shyness as a dynamic quality that emerges or acts out within a constellation of relational dynamics. Similarly, GAP is a constellation that works to establish new connections within their international framework and to build networks. In a way, their process moves through stages of shyness, bringing potentialities into the cultural scene that expand what it can become.

## OFFERING

GESA—How can shyness be explored as a space of potentiality? What if shyness opens into a realm of all possible "not yet's"? How do we meet ourselves and one another from this state of receptive listening? Not-yet imposing anything in particular, but with a curious openness towards a multitude of possibilities.

In my workshop, we work with the body and the embodied experience of shyness—how shyness is not so much just a personality trait, but rather a dynamic in a constellation or a phase in a process. The subjective experience of each moment, that might be affected by the constellation in space, is of interest in this work. It is not a workshop in which it is important

*There is so much that is already present here,  
even if not verbalized.*



what the body does and how it moves but rather how my life stream is experienced through my body. Therefore, we tune different body systems that relate to particular sense perceptions.

We particularly focus on how we experience seeing or being seen. In the end of the workshop, we explore what surfaces in the absence of light, for an extended period of time. A prompt for the darkness practice is: What comes to the light in the absence of light that shies away in the light?

We study our own sensational field of what opens through our bodies when we meet these aspects of shyness or when we meet one another when seeing and being seen. For example, we explore if it feels different to be seen from up close or further away, to be approached with eyes closed or with eyes open etc.

An underlying interest of mine is how we can presence (i.e. bring to the fore/recognize) parts of ourselves that might lie dormant, possibly because we don't share such aspects with what and who surrounds us in a particular situation.

First noticing our own perceptual embodied field (physical and emotional sensations, and mental movements that we notice through our bodies) might allow the dormant parts to presence. How do we experience what happens when we really presence that into this shared space? What would it be like to take the risk of not understanding and not being understood directly?

In this international shared space, where there are multiple invisible or dormant languages present, we can practice staying in an openness beyond just needing to narrow into a homogenized space where we understand the meaning of what we say.

We acknowledge what multi-place-based relations are carried in us and bring them into exchange through non-verbal communication.

#### FLOW OF THE DAY

GESA—We begin with just feeling how it is to walk; how the different parts of our body integrate or take part in the walking. Some prompts are: I am walking here just noticing my walking, or I am moving as one particle of a bigger organism. Then we begin mapping the body and how the body is in space.

We tune the eye and its different modes of functionality, like camera functions: sharp focus, short range, mid-range, long range, open vision or peripheral vision and panning vision.

Then we pick one visual partner, which can simply be a dot on the wall. This is practicing how I experience myself and my body, and how the perceptual field is impacted through the relationship to this visual partner. When I look at it with a sharp focus vision, I experience it as something outside of my body. What does it do if I perceive that visual partner in my peripheral field so that I never meet it directly?

I invite everyone in the group to have the experience of a single visual partner looking at them, to think of the rays that are being emitted from the visual partner, touching the eyes and being processed in the brain.

Another exercise is practicing standing and being seen. One person stands at the edge of the space and then the group walks towards them from the other side of space. The one who stands alone can assert the boundaries. The idea is to notice how it feels if suddenly there is this group of people walking towards you, and to be able to say stop; to navigate communicating the permission to come closer or to go away.

In the performance context, there is always an action that involves being seen or a persona of the performer being seen. But in this standing exercise, it is a real stripping that away; there is no action to somehow disguise or put on top. There is just the experience of being seen.

#### SHYNESS IN RELATION TO THE FIELD OF DANCE

DANIEL—There's something primal in this kind of looking (referring to the part of the workshop where the group was instructed to all look at one person, who was asked to stand in front and not look away)—being looked at in relation to the violence of othering. Talking to Gesa reminded me that there's also something in this exercise that is specific to the field of performance, particularly as a dancer, around the way that your body is seen and consumed by viewers.

Being looked at, in this intense way, is a discipline-specific knowledge that has some important contributions to make, both to the study of shyness and to thinking the violence of othering in the specific context of being a performer.

GESA—In the professional dance world, the body is very often used as material, like clay that can be formed

*We can practice staying in an openness beyond the need to narrow into a homogenized space*

into something that can be sold. Professionalizing the body can lead to a process of segregation.

Some dancers and choreographers have tried to reclaim the dancer's agency, for instance Deborah Hay who has also practiced with her dancers a version of the standing practice that we did. The dancer is not just focusing on how my body material carves a moving image into the space that is seen by others, but the dancer practices seeing themselves, which literally informs the whole body and therefore directly affects the dancer's presence. The object to be looked at becomes a perceiving subject.

Sometimes it's forgotten that this body is actually the home of a person: the home of all the aspects that belong to this person and the life communicating through it.

Traditionally dance is a mute practice; body language is the expression tool. I have had the experience of the body expanding beyond my capacity to use words or explain. This subtle, strong dynamic realm, that the body can fathom, can maybe capture the potential of shyness in a special way.

The metaphor of crown shyness relates to something I call spheric touch. When tuning the different embodied layers, the second skin is the layer in which you sense the connection that is already present in relation to you without being bound to the condition of touching. It indicates that you can sense beyond the edges of your actual body.

Crown shyness in trees indicates that there are these channels, of exchange of information, that go beyond the edges of the branches' physical position. Sometimes we talk about crown shyness as restricting growth, but I feel it's a very intricate dance, not a holding back or a give and take, but a beautiful reaching into and moving around and out of. When tuning that second skin or spheric touch, I come into dancing in an intra-connectedness.

#### REFLECTIONS FROM PARTICIPANTS

NAAKAI— The workshop was a really unique and meaningful experience. I found it particularly moving and novel to experience/explore trust in self and others in the darkness, and also to experience in that well-held space, a somatic interplay between seeing and being seen. It felt very powerful to reflect on shyness not only as a possible reticence to be witnessed, but also how it can show up as hesitation to witness/make contact with others.



ALEXANDRA KOLLEROVÁ—The workshop on shyness offered special space for exploration of shyness as a state of potentiality.

I appreciated how it invited us to view shyness beyond a personality trait and engage with it as an embodied process.

The exercises that combined physical awareness and reflective openness were especially impactful, allowing for both personal insight and collaborative discovery. It was a unique experience to explore such an abstract concept through movement and sensory tuning, which deepened my understanding of psychophysical dynamics.

OFEM—“Are your feet touching the floor or is the floor touching your feet?” (Gesa)

Exercises that require the body as their primary participatory instrument can feel really intimate; intimacy can feel arduous in collision with new bodies.

This workshop, facilitated by Gesa Piper, was a tremendous opportunity to confront space in relation to our bodies and how we react to other foreign bodies that engage with said space, probing our cultural and personal interpretations of safety, consent and belonging, and navigating the commonality of our experiences through feedback sessions after each exercise.

But beyond this, it was also an open call to rhythm; a chance to communicate with this vessel of blood and bone, feel each movement, curate each throbbing. An examination on musicality, no sound; just us and this theatre of sensitivities.

It was a moment of reflection for me, an avenue to pay heed to myself and stay attuned to my heartbeat but at my own pace and discretion. It was also rewarding to have done this personal recollection with a group of people, us all going through our personal discoveries but doing so in a cluster felt like an informal way of holding each other up in the light. Us, all vulnerable but even courageous enough to shy together.

One of the exercises I found oddly interesting was the stare competition. The simple, not so simple, task of two people paired together in a staring contest for a timeframe really makes you interrogate what you think you know about each other, creating elements of doubt but also reinstating fortitude at the helm of it. It also creates discomfort and leaves you naked when held in each other's gaze, so much it makes you employ visual tricks to avoid the peer.



In the end, I offered myself for an exercise which felt like a visual representation of 'All Eyez on Me'. For what felt like an advanced level of the stare competition, it became harder to negotiate my freedom as opposed to the former where I could spar for it. I felt like an item up for the auction; an exhibit of some sort.

What is power and who dictates what? What is negotiation and who gets what? What is shyness and who feels what? A culmination of all these questions jolting through my body whilst yet trying to maintain calmness.

We came as individuals with our fears and our shyness, but as participants in group exercises, we unfurled and shared with one another—moving from personal to collective; shying together.

*Known shyness is a very intricate dance,  
a beautiful reaching into and moving around  
and out of.*



I invite people to recognize  
or appreciate the contradictions  
and paradoxes inherent  
in society.



WORKSHOP 4  
RE-CALL ≠ WRECK ALL...  
FACILITATOR: BERNARD AKOI-JACKSON  
IN COLLABORATION WITH MUSEUM OF IMPOSSIBLE  
FORMS

*(little deeds in memory or for a memorialization of skills and means we've forgotten, almost had or didn't at all have).*

*Re-Call ≠ Wreck All is a collaborative gesture between Bernard Akoi-Jackson and the Museum of Impossible Forms. It is proposed as a site-specific experimental event located within MIF. It manifests as a participatory and performative intervention in two parts: a set of activities to be undertaken by specifically invited participants and a public forum in which the general public can engage and interact. The entire set up functioned as a sculptural/object-oriented installation and simultaneously provided the physical context for the performative engagement. All were cordially invited to come engage and discuss our collective condition.*

# WORKSHOP 4

## OFFERING

BERNARD—What I offered this time had similar undertones to what I did in Lagos. For instance, it still uses bureaucratic procedure, rote memorization strategies to engage people, to try and see what our bodies can remember from situations that probably would have been foisted upon us. Sometimes it may not have been oppressively done. Sometimes it has been done through coercive means as part of the educational system. This time, (in Helsinki as opposed to Lagos) there was a little freedom in the structure of the workshop; there were no questions to answer or a questionnaire to fill out, but rather, there were a few options that the participants could pick from.

