

REPORT ON THE WORKSHOPS SERIES

“oddkin°labs”

AT THE MUSEUM FÜR NATURKUNDE BERLIN,
EXPERIMENTAL FIELD FOR PARTICIPATION AND
OPEN SCIENCE. 21 May, 4 June and 4 July 2019.



by Chiara Garbellotto and Sina Ribak

Photos by Deborah Cohen, Harriet Merrow, Sina Ribak

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Report on the workshops series “oddkin°labs” at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin, Experimental Field for Participation and Open Science. 21 May, 4 June and 4 July 2019.

BY CHIARA GARBELLOTO AND SINA RIBAK

The series of workshops “oddkin°labs” is a collaborative experiment in between research and museum public engagement co-designed by social anthropologist Chiara Garbellotto and environmental and cultural manager Sina Ribak and co-produced with artists Constanza Mendoza and Sybille Neumeyer and film maker Debbie Onuoha. It was hosted at the Museum für Naturkunde Berlin (MfN) and it engaged with themes and collections of the Museum by questioning objects, spaces and narratives with a transdisciplinary approach. Sixteen practitioners and researchers from the Museum itself and fifteen from other working fields joined and contributed to the three sessions.¹ The production was supported by the Centre for Anthropological Research on Museums and Heritage (CARMAH) as part of Chiara Garbellotto PhD research and by the MfN as part of the project ‘Experimental Field for Participation and Open Science’. This project has run since spring 2018 and is led by Wiebke Rössig.

The workshops proposed an approach to public engagement as research-oriented. Its production set up an exploration of collaborative processes between museums, academy and independent artists and practitioners from the Art and Culture field. The wish to develop a public engagement format in this specific museum was part of Chiara Garbellotto PhD proposal since its very beginning and it was conceived as a way to expand the research methodology alongside participant observation and interviews. Besides this aim, the researcher was interested in developing a conversation with actors external to the museum institution whose practices and interests were nevertheless close to the themes and collections of a museum of natural history. The Reading Club “Beyond Us and Nature”, co-founded by artist Eva-Fiore Kovakovsky and Sina Ribak, based at the Berlin-based bookshop

¹ Seventeen invitees from the Museum and seven from other fields expressed the wish to join the workshops but couldn’t because of contingent reasons. More details about the participants in the section “Working report”.

“Zabriskie”, was since its beginning in June 2017 the place where a network of people coming mainly from the arts, humanities, social sciences – but not only – grew and where the oddkin°labs co-designers met.

After the possibility of organising a series of events at the MfN became concrete with the ideation of the Experimentierfeld project, Chiara Garbellotto and Sina Ribak proposed in June 2018 the first outline of the workshops to Wiebke Rössig. The proposal met the project’s main guidelines: the themes engaged have to directly relate to the Museum research and collections and the events have to be open to visitors if conducted during opening hours. In this initial phase, the funding was also discussed and a final agreement reached with both MfN and CARMAH in the following terms: MfN funded Sina Ribak’s position and the purchase of stationery supplies; CARMAH funded two guest facilitators’ positions², the graphic design service, and the catering. Beyond the initial meeting with Wiebke Rössig, Lisa Jahn supported the whole production phase for what it concerns the logistics and Anna Szöke, CARMAH research manager, supported the production phase for what it concerns the drawing up of guests’ contracts. Harriet Merrow and Deborah Cohen, CARMAH student assistants, supported the workshops as photographers.

RESEARCH CONTEXT AND AIMS

Reflecting on the proliferation in the last decades of projects and funding schemes in the so-called field of “Arts & Sciences”, a common question arose for the co-designers: how such multiplicity of practices make issues concerning more-than-human relations matter in different ways? In the very last couple of years, the acknowledgment of the on going climate crisis has been addressed by different actors and institutions in the cultural field, both private and public, at different scales. The increasing centrality of the Anthropocene paradigm and the critical responses that it provoked has been materialised in numerous events, projects, exhibitions, talks, books, films etc. The Berlin context is a great example of such diversity, being a hotspot for both artistic and scientific production and for the relative job markets and professional networks. The Reading Club is a moment when actors who directly work on

² Chiara Garbellotto and Debbie Onuoha’s roles were part of their respective contracts with Humboldt Universität as members of CARMAH.

related themes gather and, by focusing on the specific practice of reading out loud selected texts, create an informal space to share immediate reactions, longer-term reflections, critiques, discomforts and joys concerning the themes evoked and actually have the time to read. This is something that, according to many of them, is very difficult to experience in their everyday lives. A critical reflection upon this space's inclusionary/exclusionary politics is out of the scope of this report but this issue directly informed the co-designers decision to curate the participants' groups by inviting members of this community and of the MfN. By choosing not to offer open workshops for a 'general public', they aimed at exploring the interactions between this specific participants by explicitly focusing on the categories of disciplines, professions, affiliations used to describe their practices and, with an implied intersectional approach, make these boundaries the centre of the workshops.

The **natureculture** approach, prominently present in the texts read at the Reading Club, became the common ground on which the collaboration began. The term, coined by feminist historian of science and biologist Donna Haraway (Haraway 2003) has a pivotal role in current debates in academia and cultural and artistic fields as a fertile approach to address how ideas of "human/culture" and "non-human/nature" have historically co-produced each other and have travelled in between different realms of knowledge production usually conceived as separated worlds. Directly connected to multispecies and posthumanist perspectives (L'Internationale online 2016; Braidotti and Hlavajova 2018; Cameron 2018; Haraway 2015; Kirksey 2014) and relational materiality (Bennett 2010; Maurstad 2012), the natureculture approach calls for the crafting of different kinds of stories about more-than-human relations, which maintain the entanglements between biological, historical, cultural, and political processes visible. This very crafting opens the possibility of new kind of relations to be traced and nurtured among knowledges but also among the very humans, non-humans, objects and technologies that co-produce such knowledges. The title of the workshop series is inspired by an excerpt from 2016 Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble. Making Kin in the Chthulucene*: "Staying with the trouble requires making oddkin; that is, we require each other in unexpected collaborations and combinations, in hot compost piles. We become-with each other or not at all." (Haraway 2016, 4). The quote affirms the necessity of looking for relations that are unexpected, not yet traced, not only among humans but also in more-than-humans companies. At the same time, it emphasises that relations exist in real

places and specific times and calls for an ethics and praxis of care and “response-ability” towards such relations. When applied to the museum context, these concept and call become particularly generative if applied to public engagement practices.

The workshops developed from a first suggestion of conducting one session of the Reading Club in one of the museum galleries. The possibility of expanding the already flexible network of the Reading Club to the Museum one was the trigger to ideate a different format, centred on the issues of expertise, disciplinary categories, and boundaries: who is talking about more-than-human relations in these ecologies? Through which practices people are engaging in such conversations? How different knowledge cultures – especially biology, environmental humanities, social sciences, and contemporary art – can critically come into dialogue by reflecting on their own epistemologies? Conceiving the MfN itself as an assemblage of knowledge cultures and different practices (Waterton and Dittmer 2014) influenced the aim of the collaboration, which became soon an exploration of how a transdisciplinary, practice-led format would afford different stories to emerge concerning specific themes connected to the MfN³. In order to do this, the dichotomy museum/scientists vs. publics was challenged by deciding to invite participants on the base of the relation they already had to the chosen themes as part of their everyday work and/or research practices.

The format we presented was considered as a prototype and the participants were invited to join as a “critical team”. In particular, they have been explicitly invited to test the potentiality of the format in the context of the MfN. This “critical participation” was meant to address not only the methods and the themes we proposed, but also those that the participants’ were bringing from their own worlds. Moreover, because of this prototype character, the workshops were open-ended and in a constant state of review and adjustment. During the periods of production and conduction of the three sessions, the discussion between the co-designers and the three invited guests facilitators have been fundamental for the development of the format and for a constant reflection on the rationale of the workshops. In order to have a feedback from the colleagues of the two funding institutions involved, Chiara Garbellotto presented the project at a meeting of the Humanities of Nature

³ See next chapter for a more detailed presentation of the themes.

Department at the MfN and at a CARMAH internal research meeting, where she received feedback and questions that pushed her to address even more critically the project as part of her research and her own role in it.

CO-DESIGNING THE WORKSHOPS

The initial proposal presented to the Experimentierfeld team included the details outlined in the following table:

	Initial proposal	Final format
WHAT	3/4 sessions focused on 3 subject themes	3 sessions focused on 3 subject themes
WHO	Adults - limited number (10-12) Open invitation	Adults - limited number (10-12) Curated invitation
WHERE	Experimentfeld, galleries, and collections	Experimentierfeld and galleries
WHEN	February – March 2019	May – July 219
TIME	Late afternoon, 16:30-18:30	17:00-20:00
LANGUAGE	German and English	Germany and English

As the last column shows, some changes were made along the production process mainly due to the decision of curating the participants groups by inviting specific persons and of collaborating with three guests facilitators. This prolonged the production of two months and influenced the decision of expanding the sessions from 2 to 3 hours. Moreover, the decision to host the workshops later during the day was taken also in response to an indicative informal survey conducted via email with FB4 staff members. The possibility of having a babysitter or a separate educational activity for children was provided. In this section the main processes through which the proposal has been developed into the final format will be presented.

ASSEMBLING THEMES AND GUESTS

Initially, participants were considered to be the same for all the three sessions, which would have been facilitated entirely by the two co-designers. A first thematic structure was devised as follows:

#1 *Meine Museumsmomente*

Personal memories and stories about the Museum für Naturkunde

#2 *Bio-diversities*

Multiplicity of meanings and practices the term biodiversity refers to

#3 *Open session (Wissensvielfalt)*

A theme to be decided with the participants

#4 *Weiter-machen*

Planning of a possible continuation and co-production of a material output (text, blog, (audio) guide, guided tour, video content)

The first three sessions were considered as more dialogic while the fourth one was thought as a possible transition to a collaboratively production of a “hybrid” new story about the MfN and the theme of biodiversity in the form of a material output. The choice of such theme was directly related to Chiara Garbellotto research focus. In the process of discussing the questions and the practical way to engage with them, the different research practices encountered took a central role. The possibility of collaborating more closely with three guests also emerged in the first months, influencing the decision to take their own practices as cases to engage with in the workshops. This choice had two main practical consequences: it implied on one side that the workshops’ themes had to be adapted to the artists’ interests; on the other side, art practice – declined into three different modes – became the privileged lens adopted. If this affected the transdisciplinary quality of the discussion, it also provided three concrete cases to work with. Each of the guests was invited to develop a site- and oddkin°labs-specific activity of approximately 2h: this resulted in the workshops being more strongly focused on specific spaces, objects, or museum practices. Moreover, co-designing the sessions with a third person at every session opened the possibility of experimenting with different combinations of activities. At the same time though, this influenced the decisions of hosting only three sessions and of inviting a different group of participants each time,

reducing the long-term and collaborative dimension planned at the beginning. This decision reflects also the available funding: including in the budget the guests' fees excluded the possibility of engaging in the co-production of material outputs. The co-production between the two co-designers and the three guests, who were all directly involved in planning the thematic content and the activities of the sessions, resulted in the following outline⁴:

0.0: The Game of Kin – Multispecies Storytelling Workshop

Guest: Constanza Mendoza from the art collective Laboratorio de Pensamiento Lúdico

Theme: co-evolution and embodied speculation

0.1: Ghosts, Silences, Hidden Things – Taxidermic Cinema Workshop

Guest: visual anthropologist and film maker Debbie Onuoha (CARMAH)

Theme: taxidermy and “visual inquiry”

0.2: The Space Between the Stones – Stratigraphic Storytelling Workshop

Guest: artist Sybille Neumeyer

Theme: “storied matter” and stones entanglements

As already mentioned, the themes sparked from the guests' own practices but, at the same time, are also part of both Museum practices and displays. The activities proposed have been designed to both address the existence of different knowledge cultures and connected modes of thinking and doing and challenge the idea that the different knowledge cultures exist as separate domains. Science fiction and scientific theories of co-evolution, visual representations of animals between scientific and cultural realms, and multiperspective engagements with stones were the attempts made in the sessions to re-think such distinctions.