I was curious to know what will happen when people go through the steps without a specific structure. To what extent would they even follow the steps? How far will somebody decide to take their own fate in their hands, even when a structure is given to them, and flout it?

## FLOW OF THE DAY

BERNARD—There were stations set up, the first being a lounge of books, texts, and objects. With these, I was proposing that material for research doesn't necessarily always have to come in the form of books or what, in academia, is referred to as literature. So, there were books of course, but there were also some objects laid out.



Anybody who came into the venue could engage with those materials, go through them, read them, try to memorize some text out of them, or try to remember what they look like. Then from there, they could either make notes or decide to keep the memory in their bodies.

Then participants were ushered into another space where they tried to remember what they had experienced in the lounge. In one station, they tried to recall this memory through using a typewriter and typing out some of what they remembered.

I'm interested in objects like typewriters because, as much as they are obsolete, they still do define aspects of our lives. For instance, I remember that for my son to travel with my wife we had to sign an affidavit, and this affidavit literally had to be typed out on a typewriter because the bureaucratic system does not permit a laptop-typed message. I had to take a short trip out of the KNUST campus and go into the city center, just to have the affidavit typed and notarized.

I'm borrowing some of these things that have direct or indirect resonance with what happens in our daily lives. I wanted to see how we were going to struggle with this (typewriter) monstrosity and if we could get anything out of its technical functioning—

to remember what we read in a book or an image that we saw, and then to recall and translate it into a machine which may or may not even function at all. There was a precarity at stake that made us all vulnerable.

The workshop also covered several ways of image making or leaving behind an impression. After the episode with the typewriter, participants could move to a softer version of typing, on the laptop, and see if they could remember aspects of what they've collected to contribute to a collective Google document text. When I went to visit the Museum of Impossible Forms, I discovered they had a printmaking press, and they invited us to use it as another station for participants to try and make a print from what they may read. There also happened to be a piano, so if people remembered their music lessons from childhood, (that is, if they ever even had music lessons at all), they could also share a piece of music with us.

The mid-day journey to the restaurant for lunch became a collective walking, like a procession, traversing a set space. I think when we do this walk as a mixed community, as both people who are comfortable with the space and those not comfortable with it, we sort of birth new ways of being.



What I wanted us to gain out of this offering were the numerous visceral, mental, and physical experiences.

#### ON RITUAL CULTURES IN ART AND IN PEDAGOGY

BERNARD—For me, pedagogy must be free. But freedom is hard to come by. I remember I was asked by people some time ago: how do you teach? And then I said, but me, I don't really teach (in a rote sense). I facilitate some levels of confusion in the people I work with in pedagogic situations. The confusions lead to frustrations that are intended for people to go seeking the answers for themselves. So, the real aim is not to frustrate them; the intent is to bring people through difficult moods and methodologies, to start inventing more personalized ways of easily accessing solutions.

I keep proposing that art is a rather easy endeavor, but then, at the same time, art is also a very difficult endeavor. And so how can something that is so inaccessible to people be made super accessible, beyond known traditions and methodologies? But knowing traditions and knowing that traditions are constructs, I also propose new ways of accessing things.

I'm very aware of rituals. By rituals I could imply the spiritual, but for me, it's not so much spiritual; it's really very secular most of the time. What I mean is this: a ritual could be coded into a password, which should be memorized and recalled, just to get through to your own messages.

It could also manifest as a pin that is needed for you to get access to your own money in the bank. These I consider as rituals that we have to participate in so that life is sometimes made easier for us. But these very things are also those that make our lives complicated. In my work, I instigate critiques of, or parody, these rituals and the structural provisions that perpetrate them. Most of the time, I approach them with some form of irony. In that sense, we sort of do the things that we normally do every day, but with a little twist.

Whilst doing that, we tend to recognize how absurd our lives are generally. We are, however, also met with the drab realization that sometimes the absurdities are also necessities. Imagine that there were no passwords to get through to things, that there would be a great deal of chaos, and maybe chaos is necessary,



but not all the time. So, as much as I'm critiquing a system that is so rigid, I am borrowing some of its mechanisms to make sense of my being, my space, and my experience. This is what I also share with others through my work as an artist and through my teaching as an educator.

#### REFLECTION DISCUSSION

*The group reflects on how the assignment was unclear. Bernard admits he intentionally left his introduction of the task vague. At several points during the day, participants ask him how to use the typewriters and he replies, "consult YouTube!" This creates an atmosphere where everyone asks one another. There is an echo in the space throughout the day of questions like, "Do you know what we're supposed to do? What is happening here? Were we supposed to \_\_\_\_\_?"*

**GESA**—There was something so special in how Bernard set himself up as this teacher in that he opened the task, but he was not it.

The structures were so recognizable, structures that are kind of imposed, but you didn't have to follow them—I was allowed to recognize these parallel planes of being and functioning because the space was arranged with so many multiple ways of engaging.

**ODUN**—I felt that asking everyone to make a print with their fingerprint and signature was situating us in all that was going on because those marks are just yours, no one else can make them. One participant said that he felt like when you go to the bank and you have to give your signature, and if it's not the right one, they'll tell you and you have to do it again.

So, in all the chaos of trying to remember a text, play the piano, use the typewriter, make an artwork, find X, read a book... in all that there was this huge space of liminality that we were just swimming in and grasping onto each other. And then you ask us with this task: who are you? Making a print of our signature was anchoring, a way of declaring "this is me."

**OYINDAMOLA**—I really enjoyed the dialogue happening in different stations. There was a moment when Nonto started singing, and Chris was playing on the piano, and they were in conversation over each other. And everyone was very immersed in whatever they were doing. There were moments of collectivity, this chaos in the community. There was a conversation at the printing press and a conversation at the type-

writers and at the books. So, we were looking up for these moments of dialogue before looking back down at what we were working on. This wasn't a task where you were totally withdrawn into yourself. Rather the task was more one of dialogue and helping. Isaac was rolling my paint for me. Odun was rolling the press for me. Someone was fixing the typewriter for me. There were these give and take moments of making together. Could I say that the work was mine? No, the work was allowed to be because of the support of the people in the room.

**GESA**—I became caught up in the rigidity of the structure of the assignment within the linear stations. I was consumed with completing each task and then checking the boxes. I could no longer see the bigger picture—the meaning or value of the assignment. Instead, I was just going through the motions that each station demanded.

*Meri recalls her childhood. When she was in school, she always had questions. She often spent the entire time in class with her hand raised. She waited and refused the task until answers were attended to. She noticed how in this structure she had no patience, for instance, to wait in line to use one of the typewriters.*

**MERI**—I really enjoyed the play with these formal elements that are so clearly linked to violence in their form, or that we recognize them from those places. Then these elements are given in the way that is linked to supervision and yet none is there. So, you start to supervise yourself somehow, or you get these multiple roles.

I started to play with that, and it was really fun. I realized that I'm a student that's good at breaking the rules; it's then that I end up doing something really great. When I am studying, and the teacher says do whatever you want, then I'm lost—then I start to find other people and say, "hey, what should I do?" I prefer not to work alone as an artist. Educational conditions often deny you the chance to work with others.

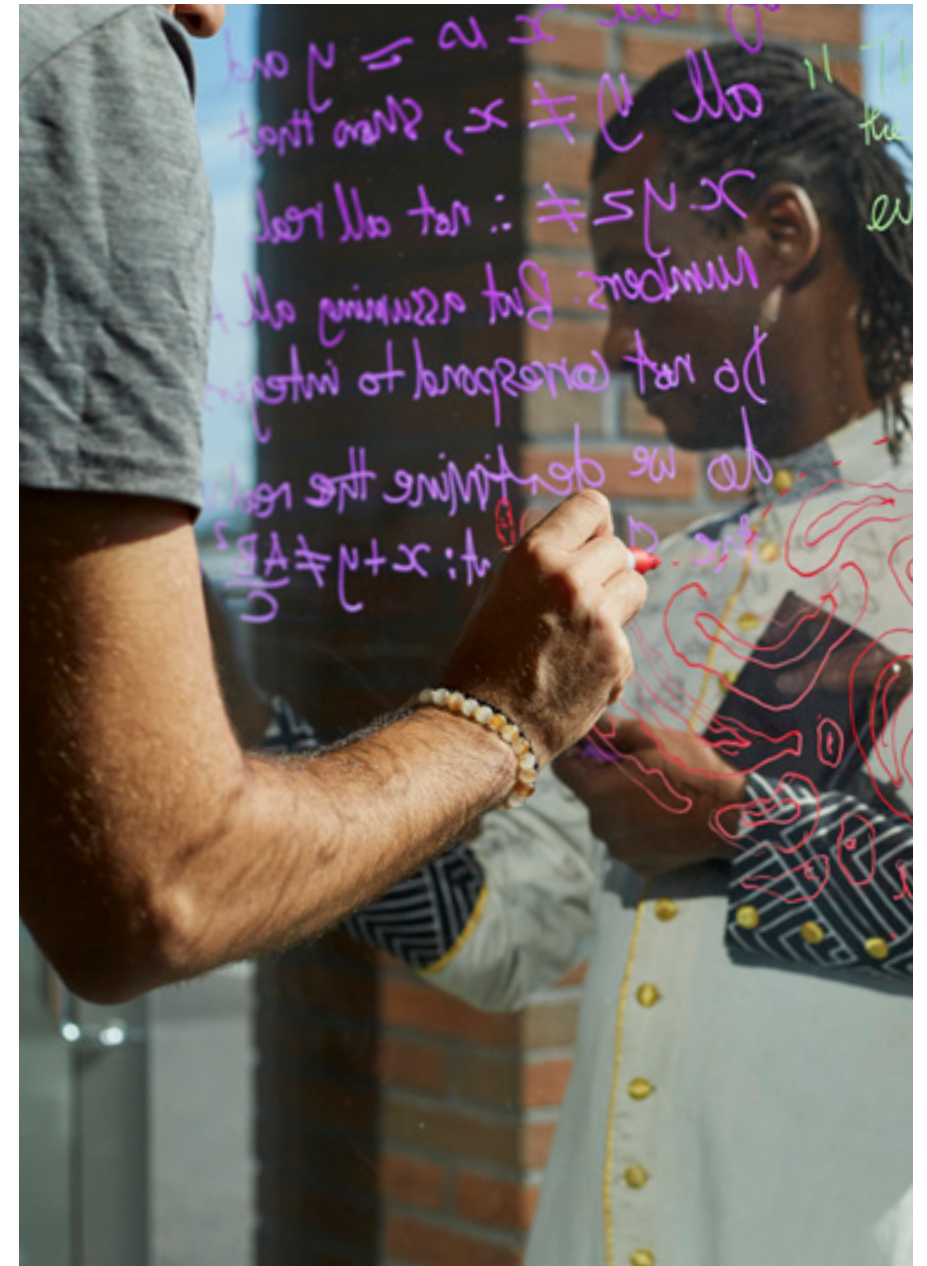
**DANIEL**—Bernard is playing with a kind of porosity which is very fragile. It's easy to disregard because when you create that porous structure, people can come in and they can have a very surface level experience—someone can come and be like, "just seems like fun, or it seems a bit disorganized." And yet something complicated is being engaged. Bernard is working with something which can't be seen. For instance, a participant comes in late and says: "oh, I missed the