CURATING THE “CRITICAL TEAMS”

As previously mentioned, the co-designers took the decision to explicitly not targeting the workshops to “general visitors” and to invite specific persons who had experience of the chosen themes as part of their main work practice. Addressing the difference existing between possible categorizations of such practices was central to the designing process, making the challenges and contradictions of the very attempt of going beyond disciplinary boundaries visible. In fact, almost all participants' experiences – both Museum employees and

⁴ See next chapter for more details on the sessions.

not – show how they engage with the themes as carriers of a multiplicity of disciplinary approaches and life experiences. Having acknowledged that, how then does the paradox of talking with disciplines in order to blur their boundaries work – especially when it comes to projects concerning “Arts and Science”? The answer to this question goes beyond the purpose of this report, but the question opened up a permanent space of reflection on how target groups are produced, how they re-produce differential categories and the effects these categories have. Experiencing the interrelatedness of theoretical questions and working procedures highlighted how contradictions are always present in between projects’ aims and organizational structures and infrastructures. This issue was directly addressed by some of the participants during the workshops. Keeping these contradictions at the centre of the reflection and the post-production was a way to address the risk of essentialising disciplinary boundaries and participants categorizations and to explore how they produced in this specific case power imbalances or criticalities.

Focusing exclusively on disciplinary categories can run the risk of making differences that were not explicitly addressed during the session – but very present during their production – invisible, namely the different levels of co-production in terms of labour at which the participants got involved. On one side this requires to consider in general the research practices addressed not only from the point of view of their methods and epistemic, but also from that of the professional careers and job markets that the practitioners are part of; on the other side, this difference pushed the co-designers to directly reflect on the roles produced through the workshops. All the five co-producers, being funded in their positions, moved from being “participants” or “members of the publics” to “project collaborators”. The 29 persons invited to contribute with their experience and knowledges, even if only for three hours, have instead not been paid and have been addressed as “participants”, even though the outcomes of this research-oriented experiment have been possible – this report at first – thanks to their material and cognitive contribution.

STORYTELLING AND CRITICAL THEORY

As the titles of all the workshops show, the themes have been considered as carriers of multiple stories. The role of storytelling emerged as a shared ground of interest for all the co-producers and became organically the file rouge of the series: the first session moved from Haraway speculative fiction and saw the group constructing worlds and co-adaptation dynamics; the second from film making techniques as visual mode of thinking and re-representing museum displays; the third from the multiperspectivity approach of Eco criticism by creating a common landscape of stones and strata of stories. The quote by anthropologist Marilyn Strathern, so central to the ethical and political position of Donna Haraway in her book *Staying with the Trouble*, can be seen as a shared reference point for the whole project:

“It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties.” (Haraway 2016)

With this in mind, the aim of the project became an experiment in multiplying the stories we encountered in the Museum, including problematic or untold ones. If we think stories as processes of relation making, a way to trace certain relations among certain things and actors, the activities proposed did not aimed at substituting or simply adding new stories to the scientific ones, but to waive such stories together. During the sessions stories of evolutionary biology interlaced with stories of hybridization, care, and death; stories of taxidermy with stories of racial classification, body normativity, scars and extinction; stories of geology with stories of mining, soil, arm industry, affect and origin myths.

An initial moment of common reading was agreed since the beginning as a way to directly engage with critical texts. Having both authors tested such activity for almost a year through the Reading Club, this moment was included as a way for the group to come together without relying merely on verbal self-presentations. The act of listening and tuning to a diversity of rhythms, accents, and volumes of voices and the possibility of interrupting to ask explanation or translation produce an atmosphere of attentiveness to each other and it grounds the listeners in the physical space where the voices resound. This activity was nevertheless adapted to the new setting and time frame: we chose excerpts of maximum 6 pages in order

to still have the time for spontaneous reactions and discussions. The reading moment was a starting point in designing the rest of the format and remained along the whole process one of the most critical point of the workshop, opening a problem space concerning issues of, again, disciplinary boundaries, access to critical theory, and diversity of ways in which printed theory can be used and circulates within different realms. A particular question is related to this: what relations does (feminist, posthumanist, post-colonial) critical theory allow to trace between concepts, objects, stories and the participants themselves when read in such modality? How the different genres selected contributed to the workshops' activities? This will be more directly addressed in the workshops proceedings but it is important to highlight here that the choice of reading English texts coming from humanities, arts and social sciences had a direct and documented impact on the discussions. If on one side the presence of such critical texts has varied among the session, in all three cases participants commented on them in both positive and negative ways, making explicit that such dense inputs require more time to be firstly absorbed by participants and used to re-orientate themselves as a group, and secondly to be more directly linked to the workshop in order to understand which points in the texts are the more inspiring or challenging for the participants themselves.

DOCUMENTATION

In the three workshops, different documentation methods were used in order to test their affordances in such context. This resulted in a different level of participation to the activities on the side of the hosts and in different group dynamics in terms of roles and dialogic interactions. Using different methods allowed adapting the documentation as much as possible to the activity designed by the guest. Considering the duration of the sessions (3 hours) and that they were held at the end of working days, this also helped not to overload participants with written tasks. The strategies used were the following:

0.0: The Game of Kin

- Note-taking by the hosts after the session;
- Photographic documentation by Harriet Merrow;
- Audio recording.

0.1: Ghosts, Silences, Hidden Things

- Note-taking by the hosts during and after the session – the two hosts did not join the video making activity;
- Photographic documentation by Harriet Merrow.

0.2: The Space Between the Stones

- Note-taking by the hosts after the session;
- Photographic documentation by Deborah Cohen;
- Audio recording.