instructions.” They think they missed the point, but they didn’t miss the point—the sense of having missed the instructions is part of the lesson plan.

**NONTOBEKO** — The workshop in itself is a very serious and challenging gesture that appears funny. Personally, we experience these kinds of bureaucratic moments, like issues with the immigration officers, and it’s not funny when it happens in real life.

When a student comes into the workshop, there is an expectation for what we do in this space to be serious. I’m wondering whether there’s affordance to not be serious in this context. I feel our research team is pushing against the grain by saying there’s a place to think of seriousness in these diverse ways, but simultaneously, these expectations of the space of study are suggesting there are much graver things to be considered.

*The confusions lead to frustrations that are intended for people to go seeking the answers for themselves.*



WORKSHOP 5  
MEMORY MUTATIONS  
FACILITATOR: ODUN ORIMOLADE  
IN COLLABORATION WITH MYYMÄLÄ2



# WORKSHOP 5

*This workshop offering nurses an idea about memory transplantation, which is apt for coming into a new space. This concept, of transferring memories from one individual to another, is explored through the lenses of cognition, conation, and emotional regulation to understand its potential impact on navigating forms of shyness. The workshop is two pronged in that there is a generative part within the frame of a walk and a reflective part.*

*The Memory Mutations workshop was offered in collaboration with Myymälä2 but held in the space of a walk from Töölö Towers to the building of the Academy of Fine Arts, University of the Arts, Helsinki*

## OFFERING

ODUN — The first part of the workshop involved a collective walk layered with metaphorical elements. One element was water, contained in the very fragile, elastic space of balloons. These forms were a metaphor for our lives. Bells tied on our wrists and ankles incorporated the element of sound, triggered by our movement.

The second part of the workshop was reflective — thinking back on the interactions we had just experienced. This reflection was also realized in the form of an exercise in transferring and transplanting memories.

The element of chance, as a creative stimulant, was an important component to preserve in the activities. The openness to probabilities and randomness allows for new ways of thinking. Chance creates more room to mine ideas through the actions of the workshop. It allows for undoing biases and reworking means and methods.

Organic interaction, as a joint activity, creates space for chance through communicative action. Pooling, adapting, reorienting, selecting, reframing and so forth (which are parts of action theory) facilitate inclusiveness and broadened perspectives to work out spaces of shyness.

These ideas situated the memory transplantation/mutation activity as an explorative adventure. The participants were not told that they must arrive at the end destination with their precious cargo — the balloon with water standing in for their body — intact. However, they all strived for this — they collectively gave the elements value and supported each other in getting to the destination.



The interconnections in the participants' actions support an understanding that learning is embedded in social and cultural contexts of all our experiential environments. The informality of chance and the organic allows for a broader apprehension of forms of shyness, which in turn promotes inclusivity.

#### ON MEMORY AND SHYNESS

ODUN — Although memory has one primary definition, several definitions can be unpacked on many levels.

The morphing and elusive characteristics of memory, and memory making, are interesting mechanisms for exploring ideas of shyness. Memory can be transient; it evolves and takes on different forms such as being borrowed, imposed, cultured, mutated, translated, hybridized... etc.

Memory shapes how we behave and in turn affects our navigations of shyness, which also can be expansive in its interpretations.

At its core, shyness deals with our actions and reactions — these vast behavioral manifestations. In the workshop, the action of collective navigation allowed for testing out variations of shyness, as they can only be deduced by the individual facilitator/participant. All participants become co-facilitators in participatory actions: mapping navigation, memory transfer and reception and role play.

#### FLOW OF THE DAY—WALK/MIGRATION

ODUN — For the walk through central Helsinki, each participant was wearing bells and carrying a balloon filled with water. Participants were encouraged to use the bells to create moments of connection with each other and with the environment. There was freedom to interact with others and move at one's own pace.

Although there was a pre-planned route, we made stops at impromptu 'points of interest' — no specific points were designated. We stopped at a large intersection and went through the, seemingly mundane, process of making sure we all got to the other side. We stopped at a lake with ducks and two very conspicuous pink rubber swans in the middle of the park. We stopped for ice cream and crafted odd sitting spots on the hill, by the ice cream stall and by the pathway. The whole area around the ice cream stand became animated and places where feet don't usually tread



became touched. We stopped at a long lake with concrete embankments. It was a waiting game for those who had been lost with their ‘lives and memories’ (that was rather symbolic). Our last stop was at the window shop, where we all looked for glasses that we thought might fit Oyindamola.

#### GROUP DISCUSSION, REFLECTION AND SYNTHESIS

ODUN — For this post-walk phase, interaction remained informal, organic and open-ended. Prompts were intuitive and participants were encouraged to share their striking experiences from the walk. The intent was to get into discussions that could lead to further questions on what the workshop session had raised.

By recalling and interacting about the walking experience, participants remembered and reflected more. The activity also further stimulated the group experience, where different participants recalled different details that then became memory triggers for others. The collective sharing functioned as a second ice breaker that attended to preconceptions of shyness and prepared participants for the more intimate interactions in the next phase of the workshop.

In the discussion, Bernard mentioned how if we mapped the movement of the group over the course of the walk, it would be similar to a drawn-out bubble in how the group broke up and came back together several times throughout the walking activity. The movement and interaction of the workshop collective was alluded to as family, a circle of friends, or confidants, where one could stay within the safety bubble of the group or interact with passersby.

The paraphernalia became connecting points for the participants in that they developed an attachment and gave their own interpretations to the objects.

Participants engaged the task of ‘life’ carrying (represented by the balloons with water) as a tremulous responsiveness to the vulnerability of life.

It was interesting how during the walk participants transferred the metaphor to the paraphernalia objects through language. Actions or happenings related to the water-filled balloons that were being transported created multiple phrases such as:

“I have two extra lives just in case”, “My life almost fell!”, “Please could you hold my life for me?”, “I can’t find my life!” and so on. We discussed the consciousness of carrying the vulnerability of the self and how memory triggers can cause us to remember our existence. The absence of hierarchy in the group



and openness to ways of proceeding, brought on discussions about collective homelessness and the equality that it creates in reasoning things out in shyness through navigating ‘not knowing’.

The connections between shyness and shame also came up, revealing how they are linked through memory triggers that create forms of weariness and separation due to memory generated anxiety. The discussion also brought up questions on how predispositions and social intelligence affects shyness.

The images that each person took during the walk were pooled together in a Whatsapp group chat and this served as a way to find commonalities and connection points. Post-workshop reflections also emerged in the group chat. Antoine King shared his tree paintings that represent his life story that he was now connecting to ideas of shyness. Akosua Odeihea Amoah-Yeboah (one of the participants whose visa was denied) shared photos from her parallel memory walk in Ghana. This synchronized activity highlighted the transferability and adaptability of the workshop activity in different means and places.

#### MEMORY MAPPING

ODUN — The participants were divided into pairs and became both ‘donors’ and ‘recipients’, by taking turns sharing and listening to memories from the walk or a memory involving an element of shyness. The ‘recipient’ listened attentively, asking questions to understand the memory’s details, context, and emotional nuances. We then used our bodies to perform the memory that had been shared with us/transplanted in us/mutated through us. We performed these transplanted/mutated memories by creating and assuming a bodily gesture. These gestures were then mimicked by the whole group, effectively transplanting/mutating the memory into everyone present.

#### ROLE PLAY

ODUN — Now all having been a ‘recipient’, each participant role-played the donor’s memory as if it were their own. While standing in a circle, each participant took a turn stepping into the middle to share the interpreted and recounted memory as a pose or gesture. Each embodied memory performed was mimicked by all the participants in the circle. There was focus given to how the memory transplant influences behavior and emotions.

Ndalo, the toddler in the group, participated and acted out things learnt tacitly. During the performed memories, he realised that the group would react to him and mimic his actions inspiring him into playful exchange. For the adults, this was a moment to reflect on shyness at that stage of development.

The active participation embodies the potential for coping and maneuvering forms of shyness in asymmetric relations such as adult-child joint activities in the role of play of the workshop. This offers a potential to manipulate participation frameworks creating a means to encounter a child as both participant and facilitator.

#### PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

IRINA MUTT — I arrived a little bit late to the workshop, when everybody was already sitting in the room.

I was a little bit nervous when entering the space. A woman I had never met before, came to me and welcomed me with a hug. I suddenly felt disarmed and part of the group right there, with that hug. Later I knew that woman was Odun, the workshop facilitator.

The workshop consisted of walking through a park, holding balloons filled with water (our new bodies to carry) and some little bells. We became a flock of people carrying balloons, walking, mingling and talking, getting to know each other while the bells were jingling around us.

The day passed with this unconscious way of navigating space and time; without hierarchies, without instructions or destinations. Only a path, a shared direction. My mind was drifting, just being in the moment after moment after moment.

I tend to attend workshops searching for an intention, explanations or a reason. But the memory walk was not aiming to provide any of that. It was something much closer to the body and how it remembers.

No need to rationalize everything! How would you rationalize the meal you share with a friend? The memory of a sunny day? How could one search for a reason why it feels good the warm breeze of a summer night? You just feel those things.

Days after the workshop, I heard the jingling of a bell trotting on my tote bag. I forgot I left a bell there, I took it and smiled, feeling a tickling of joy. And then I understood. The memory was there. Instant and shiny. Like a magic trick.

Organic interaction, as a  
joint activity, creates  
Space for Chance





GABRIEL THIAM — A walk can be just that — a walk, or it can be revelations that jump from one to another in conversation. The latter was my experience in the On Shyness workshop, on the last day of the workshops, when we made our way from Töölö Towers, Helsinki, to Kuvataideakatemia, where we then wrote our thoughts and reflections, had a late lunch and an exercise where we recollected things we'd seen during our walk as a form of embodied remembering.

What I took from both the previous day, when I briefly visited the workshop at the Museum of Impossible Forms, and also the memory walk, was

an atmosphere of careful listening, to that of one another but also to the environment.

Consequently, I was writing a sum up from a lecture series on perception, and as much as one can put things together in the head to form a kind of theorising, it is always of much avail to return to practice. So, in this case, to actually perceive. And, perceive I did: during the walk, the eyes of another, the surface of the water of Töölönlahti, the ducks and geese, the words, whether chitchat or of more importance, the jostling leaves in the trees and so on...

We also ended up having impactful conversations with one another about topics such as labour and finding a footing in the current situation in Finland as a native but also as a foreigner. I argue, however, that the meaning of this walk was not in what comes up, but how to be in the moment to receive it. We were handed balloons to carry before leaving the Töölö Towers, which to me signified the conscious. On top of that we were given small jingles to attach to wrists and ankles. I think this part of the practice was of most significance. How to hold oneself in the midst of the journey, change, live!

ANTOINE KING — The walk was difficult for me because I can't walk well at the moment, but I was able to be pushed around in a wheelchair by Odun. This made me feel cared for and I truly appreciate that.

We were given a balloon with some water in it that represents our life. I kept it with me even when I got home those next few days, playing with it with my children. I wanted to keep it safe and protected and never get rid of it. But of course, everything has an end, so after time it shrunk and then became a bit of a distraction to keep around. I also wore the bells we were given for many days afterwards. I enjoyed having the extra ambiance to my being which helped me stand out a bit more and sometimes face my shyness.

The workshop allowed me to reflect on my shyness and how I have been holding myself back for so long. What stood out to me the most was the statement that there are trees that will stunt their own growth for the benefit of other trees to get light and grow. I recognized this in myself. I feel I have been too shy or afraid to let myself shine. I would put myself aside and help others achieve their goals. I always thought of shyness as negative, but Odun spoke about it being a positive natural aspect of human life.

I may be here to assist others in life, and I am OK with that and even proud to be support for so many friends and family. At the same time, I also want to grow through my shyness and bring more of myself to the surface, that way I too can grow and flourish. I hope to use some of the connections from the workshop to assist me in my continuing growth with art and life.

Now I'm looking forward to walking again and moving towards a more vibrant future for myself. I was happy to meet new people from around the world and come together to share this experience.





# CLOSING THE SPACE

*Dudu leads us in a Word Association Game as an exercise for reflecting on our time together. We go around the circle, each saying one word that comes to mind as a sort of free association. At the end of several rounds, we take a moment to write down 5 words we remember from all the words that were spoken. After 5 rounds, we end up with 3 lists of 5 words each.*

*Next, we pass the lists to the person next to us and make a selection from someone else's word list (by crossing out some of the words on the list we received, before handing it back to the person who wrote it). This process culminates in being given 5 minutes to write a poem that includes all the words left on our list.*

I am deaf to the bubbling sound of the festival  
 Blind to the omen of the wild  
 the tree in its constant drift grants nothing but  
 confusion  
 yet I trust in the collaboration between light  
 and dance  
 the flower will bloom  
 what was once soft and malleable like clay  
 will harden like iron  
 a sharpness of souls  
 what was hidden shall crawl out into the  
 open  
 disgracing the trepidation  
 overcoming the shyness

— OFEM

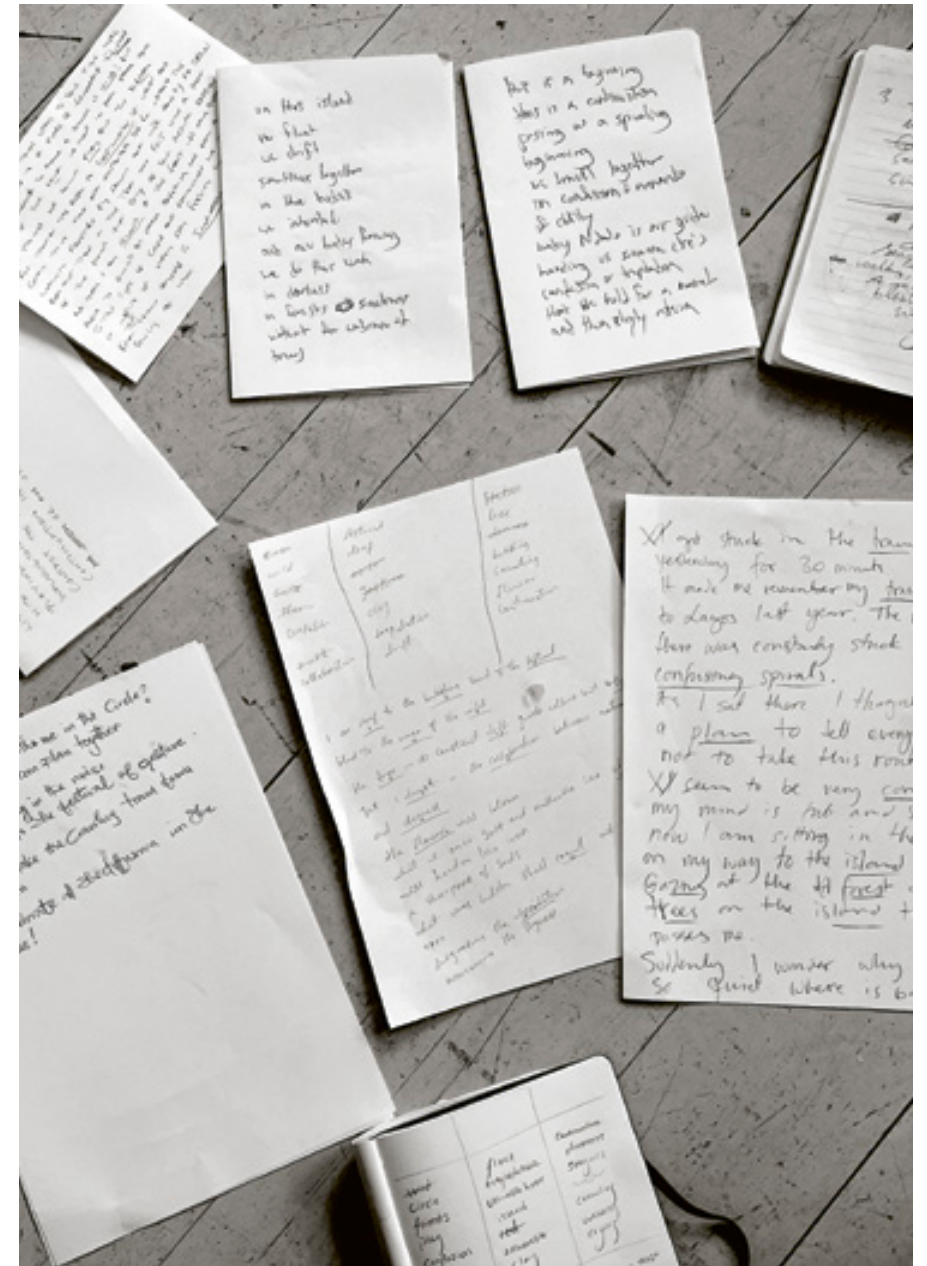
On this island  
 we float  
 we drift  
 sometimes together  
 in the bodies  
 we inherited  
 and new bodies forming  
 we do this  
 in darkness  
 in forests sometimes  
 without the embrace of trees  
 this is a beginning  
 this is a continuation  
 posing as a spiraling  
 beginning  
 we travel together  
 in confusion  
 and moments of clarity  
 baby Ndalo is our guide

handing us someone else's confusion or trepidation  
that we hold for a moment  
and then shyly return

— DANIEL

This circle has been expanding in trust  
through beautiful confusion  
we play with clay and become vulnerable  
at first we feel like islands floating and unable to hear  
each other  
but slowly, we crawl, or walk, each as we are able,  
towards crying—  
leaking shy inner movements  
that bind us together,  
expanding from this place

— ALYSSA





*Wandering and Wandering*

PARTICIPANT REFLECTIONS

DANIEL — There’s something methodologically organic about studying shyness by coming together as a group of people who don’t know each other... to study shyness.