A moment of group reflection on the format itself took place at the end of each session. Moreover, in the month following each session, Chiara Garbellotto conducted a half-an-hour to 1 hour-long individual feedback session, in person or via Skype, with 17 out of 22 participants; the two hosts conducted together a 1 to 2 hours-long individual feedback session with the 3 guests. During two initial meetings, the hosts informed the Experimentierfeld team about the plan to document the workshops and agreed to share the documentation gathered and to provide information regarding the participants - how many, whether they joined spontaneously (this was not applicable after the participation became via invitation only), and the impact of the workshops. The writing of this report was also planned.

WORKWHOPS REPORT

In this section the three sessions will be described in more details. A particular focus is kept on how the themes have been articulated by the group dynamics into specific concerns and at specific scales both through the activities and the more dialogic moments. “Co-evolution”, “taxidermy”, and “storied-matter” were considered as processual objects that are “done” through practices more than concepts to debate and as “issues” (Marres 2012) emerging from the situatedness of the workshop events.

0.0 THE GAME OF KIN – MULTISPECIES STORYTELLING WORKSHOP

21 May 2019

The first session was focused on the concept of **co-evolution** and artist Costanza Mendoza was invited to be the guest facilitator. The collective “Laboratorio de Pensamiento Lúdico”, of which she is member, developed in the last 3 years the card-game “The Game of Kin”, inspired by Donna Haraway body of work. The game invites participants to embody a multiplicity of species – plants, animals, bacteria and fungi – and develop in groups speculative stories about strategies of survival to dramatic changes in their environment. On one side, oddkin°lab gave the possibility to the art collective to test the game together with biologists for the first time; on the other, the game allows players to explore each other’s worlds by narrating and negotiating the creation of a new, common world. Besides the 2 hosts and the guest facilitator, 13 people joined the workshop – 8 based at the MfN and 5 not based at the MfN: Flavia Barragán Clavero, Filippo Bertoni, Karine Bonneval, Alice Cannava, Linus Günther, Lisa Jahn, Siri Kellner, Sybille Neumeyer, Debbie Onuoha, Wiebke Rössig, Luis Valente, Matthias Zilch and Sandrine Bron.

As a starting point, we asked the participants to bring an object or a book that they thought representative of their everyday engagement with the concept of co-evolution. We invited them to form pairs and briefly present themselves in turn through the object, taking notes on post-its of each other’s key words. We then let some minutes for the group to browse the objects with the notes to have a quick overview of other people’s background. Through this small exercise, we put an emphasis on the different material words such concepts are done with.



This initial moment, which lasted approximately 15 minutes, was immediately followed by half an hour of common reading of the chapter “Evolution Stories” from the book *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Haraway 2003). The excerpt, taking the case of the co-habitation of dogs and humans, focuses on how stories about multispecies relations (dogs but also plants and other animal

species) have been told through a rigid separation between scientific and cultural approaches. The author, rewording domestication as co-constituency of companion species, challenges the reader to think what in history “counts as nature and what counts as culture”. An actual reflection on the text was ultimately not possible because the guest facilitator preferred to immediately begin with the game. An immediate feedback was nevertheless given and five participants shared more details about their specific relation to the theme and their research practice.



The following hour and a half was dedicated to the three phases of the game. Each participant was associated to one “critter” by picking a species card and 4 groups were formed according to a second card picked, the habitat card. These cards defined the particular lack of an environmental element –

water, light, air, solid ground – influencing the four scenarios. The groups then engaged in the imagination of their specific ecology, in the delineation of survival strategies, in the construction of the habitats by means of props and material elements available in the space, and in the negotiations with the other groups after further drastic changes in the living conditions brought by a third card. Such final developments resulted in the four groups re-shuffling into 2 final groups due to the necessity for entire ecologies to mingle and species to migrate to different environments. A final phase concluded the game: group representatives shared the four co-evolution stories to the others. The last half an hour of the workshop was dedicated to a common feedback on the workshop and the game.

The group dynamic of storytelling was guided in this workshop by the game rules and tasks to accomplish. The request to co-narrate a world with its inhabitants, their relations and those with the environment – not only at a specific point in time but through a long-term



perspective – left nevertheless room for different proposals to be discussed and questions to be addressed. The speculation of possible evolutionary strategies triggered conversations on

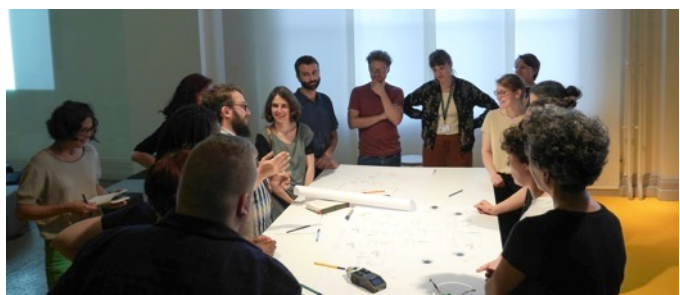
the difference between **scientific knowledge production and speculative science fiction**. One of the participants – an evolutionary biology researcher – described the



storytelling dynamic on one side as a “very democratic process”; on the other, she voiced the necessity of “suppressing the scientific side” explaining: “this cannot happen, there need to be more steps between one event and the other”. It was the speculative character of the game, she added, that allowed her to escape this impasse and think, “everything is possible”. Another biologist voiced the same feeling: there was “nonsense” moments if thinking about the “scientific content” when she felt the necessity to contribute to the group by bringing her logic adding “as the others did

too”. Interestingly, she assumed a common sharing of the concept of evolution as the base for the group to engage in the speculative activity. A third biologist spoke about the speculative process in terms of “adapting to the others”. She also commented that the rules of the game focused on survival but that there was also freedom where to go to in the story telling and that there was openness to many solutions. When directly asked about storytelling dynamics during the individual feedback, another participant shared that, while playing, she had the feeling that the future of her group was at stake “for real”. She particularly defined herself and the other participants as “experts” and that was the reason, she said, why the game was taken in a “serious” way, even if in a relaxed atmosphere of laughs and jokes.