DUDU — Engaging with this concept of shyness is an interesting way to enter this program. We all have our own definitions and experiences with shyness that not only come from our own personal understanding, but also our cultural contexts. Here, we bring that all into one space and deal with the complexity of shyness from different perspectives.

As participants, we held onto this theme of shyness, wondering — “what are we going into?” There is this open space before us. I think about the experience of being here for a week now after arriving and not knowing each other — how I am feeling those layers of shyness peel back and evolve.

We are getting to know each other in the context of where we come from; there’s an awareness that in every interaction, we’re engaging with shyness inside of that.

DANIEL — What specifically has felt valuable in the pedagogy of the shyness workshops so far?

OFEM — I think that experiences, ideas, or themes, even though they are global, are also very personal to us in terms of how we react to them and where we come from. The concept of culture outside of culture.

Thinking about foreign culture and domestic culture — how do they come together? How do they relate? For example, the culture that I have back in Nigeria is different from a culture I would experience here in Finland. How does the culture here influence my practice back home? And how can I find a melting point between both?

DUDU — Every workshop is so different; they each bring such different perspectives. In Meri’s we worked with shyness in a very embodied, physical way. The materiality of the clay, which I have never worked with before, was very exciting. I love working with my hands. Nonto’s workshop was more cerebral and more in line with my practice as a collage artist. Each workshop sort of contextualizes the previous ones, unfolding different experiences of shyness along the spectrum of how we might understand it.

What I enjoy most is that the gathering doesn't feel hierarchical in any sense.

I appreciate how the faculty is quite open to learning in the process of facilitating—I don't feel taught. I feel that it's a sort of space for ideas to land and be questioned, negotiated, challenged and changed. There seems to be quite an openness from the faculty side, which I've really appreciated.

It's quite a new experience to be invited to a program where you, at any point, can continuously negotiate your position inside of it. Sometimes you're speaking and you're teaching, or you're observing and you're watching, or you're participating or you're not participating. This negotiation is across the board with participants and faculty.

MINA—I am learning a lot from being part of these workshops. We work together along with the facilitators, putting our hands in the clay and trying something, then destroying it and trying something new, then doing something else—something that we never thought to do before. This is a new way for me to engage. I like the history of these workshops—how this is not the first gathering, there was one before in Lagos, and these workshops continue to develop to become something bigger and bigger in the future. I think many artists will really enjoy this model.

DANIEL—How do you think this model of engagement (including the proposal for a low-residency MA program in place-based artist practice), that is being developed between CCA, Lagos and Uniarts Helsinki, could be of value for you and your peers?

DUDU—Academic spaces can feel very alienating depending on the context. I love the porousness of this model—there are many different ways through which people can enter or participate.

I find huge value in this model of engagement and see benefit in all the different constellations of what it could be. In one potential iteration, I imagine that all the participants go and enter an engagement with each of the spaces where their practices are based, in both the African and Nordic context, in a way that brings them more deeply into the kind of formulation of the program. As a South African, my practice could be based in Zambia or could be based in Europe somewhere. But what I find interesting is that we're all from different spaces on the continent and now we're finding ourselves in this Finnish context where those specificities of place can find more language.

NOURHAN—I like the model of being home, working on a project in my home country, and then traveling somewhere in the middle of it to get out of my comfort zone, to be engaged with a group of artists and curators coming from different backgrounds, and then coming back home and continuing the project that I've been working on.

Most of the time, I would want to work on my project at home because it's site specific and the materials and research are so much related to my home country. Being away for a long time could be difficult for developing the project. So, the idea of traveling for a short period of time and being together with other artists and curators for an intense period, like these two weeks, makes a lot of sense to me. Having the opportunity to see many things can help me see my project from a different perspective.

Actually, this is what's happening now here in these Helsinki workshops. I was working on a project in my home country and then I received the invitation to attend the workshops. At first, I thought the theme of shyness was weird—like, out of all the themes, why shyness? But then I thought maybe this is an opportunity to see my project from a shyness perspective.

It's a good thing when the world surprises you with unplanned themes or opportunities that can invite you to revisit your project from a different angle. This is what happened through my experience here in Helsinki with my project—I started to walk the streets of Helsinki while thinking about my project and taking pictures. Then I started to compare the images that I took in Helsinki with the images that I took in Cairo. Now I see my project in Cairo from a different angle.

OFEM—From my personal experience, even back home in Nigeria we have a system where smaller migrations happen. Artists migrate all the time to find the climes where they feel their art will thrive, everybody is finding a way to make their artwork.

Thinking about it from this minor perspective to the major perspective of having to leave the country, I can imagine what that might open for an artist like me trying to explore more in his work. For most of us artists, we work in our own spaces; we work in our silos. But having to work together with different artists from different backgrounds, where you're all experiencing different cultures at the same time (and for the first time), there's a lot of movement that happens (even internally). The feeling is unprecedented, healthily so.

*a space for ideas to land and be questioned, negotiated,  
Challenged and Changed.*

When you're sharing space with people who have different ideas from yours, what kind of works do you produce, and how does it affect cross-cultural exchange programs like this one?

How do you build communities and networks from such interventions? It is exciting and I think is a program with so much potential, breaking the hierarchy of knowledge accessibility and the possibilities that can ensue from there.

MINA — Arts residencies have given me different ideas, allowed me to work on different projects, engage with different communities and cultures, and learn about things that I don't know in my home country. I think a model like this (where higher education takes place through a series of residency-based sessions) can build many connections.

This kind of art residency model is very important for every artist to develop and grow their work. For African artists or for European artists—they need to have this kind of exchange and to make connections so that in the future there could be another cooperation to do a new project together.

ISAAC — Going from the perspective of home, then moving away into the scope of a different place, and then going back home again, helps you put together a work that has a diverse way of bringing out what is within you as an individual.

Thinking about what we discussed on the value of identity, I'm realizing that part of what this program does is to recognize the importance of where one comes from, treating it as a meaningful and valuable space for study.

This affirms that you don't need to leave the place you identify with in order to advance in your growth and studies.

## FACILITATOR REFLECTIONS ON SHYNESS

DANIEL — What have you been learning about shyness so far?

MERI — I have realized that shyness, as it might first appear, doesn't only have to do with one's personality. It is not about whether you are an introvert or an extrovert. It's something which relates to all of us in different ways.





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*Shyness cannot be  
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NONTOBEKO—Thinking about shyness as a temporal, social awkwardness—how might we create environments that foster comfort with each other so that shyness goes out of the window?

Shy, not shy—shyness is not a permanent state of being. Shyness comes through a certain moment. As beings, we naturally retreat to a space where we want to be comforted, and shyness is one of the ways that we project an existence for that temporary moment that allows us a space of safety. Appearing shy gives you that agency to withdraw, in one sense, but in another sense, once we find ourselves in the most comfortable space, the shyness no longer appears or has space.

MERI—What I have come to realize is the potential that shyness has for being able to approach a matter in a more genuine and humble way. In that I mean that I'm not coming with prefabricated ideas of what I know and my knowledge. I do bring them to the table, but I don't need to convince everybody else that I am right. I can take a position where I am more listening in and wondering, or letting things take time before I formulate my ideas and my thoughts.

ODUN—I've been learning about shyness as a way of thinking, as a school of thought. Shyness creates a multilayered inclusiveness that breaks set systems and bureaucratic norms. It paves a way for an expansive sphere, a broadness that is the horizontal format in pedagogic exploration.

Shyness feeds the organic and accommodates comfort in the space of not-knowing. How does shyness attend to issues, to spaces, to critical constructs or ideas that have been institutionalized?

BERNARD—Shyness is a reality. We cannot wish shyness away. If we think of shyness as a human trait, and create a word cloud around shyness, sometimes maybe we get fear or apprehension or awe. But we could also get caution. Shyness cannot be singularized into one meaning.

GESA—I think the frequency of shyness is multiple. I can consider myself as a constellation in that maybe there is a surface level of me that is quite courageous or more solid, yet underneath that solidity of a shell is this inner sensitive shyness that needs the shell to be there so that it can live under some kind of safe protection. Shyness is not singular; we cannot find it and then define it. Then it is already something. But shy-

ness would escape that. It cannot ever be that which I think it is.

ODUN—Shyness creates a multiplicity of language references beyond spoken language: language as an idea, language as a means of existence, language as a sphere of culture, language as a behavioral quality. The influence of technology on the interaction and communication of communities begins to deconstruct our world into a singular space. Shyness has the potential to open into those language references. It is valuable for attending to a broader pedagogical ideal, referencing knowledge sharing, preservation, revitalization, and dissemination.

BERNARD—In my workshop offering, we were performing the ways in which we claim to gather knowledge, and we were performing the ways in which we make these gatherings seen, dissemination is implied. But how do we also perform the ways to show the failures inherent within these time-tested methodologies? How do you make visible those negative, yet salient aspects of our research that we didn't expect to encounter? If we're able to propose answers to some of these questions, we're in a way, dealing with shyness.