An element of the storytelling that was commented on during the workshop and some of the individual feedbacks was that no group included **hybridization** as survival strategy, even though this was discussed by some of the critters. When in the final group reflection the guest facilitator highlighted this absence, one participant replied: “as a biologist I have problem to hybrid the platypus and a bed bug”, pointing at the complexity of such co-evolutionary processes. A second participant directly commented on this: “The knowledge is the



difference. Because of your different background you see the limits of that and that's why I think you didn't go through". Another one voiced an interesting approach to this issue during the individual feedback, pointing out that maybe the difficulties in negotiating more or less "realistic" elements was not so much a disciplinary issue and instead more depending on the fact that participants were all adults. To describe the presence of different modes of thinking, she used the metaphor of classical music and improvisation to think about different "times" and rhythms at which the speculations took place. This contribution nicely puts at the centre how the difference in such modes of thinking does not regard the possibility or impossibility of thinking hybrids, but instead what elements are assumed as necessary for the process of hybridization to be even thinkable. The acknowledgment of different modes of thinking was voiced by another participant in these terms: "While playing on concepts such as ecosystems and in general scientific topics you know that there is something missing, that the processes are more complex. (...) Proven facts are needed but maybe the understanding happens anyway, even without scientists, it could be even healthier". These reactions open up the idea of hybridization as a set of given cognitive information – pertaining to one single epistemology – to a discussion of different modes of thinking hybridization. Reflecting on this contributions, the "expertises" embodied by the participants emerged as differing not so much in regard to how the subject theme was understood, but in regard to the very possibility of working across different epistemologies.



Hybridization was not easily included, one participant proposed, because of the central role that the concept of **co-evolution** played both as part of the invitation and of the reading. In this way the two phenomena are presented as separate processes. When considering this comment together with an exchange occurred during

the game concerning the possibility of hybridization, a specific understanding of such process came to light. Hybridization was in fact discussed in terms of environmental engineering and genetic manipulation to the purpose of transferring favourable traits of one species into

another species. It was again clear how such terms were mobilised always as part of specific epistemic and in connection to particular repertoire of terms, objects and practices.

Moving away from hybridization back to co-evolution, not much discussion occurred during the workshop on how the term was used. During individual feedbacks, it was described by one participant in ecological terms as a phenomenon happening via multiple “mechanisms” such as parasitism or cooperation. Game theory was referenced in order to describe the presence of thresholds for the species involved: “A positive outcome has to exist for every species not to fall into a parasitic relation”. Going back to the body of work inspiring both the card game and the workshop series, it is possible to highlight a different angle to think co-evolution, more focus on the symbiogenesis processes occurring at the level of cells. The excerpt from the text read in this session, when Haraway praises the eco-devo approach, directly points at an understanding of multispecies co-evolution that do not separate biological/genetic processes as prerogative of non-humans from cultural ones as prerogative of humans:

“Differential, context-specific plasticities are the rule, sometimes genetically assimilated and sometimes not. How organisms integrate environmental and genetic information at all levels, from the very small to the very large, determines what they become. There is no time or place at which genetics ends and environment begins, and genetic determinism is at best a local word for narrow ecological developmental plasticities.” (Haraway 2003, 32)

How a more direct discussion of co-evolution would have changed the stories crafted through the game and allowed a more diversified mobilisation of the term? The Game of Kin explicitly considers **co-evolution as biological, ecological, and socio-cultural** and invites participants to develop other aspects of the ecologies created through specific lens such as temporality, transcendence, or communication. The cards dedicated to these themes have not been discussed by the participants at the same length as those about species and environmental changes. When the guest facilitator asked directly about their use in the groups, one participant shared that they picked the “socio-political organization” card and that they “had not done much with that”. One participant of the same group commented during the individual feedback that “it was a political decision not to go into politics” and her feeling was that they were considered “serious stuff” and thus ignored. Another group

articulated the “transcendence” card by adding yellow graphic elements (picture on the right) to the species granted with such capability. When thinking through the natureculture approach, the exchange among participants focused more on the production of a “realistic” possibility of survival for the ecologies created based on the cycles of life, metabolisms and resource consumption according to a scientific base. Socio-cultural and symbolic dynamics were added to the ecologies created in order to comply with the game request.



An interesting conclusion for this session sparkles from the comment of one participant during the individual feedback. Reflecting on the group dynamic she noticed that probably the process of thinking about co-evolution was for scientists *not* so new and that could have resulted in a non-“exciting” experience for them, especially not having a defined goal to achieve in the game. This points to the challenge that transdisciplinary projects bring to the surface of re-thinking concepts, processes, and practices that are at the base of different knowledge cultures, tackling the very grounding and taken-for-granted assumptions and foundations of the epistemic involved.

0.1 GHOSTS, SILENCES, HIDDEN THINGS – TAXIDERMIC CINEMA WORKSHOP

4 June 2019

The second session was focused on the museum practice of **taxidermy** and we invited film maker and visual anthropologist Debbie Onuoha to be the guest facilitator. As part of the “Making Difference” project based in CARMAH, she is working on a film centred on the figure of the life of the gorilla named “Bobby”, whose taxidermy was made and is exhibited in the Museum. She is also a visiting researcher with the “Animals as Objects” project of the Museum’s “Humanities of Nature” department. The workshop was centred on the use of filming as a processual mean to interrogate one’s own experience of being in the Museum

gallery “Evolution in Action”. By engaging in this activity, participants were invited to explore the taxidermies at a slow pace and engage themselves in representational work. The aim was not to produce completed video outputs but to use video making tools to elicit questions and observations on the gallery and the taxidermy practice. Besides the 2 hosts and the guest facilitator, 12 people joined the workshop – 3 based at the MfN and 9 not based at the MfN: Faysal Bibi, Hayden Fowler, Lisa Jahn, Susanne Kriemann, Tamara Masri, Thais Nepomuceno, Sybille Neumeyer, Hagar Ophir, Jan Panniger, Rhea Rhamjhon, Stephanie Scheubeck and Nine Yamamoto.

As a way for the participants to know each other, Debbie asked everyone to start by sharing a memory related to a museum of natural history or a zoo; she also offered the second option to tell the group what was the thing that people was mostly occupied with in the last month. Half of the group shared memories which span from being in a museum after closure time to refusing to go to zoos as children, to more specific visit to the Natural History Museum in New York or a zoo in South America. More “recent” memories included the museum taxidermist’s one – for whom “everyday is a museum memory” – and that of another participant who was still feeling the emotion of entering the Museum for the first time and who had to rush away from the dinosaur skeleton to reach the workshop. From the responses of those who decided to share more about their occupations, a general historical and cultural approach to museum institutions and their role emerged. Museums and national identity formation, curatorial logics, nature as symbol of displacement, and museums’ collecting practices were some of the issues voiced by the presents. Being the majority of participants from such fields, the transdisciplinary aim of the project was affected. The three museum practitioners who joined this session needed in fact to live half through the workshop or before, influencing the dialogic atmosphere and favouring the socio-cultural approach to the theme.

In the following section of the session the participants were asked to spend 10 minutes in the ‘Evolution in Action’ gallery, pick the exhibit that mostly caught their attention, bring back



something about it – a photo, a drawing, a small text – and start thinking about how to engage with it through their cameras. Back in the group circle, they shared their experience of the displays, choices and motivations they made. In this phase, the exchange focused on the **emotional response** to the space and the vitrines and the common discussion started to



unfold as a mix of many layers of engagement with the gallery. One participant felt overwhelmed by the entire room; she couldn't explain precisely her mood but connected the feelings of suspension and eternity to the practices of collecting and preserving materialised in

the room. **Exhibiting strategies** were the choice of two other participants, who were especially caught by the LED text display the first and by a series of jars with mutated animals the second. The contrast between the flickering lights and the stillness of the animals provoked a reflection on the ethics of exhibiting dead animals and on the competition for visitors' attention that such display demand on them. The jars directed the attention to the very positioning of the exhibits at a children level: "are children more curious about this? How does it feel to have two bodies?" While these responses signalled an open questioning of the space, other participants voiced an explicitly postcolonial or feminist perspective on the chosen objects. The pose of the kangaroo, put in relation to the white busts of scientists, sparked questions about gazes and the role the visitors are asked to embody. The participant who pointed at this commented later on: "The display itself is staging a scene" and people are put in the role of observers, but they should be involved in "more action and intervention from the entrance of the museum".

Other participants connected to **specific exhibits** by mobilising more personal stories. One, who introduced herself by sharing her current interest on the female genealogy of her family, took a picture of the human skeleton and connected it to the thought of cycles of life. The nearby skeleton of the ape caught the attention of another participant who, as a



choreographer – as she commented – wanted to feel his posture and reproduced her waddle gait (*Watschelgang*) to the rest of the group. She reported also the content of the label. Yet another participant chose a non-taxidermied exhibit, namely the only living being in the museum, the lungfish. She reflected on ideas of proximity and distance and of inside and outside in response to the status of that species and to the material elements of the aquarium where that individual lives. The same fish provoked different reflections for a participating evolutionary biologist, who highlighted a different way of telling stories about evolution with such animal in comparison to the T-Rex skeleton, also displayed in the Museum.

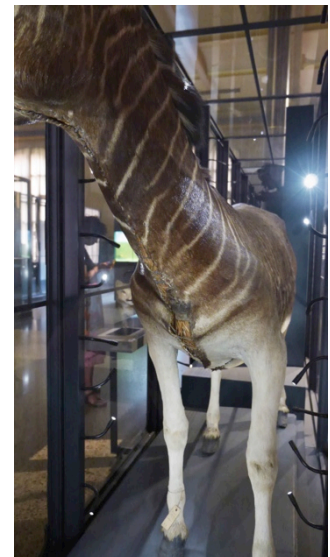
The common reading of 12 pages selected from *Displaying Death and Animating Life* by anthropologist and Women and Gender Studies scholar Jane C. Desmond (2016) followed. In contrast to the previous workshop, as the feedback meetings made clear, the participants who stayed for the entire session described the reading positively and as a fruitful input. The familiarity they already had with English texts produced in the fields of arts, humanities and social sciences emerged in the way the discussion that followed promptly developed. No comments concerning the action of reading out loud emerged from the documentation and, on the contrary, re-elaborations of the excerpt points at a direct engagement with such piece of critical scholarship. A main theme that the group developed



was **normative representation of body perfection** and its material-semiotic violence. A direct connection to contemporary practices of representation through digital media was made when one participant referenced Instagram. She also suggested another example of visual practice

to think the entanglements between technological developments and scientific typification processes, namely photographs of symmetrical snowflakes. Issues of **normative sexuality** were embodied for another participant by the peacocks' vitrine and its "heterosexual and monogamous couple, represented outside their aging process". Its narrative was described as coming from a "Christian, educational, and anthropocentric context".

A second theme that developed in response to the gallery experience and the text reading is the idea of **extinction** as obsession with preservation of a perfect, out of time, static status. One participant associated the gallery style with a “sculptural ideal”, contrasting it with a more processual representation of life and death cycles. Pushing even further her comment, she highlighted the specificity to the contemporary time of extinction anxiety adding: “Humans and animals always adapt to the environment”. If this position emerged specifically from this participant – who made it the focus of her video by provocatively stating, “Extinction is a myth” – a sense of partiality in how extinction is portrayed in the gallery through both interpretation texts and taxidermies emerged also in exchanges between other participants. From the very beginning of the workshop, **colonialism** and **hunting practices** were pointed at particularly by two participants as absent stories in the space we were exploring. “The necessary hiding of the traces of the killing”, a main part in the text excerpt, was particularly taken up in the conversation and discussed in terms of what was there and what not. One participant voiced her surprise in hearing that it is still allowed to kill animals for collections. This was an interesting moment in the workshop not only because it directly connected a more historical approach and the representational politics of natural history museums to the logistics of contemporary scientific practice. It can also be seen as a moment when the dialogic exchange attempted at untangling the complexity of the theme explored and at pushing the group reflection further. The question concerning the contemporary provenance of dead animals held together in fact the issue of how human violence on non-human beings developed through history, the access to the knowledge about such violent procedures, and their scientific specificity when it comes to natural history museums. Which animals is it still allowed to kill? The questions was answered in the group on one side by recognising that many animals come from zoos and, on the other, that different ethical rules exist for different species and that especially insects, smaller and more numerous species are the one still killed for collecting purposes.