**By being honest with ourselves, rather than considering failure as a disaster, we stand the chance of activating a very potent learning tool.**

When you are able to share your findings, or feelings, in a manner that is non-judgmental, you empower yourself, that maybe next time you do something differently.

GESA—I think of shyness as a subtle but highly potent frequency that is sometimes dominated and therefore cannot really come out. But it radiates through its presence. I was interested in the study of something that is not necessarily externally so visible.

**Shy not as a passive withdrawal, but a state that doesn't yet have a manifestation. This realm of all possible "not yet's."**

An example of the psychophysical connection in shyness might be having a crush on someone, where sometimes shyness happens and can manifest very physically. In this state there is a frequency of curiosity; we feel the potential of connection, but we can't know yet where it will go. Shyness can also be like a pre-state of multiple possible directions.

When we meet and invite shyness in as a possibility, the whole approach to what we address of being important shifts. From that place, I think there's so much learning happening towards something where we don't need to know already, yet we welcome that which is already present.

## FACILITATOR REFLECTIONS ON PEDAGOGY

TARU — What are some key aspects of this emergent pedagogy, that is being developed in this collaboration between CCA, Lagos and Uniarts Helsinki, that feel most critical and important to you?

DANIEL — I think this idea of teaching through/as wondering together—teaching, not as a practice of bringing to others what you know, but as a practice of bringing your artistic practice and offering it to a group in a process of wondering.

To me, that's the kind of organic pedagogy in art making—it is a process of wondering. So, if pedagogy can be the opening of that aspect of art practice to a group, inviting others to come inside of that process with you, that feels like a very beautiful way to work.

I see that happening in the gatherings that we've been creating in Lagos and now in Helsinki.

TARU — wondering and wandering?

DANIEL — Yes, wondering and wandering. The universities that we've built, as places to support art practice happening at the highest level, are beautiful projects and they support certain kinds of practices very well, but not all practices. There are many artistic practices which actually struggle in being institutionalized. It's important to establish other kinds of less formal spaces of higher education to allow for the ways that many artists' practices function. Personally, I bring to this work an interest in place-based artistic practice.

There are many artist practices that are situated in the places where they are living. I think this study program, that we are developing inside this collaboration, will allow those marginalized art practices to develop, to thrive, to be connected to others, while remaining where they are.

I also see incredible value in the types of networks that would be formed through this kind of program. When you go to school with people, you become very close to them. But when you go to a residency

The whole world is  
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we saved to move  
out





and you spend a month living together in a small place with just ten other people, it's a whole other kind of closeness. You're eating all your meals together, you're around each other through all kinds of struggles. You go through different moods and different phases together. This model of study makes more space for these formal and informal aspects of study.

Also important is working with these small organizations and the pedagogies that are latent in them—these are places that are nimble, that have deep intelligences, and that are creating space for artists' practices to develop in very particular ways. Being able to study towards a degree inside of those kinds of spaces, and those kinds of interactions, has the potential to make a very important contribution to the higher education landscape.

Artists are already going to residencies and research centers to find these qualities; they are serving this function as deep spaces of formal and informal place-based learning. What we don't have right now are structures to tie a series of residencies together and to move through that series of residencies with a group. I think there's something very powerful in what will emerge just organically from that structure, one that I've yet to see in my educational experiences.

MERI—I think this pedagogy sets a different pace which is crucial and necessary at this time of planetary crisis.

We have one planet on which we live, and we need to rethink what education is and what we want to educate ourselves to become.

None of us chose in which geopolitical region we were born. Still, we tend to understand or study things from our own perspectives. So that gives a kind of a narrow view on the complexity of the whole world or of a subject at large. When you bring diverse people together to practice through a shared embodied experience, a very fertile ground is created for exploring things in a way that you cannot if you stay within your primary location.

GESA—I find it crucial that we simply are together. Practicing together with people from different places and demographics is like connecting with a rich archive of knowledge and experience where the conventions of a hierarchy of knowledge or experience are less pertinent.

In the workshop offerings, I almost feel an alchemy happening. The learning and creative potential ex-

pands with each situation, as if branching off and connecting, or reaching further out and deeper in. Knowledge is very alive as we practice how it is lived in this moment, instead of knowledge as generalized statements.

I believe that situationality has a major impact on the learning aspect. If we're located in one particular place that is part of one particular socio-political culture that has the power, then everyone who comes there needs to base themselves through that situation to connect. I think if the power and potential of that situation is not acknowledged, it can be really exclusive and isolating. This model of decentralizing one particular place and going to different residency settings is valuable.

How is this situation, and all the demographics that belong to it, a place to ask — how do we practice this lived knowledge here? In this way we don't take for granted that what exists in this place is a kind of a truth, but rather that the truth appears through the shared space again and again, and we stay flexible with it.

BERNARD — We could never have been the great discoverers and great beings that we have become if we did not dare to venture out of our comfort space and I think this is what this type of learning offers.

I'll answer with several African proverbs. One is: "You only think your farm is big because you have not lifted your head to look above and beyond." If you do, you'll realize there are bigger farms out there. And maybe there are also smaller farms, but they are probably growing something successfully using a certain technology that you will only know about when you go to ask.

Another kind of indigenous wisdom taken from Adinkra symbolism (a symbolic system from Ghana) is: "One that does not know something, should they ask, they will get to know." You literally can't stay with yourself and ask and get to know; you have to step out. And in stepping out, one gets to encounter many more worlds out there. I think this is the merit in activating roving academies.

Within the notions of the nomadic are inherent movement, change, transformation, and adventure. There's something about moving around: it keeps you aerated and your blood in good circulation, as we see in biology and in chemistry.

You are always mobile: there's air around you, there's water around, there's fire. You are constantly in touch-conversation with the elements.



Another proverb I would offer is from the Akan culture (from the Twi language) and it is transliterated as such: “When water stays in a bottle for too long a time, it begins to take on a foul odor.” Water needs to move constantly, it needs to join the bigger cycle as rain, become heated up, transform into vapor and come back again as rain. We become stale and stagnant when we sit in one place.

One of the merits in moving around then, is that we activate the potential to enrich our lives and the lives of others we encounter along the way.

Together, the whole world is enriched just because we dared to move out; dared to change our perspectives and dared to have our beliefs challenged. But we don’t move to take over peoples’ places as was done by colonialists; we move to move about again and to eventually return home, enriched, transformed and maybe, better equipped to deal with our original spaces, which would also have transformed by the time we return. Whilst we expand horizons, our own horizons also get expanded. This is the merit of this type of education that is not necessarily anchored to a singular culture.

ODUN — Interacting with participants from different parts of the African continent and then relating them with spaces in the Nordic community, brings up how these spaces of thought are conceived and understood, or not understood, from both continents. These gatherings have presented ways of understanding how postcolonial structures have been placed in the pedagogic systems in both regions.

The idea of roving would mean roving across both continents, looking at how participants respond to the context of the geographic spaces and the cultural perspectives. This is to be matched with untethering the ideas of the more formal Nordic system. I see value in the concepts of not knowing and ideas of inclusivity in shyness that have been embraced.

Creating a completely horizontal and deconstructed pedagogic space is a bit like a utopia. It raises questions of criteria and evaluation measures. There’s this dream of removing all the hurdles of what is imperialized as forms of knowledge, what are accepted understandings of knowledge, what are accepted criteria for participation. The value of this is creating a different space and inclusive means of addressing variables outside of the norm.

On one hand, the model takes in what has already existed and is accepted in general pedagogy, and

on the other hand, it allows the things that are hidden, the things that have been swept aside, and puts everything on the table.

In this utopia, this pedagogic experiment would recognize diverse forms of knowledge that are imperially marginalized. It would function in a more collaborative learning environment that is responsive, flexible, and adaptable in an iterative approach, in which curricula can evolve organically. It would allow interdisciplinary experiences for cross-pollination of ideas and methodologies, leaving space for reflection to navigate issues rather than work off of assumptions and biases.

This model has the potential to empower local communities and organizations through collaborative action and to hone cultural sensitivity.

DANIEL — Why not just create a new program inside the university’s existing spaces? What is it that this roving, emergent pedagogy can offer at this moment to artistic and curatorial education and practice?

NONTOBEKO — The university provides a space for thinking, allowing voices to be developed, refined, and solidified. People attend university to gain knowledge that is presented in digestible forms.

I constantly strive to extend my teaching beyond the classroom, challenging the authority of both teachers and students to facilitate learning through multisensory methods. I do this to debunk the hierarchy of the classroom. It helps me push my understanding of the concept of embodied knowledge against the backdrop of what we have come to know as the canon.

I see this emergent pedagogy offering a transition space that can potentially bring together artists (including university students) from diverse backgrounds, to reflect on their practices and share their experiences. It is a space of learning from different perspectives, challenging assumptions, and supporting each other’s artistic development. This emergent pedagogy provides an important space for co-sharing and learning environment.

*We need to rethink what education is  
and what we want to educate ourselves to become*

A photograph of a woman with short hair, wearing a patterned sleeveless top, leaning on a balcony railing. The balcony has a light blue glass railing. The building's exterior is made of light-colored stone or concrete. There are windows with dark shutters. The scene is partially obscured by green foliage in the foreground and background. The word "CLOSING" is written in large, white, sans-serif capital letters across the center of the image.

# CLOSING

## CONDITIONS AND VALUES THAT ASSIST IN THE EMERGENCE OF THE SCHOOL OF SHYING A WAY



—Attending to knowledges embedded in place and place-based pedagogies.

—Addressing and challenging extractivism in practices, methods and structures.

—Imagining, constructing, and inhabiting new narrative spaces.

—Wondering together how to study any given place, curiosity about new ways of knowing and being in place.

—Creating a critical community of peers and a network of independent artist initiatives across the Nordic region and the African continent.

—Expanding the horizon of what art is and can be, drawing together many different fields of study.

—Not only focusing on making, but also the things we do that are not part of our art practice. Developing new cultural rituals/ritual cultures.

—Allowing and trusting learning to happen, rather than trying to make it happen or monitor it. Leaving room for silence, doubt, second chances. Serious play.

—Noticing and valuing what happens on the peripheries: just shy of the planned activities, just shy of our conceived art practices.

—Questioning hierarchies and exclusions.

—Practicing alternatives to the individual/collective binaries in art and research.

—Inhabiting a radical equality of intelligences.

—Allowing for misunderstanding and contradiction.

—All hosting each other, radically sharing responsibility for all aspects of the study space, facilitators are also participants and participants also facilitate.

—Hosting vulnerability, a space of fragility and complexity of encounters.

—Acknowledging the powers of language, developing new languages, nonverbal language.

## OUTGROWTHS AND IN-COMES

On one level, the conventional notion of research outcomes is antithetical to researching shyness. Perhaps more appropriate to consider what grows out and what grows in from this work. These out-growths and in-comes are difficult to assess, they often take time to reveal themselves or shy away from view.

Still, there have been some concrete out-growths of the FAPI project, and the School of Shying a Way, that are worth mentioning here. One, that has been referenced elsewhere in this research notebook, is an official proposal for a roving master's program focused on place-based artistic practice.

The proposed study program would take place at the university level but be geographically distributed, locating itself at different research centers and artist residency sites on the African continent and in the Nordic region. The aim of this program is to enable students to study within, and encounter, small arts organizations that are deeply engaged with and enmeshed in their local contexts.

We have been discussing a low-residency study model, where students come together for intensive periods of collective in-person study but are otherwise located in their 'home'/field sites. This structure is designed to make space for artists to develop situated, entangled practices in the places where they are living. The art projects that they are creating in their home locations are complemented by a series of intensive gatherings, to develop their international networks on the African continent and in the Nordic region, and online critique groups and supervision.

**The model allows artists to continue to advance their education, remaining rooted in their home regions, while still gaining an international network.**

While this MA program proposal has received the most attention, the FAPI project has also resulted in a proposal and a pilot for an expansion of the Visiting Professor program at the Academy of Fine Arts, aimed at including more artists and curators from Africa and a proposal for a continuation of the exploration of shyness as a research project, possibly including a collaborative PhD research cluster between Finnish and African researchers.

The work of the School of Shying a Way is still in process and emerging. We began with patience, committing to the work and time it takes to build trust and find a way. That work continues.

## CLOSING NOTE

The Yoruba term for “shy” translates loosely to “my eyes are pushing me to lower my gaze,” a phrase that underscores the cultural perception embedded within language. Language not only categorizes ideas for practical use but also reflects cultural values. For example, in a recent social media post, a woman who discovered she was 40% Nigerian invited others to share what it means to be Nigerian. Hundreds of responses emerged, all highlighting a consistent theme of “boldness,” characterized by high self-esteem, pride, resilience, and confidence. One notable comment summarized this as “Main Character Syndrome,” capturing a strong cultural identity that is far from shy.

A three-year study of individuals taking the NERIS personality test (World Personality Map: <https://www.16personalities.com/country-profiles/global/world>) found Nigerians ranked as the ninth most extraverted population globally, while Finns ranked as the seventh most introverted. In Finland, shyness often signifies blending in, while in Nigeria, it can make one distinctly stand out. Cultural relations work requires engaging with these nuanced perceptions and creating environments conducive to meaningful interaction. It demands not just awareness of cultural differences but the active practice of navigating and appreciating them. Bridging these differences necessitates attentiveness, or, metaphorically, “lowering our gaze,” to truly perceive and respond to what unfolds in intercultural encounters.

Workshops provided a critical space for experimentation and discovery, uncovering perspectives that might otherwise remain hidden. Similarly, the educational activities in community and cultural centers often lack formal certification, yet their contributions are invaluable in validating and shaping knowledge production and exchange. This notebook offers more than a snapshot of our workshops; it serves as a map of whispers, gestures, and small, brave acts, making visible the nuanced, often overlooked experiences of the shy. These interpersonal relationships lay the foundation for meaningful international programs to occur.

In the words of the author Sue Mink Kidd, “Stories have to be told or they die, and when they die, we can't remember who we are or why we're here,” this notebook exists because stories told in the soft, unhurried voice of shyness must be remembered or they may die.

OYINDAMOLA FAITHFUL  
Nordic/Pan-African Studio Project Co-Leader

In the Helsinki gathering, Ndalo (Nontobeko and Bernard's young child) accompanied them to the workshop. He was an extraordinarily easy toddler to have inside a research process, but, like any child in a context full of adults, his presence was deeply felt. The lessons he offered to the work were multiple and, as he wasn't on a clock, he was always working! The work of this project took place at many different sites. We gathered, in loosely formed circles, around tables high and low, in makeshift meeting spaces. These tables quickly became scattered with a collage of cups, notebooks, pens, cameras and cell phones. One of the ways Ndalo engaged with everyone, and everything, was to pick items up from the table, or out of someone's hands, carry them for a while and then, often, hand them to someone else. He was an exceptionally gentle holder for his age, not prone to exploring through destruction, so most people let him take what he was interested in. Almost any object could be of interest, from a pen to a cell phone. This 'work' that he did, carrying things from one place to another, reminded us of the partial truth, the limited understanding of objects that comes through notions of ownership and use value. Through Ndalo's shy lens of the child, all objects were things to be discovered, explored, wondered about without conclusion and then passed on. In this, Ndalo was a great teacher, reminding us that this was our hope for how to handle the emergent thing/space we were making together in this School of Shying a Way.

Inevitably, we fail as much as we succeed. It is not an easy thing to hold something lightly and curiously, to care for it and then let it go and not know where it will wind up, how it will be understood, what it will become and if it will ever return. At the core of the work of this project, happening through and across two institutions (themselves fragile, partially-there structures, that appear in very solid forms, in two very different geographic, political and cultural contexts) our aim was to forge relationships. On one level, the work of forging relationships is often personal but it can also be understood on an aggregate level as the web of interactions that extends from any endeavor, large or small. These interactions, understood together, were 'the relationship' being formed. From sitting at tables, physical and virtual, negotiating a cooperation agreement between two institutions of such radically different sizes and positions, to the communication with a security guard at 2am outside an apartment in Lagos rented for our gathering, to making sense of 'what kind of a gathering this is' with a video documentation crew hired in Lagos, to the meeting of people charged with monitoring finances in such radically different environments, we tried to

keep our focus on this larger project of relationship building. It was not a simple project.

How to 'carry on' this/these relationship(s)? At the conclusion of the Helsinki workshop, we gathered on a hill on an island off the coast of Helsinki, the same place we had begun the work with this group. We sat on the lawn and looked out at the landscape and each other. I said to the group what I often say at the conclusion of a workshop, 'Whatever you have encountered here, that is beautiful and of value, take it with you. It is and already was yours.' And, on one level this is true, but on others it is not. As Oyindamola and I have taken on the work of holding this relationship for this long, a special responsibility emerges, even if we renounce a certain kind of ownership. Ndalo can pick up the School of Shying a Way from a table, wonder at it and pass it on to someone else, but, whoever it is handed to will likely find a moment to hand it back our way. Responsibility for care is contained in the act of holding and is a constant negotiation. The heavy weight of relation building is that relationships are ephemeral and fragile structures, coming together and falling apart.

So there is no closing of this work but I did want to end this collection of notes with a note of gratitude. Recognizing all those who have held the space and the relationships inside this project with us, whether lovingly, curiously, frustratedly or skeptically, knowingly or unknowingly, you are welcome, this is the work. Thank you.