To the purpose of an **analysis of the format**, the rich series of questions and themes emerged cannot be separated from the explicit visual focus set by the workshop framework and, more precisely, the specific attention to “absences” and “ghosts” the title refers to. The



session structure invited the participants since the beginning to pick and stay with one exhibit in order to develop, literally, a perspective on it. The explicit invitation to visually portray an object was meant nevertheless as an encouragement not to aim at a final video, but to concentrate

on the very process of constructing the visual representation. It is relevant to notice how the very materiality of the gallery’s architecture and display afforded the participants with elements clearly related to the theme of vision and gaze: the numerous transparent glasses and spotlights were very much referred to in the reflections and portrayed in the videos. The aesthetic dimension nevertheless was always engaged by relating some of the material details – a scar, an animal pose, the whiteness of the busts, the intermittent lights, the multitude of eyes – to one or more themes that were not “visible” in the room – human-non-human relations, colonial hunting and collecting practices, scientific typification of bodies, political and economic reasons for animal extinction, traffics of normative representations among scientific and cultural realms. If on one hand, the participants’ criticality can be read as a successful outcome, on the other hand it is also fundamental to remember the very composition of the group and the lack of museum practitioners and researchers during the reading and filming sections.



During the final discussion round, one of the participants opened up a reflection that was critical to the format, voicing her perspective on museum institutions and proposing a counter approach to the one emerged during the workshop. “When I first came to Europe, I realized how backward my country in terms of Education in museums was. Brazil lost many

valuable collections, insects' collections, Egyptian collections. There are no guided tours, no teacher or instructors, you just pass through the museum without noticing or knowing how valuable it is and what the work involved is." Following this comment, one of the co-organisers pointed at the fact that "decolonizing museums" is currently central to museum studies and practice debates themselves and at the difficulties and criticalities. Another participant contributed to this issue by warning from what she voiced as an over-criticality towards the museum. Reflecting on the amount of input condensed in the three hours and the relatively short amount of time available to dig into themes and stories, she warned about the danger of reproducing a bourgeois pattern of intellectual criticism, where we assume a judgmental role upon how things should be done based on generalisations, without a close familiarisation with the institution under consideration. "I know nothing about the MfN", she reminded the others, calling for reading against the grain in an open way, reading the Museum and reading with the Museum. Considering that the aim of the workshop series was to engage in a dialogic and practice-led experience and to avoid dichotomous contrapositions of (museum) scientific expertise against (public) non-scientific expertise, this comment came as a fertile problem space concerning our attempt at designing a public engagement format. As another participant reflected during the individual feedback, inviting participants to speculate on different stories which are critical of the institutional narratives without providing the structure for a consistent and long-term access to information concerning the very institution, risks putting the participants in the problematic position of being asked for solutions that they are not in a position to give, a sort of "outsourced criticality."

Organising a visit to the Museum taxidermists' studio in the following weeks was a move in the direction of providing some further engagement and familiarity with the Naturkundemuseum. This was a chance to engage with the theme from a different entry point than the workshops. One of the participant joined this follow-up and shared positive feelings about listening to the practitioner's description of his work and his personal path in this profession. The technical details of the Taxidermic procedure and the glimpse we had into the ecology of institutions, national and international championships, professional service companies, job markets and educational trainings that he outlined, allowed for a different kind of story to emerge — one that is much closer to the everyday experience of being a taxidermist.

0.2 THE SPACE BETWEEN THE STONES – STRATIGRAPHIC STORYTELLING WORKSHOP

4 July 2019

The last session took as a starting point the minerals collection of the Museum and the idea of thinking “with” stones beyond a systematics perspective. Having started a conversation with artist Sybille Neumeyer on the MfN as a construction site and as a place literally made of stones, we invited her to be our third guest facilitator. As part of her artistic research, Sybille had already been in exchange with the curator of the minerals’ collection and was particularly interested in the narrative affordances of these objects and the possibility of challenging the common assumption of stones as non-living beings. The main concept for the workshop that she proposed was what she called a “stratigraphic storytelling”. Her wish was to engage with the participants in a polyphonic account of stories about stones and, through a group exercise, in a creative mapping of such landscape of stories. As it was the case for the other two sessions, the aim of the proposed activity was not the production of a final, completed output, but to focus on the process of doing and thinking together.

Besides the 2 hosts and the guest facilitator, 6 people joined the workshop – 5 based at the MfN and 1 not based at the MfN: Ferdinand Damaschun, Anita Hermanstädter, Robert Luther, Tahani Nadim, Meike Weißpflug, Yen-Yi Lee⁵. Participants were asked to bring a stone to the workshop and the session started with a round of presentations through such stones and their stories. More time was reserved for this initial stage than in the other workshops and people engaged at different paths and depths in their narration, according to the relations they had to the stones. Some of them have been measured



and collected, other smelled, some sculpted or core drilled. One was not a proper stone but a coral, a community of symbionts who died by water heating leaving their white skeletons as a trace. Another was not a stone anymore but a material legacy or better, a corporeal memory,

⁵ Due to a last minute postponement of the workshop date, only one participant from the initial group of 10 could join also the second date and new invitations had to be sent last minute.