DANIEL PELTZ  
Nordic/Pan-African Studio Project Co-Leader



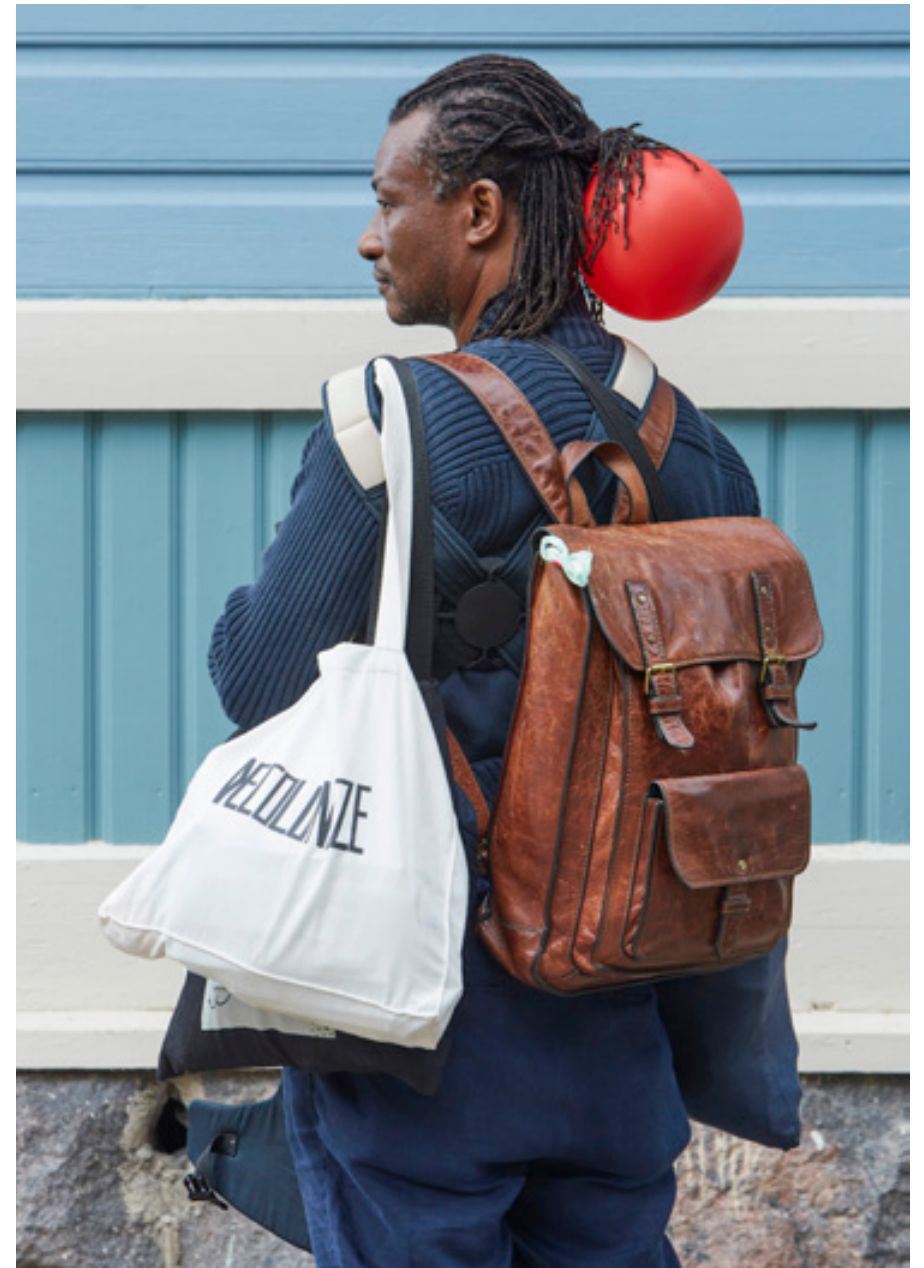
DANIEL PELTZ — Uniarts Helsinki Finland Africa Platform for Innovation project-lead. Daniel is an artist and co-founder of the long-term, place-based research project Rejmyre Art Lab's Center for Peripheral Studies and The Nordic/Baltic Studio. He serves as Professor of Time and Space Arts (with a specialization in Site and Situation Specific Practices) at the University of the Arts Helsinki's Academy of Fine Arts in Finland.



OYINDAMOLA (FAKEYE) FAITHFUL — CCA, Lagos Finland Africa Platform for Innovation project-lead. Oyindamola is the Executive & Artistic Director of the Centre for Contemporary Art, Lagos (CCA, Lagos) and Asikò Art School. She serves as the Board President for Res Artis, the worldwide professional body for artists' residencies. Oyindamola also serves as the Associate Executive Director for the Global Arts in Medicine Fellowship.



MERI LINNA — Facilitator in Lagos and Helsinki Shyness gathering. Meri is a visual artist and pedagogue working predominantly with various collaborations, the most prominent being their engagement with the duo Harrie Liveart since 2010. Meri also teaches at the University of the Arts, Helsinki's Academy of Fine Arts where they graduated in Sculptural Studies in 2014.



BERNARD AKOI-JACKSON — Facilitator in Lagos and Helsinki Shyness gathering. Bernard Akoi-Jackson (PhD), is a contemporary Ghanaian artist, writer, curator and educator. He is a Lecturer in the Department of Painting and Sculpture, KNUST, with particular interests in disruption and the revolutionary potential in contemporary art practice. His work revolves around a critique of post- and decoloniality, an investigation of quotidian interactions and gestures, and an engagement of linguistic quirks via textual inventions.



NONTOBEKO NTOMBELA — Facilitator in Helsinki Shyness gathering. Nontobeko is Head of Department and Lecturer in the Department of Curatorial, Public and Visual Cultures at Wits School of Arts. Her research focuses on modern and contemporary South African art, with a particular interest in Black women artists.



NDALONHLE — Helsinki Shyness gathering. Ndalo is a multi-talented 18-month old baby. Born of South African and Ghanaian parents (Nonto and Bernard) who work in the field of curatorial and artistic practice, his exposure to art since birth has been through his parents' professions. His presence in their projects offers an expanded understanding of communal and collective creative practice. In these moments, Ndalo's contribution disrupts conventional modes of creative communication and participation.



ODUN ORIMOLADE — Facilitator in Lagos and Helsinki Shyness gathering. Odun Orimolade (PhD) is an artist, academic, and cultural practitioner who directs her work in trans-disciplinary approaches, research, and collaborations. She is a Lecturer in the Fine Art Department, Yaba College of Technology and is Curatorial Director of the Yaba Art Museum. She is a Research Fellow of the College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa.



GESA PIPER — Facilitator in Helsinki Shyness gathering. Gesa is a dance artist and pedagogue who grew up in Germany. She teaches at the University of the Arts, Helsinki's Theatre Academy, where she graduated in Dance Pedagogy in 2014. She is interested in embodied entanglements within circumstance and environment, temporality and spectra of time, and personal and collective memory.



LUAMBA MUIंगा — Facilitator in Lagos Shyness gathering. Luamba Muinga works in curation, cultural research, and writing. His practice centers on re-examining history, the permanence of memory, and how we appropriate the past, extracting its context to locate it in the present. He coordinates LabCC—Laboratório de Crítica e Curadoria and is co-organizer of the curatorial network Continued Conversations...



DAVID LARSSON — Facilitator in Lagos Shyness gathering. David is an artist and Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Konstfack University, in Stockholm, Sweden. His work revolves around issues of social development, modernity, political events, natural resources and collecting/archives.



ALISON NATURALE — Documentarian and editor for the Lagos Shyness Gathering. Alison Naturale is an artist who works in a variety of media including print design, video installation and interactive documentary. She is Managing Editor at Drawn & Quarterly, a graphic novel and art book publisher.



ROSIE OLANG' ODHIAMBO — Documentarian and editor for the Lagos Shyness Gathering. Rosie Olang' Odhiambo is an independent curator, artist and bookmaker. Her current artistic and curatorial interests explore zines, artist's books and other unconventional book structures as formats to play across various disciplines, (primarily visual arts, literature, and poetry) engaging with decolonial, queer, feminist, and black radical traditions.



AMA OFEIBEA TETTEH — Program Manager in Lagos Shyness gathering. Ama is a designer, researcher, cultural producer and founder of Chapter54. Committed to leveraging the Creative Industries to drive sustainable social development, she has a special interest in the African continent. She is currently also Programme Manager for Àsikò Art School CCA, Lagos (NG) where she leads on the project and partnerships.



TARU ELVING — Curatorial team for the Helsinki Shyness gathering. Taru is a curatorial researcher and co-founder of CAA Contemporary Art Archipelago. She is currently a lecturer at the Academy of Fine Arts, Uniarts Helsinki, in the Praxis masters in exhibition studies. Her practice focuses on nurturing undisciplinatory and site-sensitive artistic inquiries at the intersections of ecological and feminist thought.



ALYSSA COFFIN — Curatorial team and documentarian for the Helsinki Shyness gathering. Alyssa is an interdisciplinary artist from the USA who recently completed her Master's in Time and Space Arts at University of the Arts, Helsinki's, Academy of Fine Arts. Her work includes writing/spoken word, performance, moving image, and site-responsive structures. Her practice is grounded in attention, silence, and sensory engagement.



OFEM UBI — Participant in Helsinki Shyness gathering. Ofem is a poet & artist exploring the poetic through visual forms. Drawing prompts from experience, his work upholds a constant query on memory and its manifestations beyond the page. He is a G.A.S. Foundation Alumni.



NOURHAN MAAYOUF — Participant in Helsinki Shyness gathering. Nourhan is an Egyptian artist who obtained her MA in Arts in Public Spheres, from the Valais school of art (EDHEA), in Switzerland. Her work uses photography, video and installations that are embedded with humor, absurdity and playfulness, to engage with recent urban transformations.



ISAAC GYAMFI — Participant in Helsinki Shyness gathering. Isaac is fascinated by the impact of visual imagery and capturing unique representations of everyday life with particular curiosity in the things less likely to meet the eye. With this, his focus lies in creating portraits that reflect the essence of the people and celebrate their stories. He studied painting and sculpture at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology.



MINA NASR — Participant in Helsinki Shyness gathering. Mina is an interdisciplinary Egyptian artist and researcher. He completed his Bachelor of Applied Arts at Helwan University, Egypt, and is currently focusing on art and social justice after completing his Fulbright research program at the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design in Washington, D.C., USA.



DUDUETSANG LAMOLA — Participant in Helsinki Shyness gathering. Duduetsang is a self-taught interdisciplinary artist and creative freelancer working primarily in collage, creative design, video art/moving image, workshop facilitation, cultural production and experimental research. Her practice is centered on visualizing imaginative modes of survival for the future through speculative reconstruction. She was the recipient of the LAPA Pan African Artist Residency Johannesburg.



AKOSUA ODEIBEAMOAHAH-YEBOAH — Participant in Helsinki Shyness gathering. Akosua is a multidisciplinary artist who explores transformation through digital mediums. She is interested in systems of signs, language, appropriation, memes, politics of the body and technology. She graduated from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology with a Bachelor of Fine Art degree in Painting and Sculpture, 2021.

## THE SCHOOL OF SHYING A WAY

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