of a close relative. Each participant was free to choose the entry point to their stones and spontaneous questions allowed the participants to explore how others were experiencing such objects. This was a way to make the multiplicity of ways of telling with stones visible, without asking a descriptive presentation of participants' works or

educational backgrounds. An example from this initial moment is the conversation triggered by a stone produced by a meteorite impact. Listening to the scientist's description of her practice allowed to learn about the physical phenomenon, objects and technologies through which her mode of knowing and "doing" stones was materialised. Craters, pressure, asteroids, shock waves, grid cells, ejectors, and a whole range of relations among them co-produced stones as a repository of traces of violent physical events already happened. Moreover, scientists and their modelling software create plots about possible future impacts. In response to such combination of both past and future events, the terms **history** and **story** were mobilised in order to address the kind of work done through such scientific research practice:



"P1: 'As a scientists I would say I try to make a model and a theory of something that has happened. Of course it's somehow a story but just the term story is like anything that you want to make up'

P2: 'But your work add to the story we can tell about the Earth'

P1: 'Yes'

P2: 'About the planet, about the solar system'

P1: 'History''

(Audio recording)

During the feedback meetings, a third term was also used to refer to a somewhat different kind of narration, namely **personal stories**. Such stories emerged as "in between" the dichotomy nature/culture, which was instead particularly evoked by one of the participants' presentation. Differentiating among "inner stories" – referring to geological study of stones – and "cultural stories", this presentation triggered some other participants to reflect on how more personal accounts afford a different position for both the story teller and the listeners

in regards to the stone, a position that keeps the specificity of the human/non-human relation at the centre and does not resolve the description of the stone through close-ended and univocal explanations of linear causations. One of the participants nicely put this during the final reflection:

“P3: Reconnecting to the actual and not the abstract thing, I think there’s a power in stories to enable us to connect, to not to enter in some kind of truer vision of the world, but to connect with the world. And this is something against all these fantasies of techno fix, and Mars, and all these dangers. (...) To me it gives always hope to see how we can still connect to things and discover new perspectives and unseen things and really work with the materiality of the world and be there actually.”
(Audio recording)

A good example of this was the story told by this very participant concerning a flint stone coming from the Lousberg plateau in Aachen, her hometown. The mining industry developed



in the area was described together with the traditional local origin story of the mountain. Such mountain – where the stone can be found – was depicted at once as an economic resource in the local mining industry since Neolithic times, a devil’s creation and the site of a public park built in between XIX and XX centuries after

the French Revolution (together with oaks, of which the “German dark forest” is composed). At the end of the story, the participant asked herself how the society living there should have looked like, since not many sources are left, and wondered what role did slavery had in the flint industry. This example works well in showing how the concept of **storied matter** encourage a polyphonic approach towards stones. The entry focused on such concept and authored by Environmental Humanities scholar Serpil Oppermann as part of the *Posthuman Dictionary* (Braidotti and Hlavajova 2018) was sent to the participants in preparation to the workshop and read out loud in the following section of the session. “Whether biotic or not, matter in every form is a meaning producing





embodiment of the world, or ‘storied matter’: ‘a material “mesh” of meanings, properties, and processes, in which human and nonhuman players are interlocked in networks that produce undeniable signifying forces’. Besides this entry, the guest facilitator offered another series of textual

input in a reader produced for the workshop. Nine short excerpts from a geologist, a geographer, a curator, a chemist and poet, a paleo-biologist, a teacher, a historian, an anthropologist and a science fiction writer were assembled in available printouts. The reading moment was thus prolonged in this session in comparison to the previous ones. This decision was received negatively by one of the participants, who decided to leave the workshop after the first couple of excerpts were read. The group reading continued and the first lines of a science fiction book especially inspired the participants to think how to tell a story about the contemporary planetary condition of life on Earth. The one-line excerpt “Let’s start with the end of the world, why don’t we?” (Jemisin 2015) provoked the participants to think about the choice upon what temporal perspective to choose and was particularly central to the following and last section of the workshop, when the group produced a landscape of the stories. A second excerpt from an anthropology text inspired another thread in the conversation and was centred on the Makapansgat cobble manuport.



The physical action of moving stones through space and the semiotic action of assigning meanings to them clearly exemplified the concept of storied matter. This further development of the group discussion connected the temporal issue to the spatial one, by bringing into light how humans and stones have been part of the same historical processes of shaping and forming environments. At this moment also a more openly political thread came up through a participant’s comment on the act of collecting from and of changing places described in this last excerpt. Mentioning the issue of commons, she suggested thinking the material relation of humans and territories in terms of property, asking the group “whom stones belong?”

Similarly to the second workshop, multiple threads opened up during this session and the final section aspired at bringing them together through a practical activity. Participants were invited to try and visually represent the stories emerged into a common landscape or stratigraphy.



As the guest herself explained, the invitation was to think them not as objects but as strata. Mass and volumes were also dimensions of the events to consider, since the stories related to each other by having very different “sizes”. How to make forces, intensity, accelerations visible? This challenge can be

described as the most open-ended moment of the whole series, living the participant total freedom in engaging in such creative activity. If on one side this meant that the discussion developed further by drawing, writing, and displaying the stones after reading, on the other side it was commented, especially during the individual feedbacks, as producing also a sense of uncertainty in regard to the common task to achieve. This critique is considered a fundamental contribution that the participants gave to the research regarding the articulation of the workshop theme into the format: at what level it was possible for participants to engage in the art practice presented by the guest facilitator? Did this experience provided the group with a useful tool to elaborate in a transdisciplinary way on the theme and its complexities? Or did it implicitly reproduce the differences existing in the knowledge practices embodied by the guest and the participants? These questions highlighted once more the challenges of transdisciplinary format and the importance of developing such questions through longer-term collaborative projects.

FEEDBACKS FROM PARTICIPANTS

The comments gathered during the individual feedbacks conducted with participants and guest facilitators after the workshops include:

PARTICIPANTS

- Instead of single researchers and practitioners, working with project team could foster more engagement; the confidence given by the possibility of participating with colleagues would encourage a higher participation to such events;
- A dissonance exists between a spread wish to engage in scientific outreach and the structure of research practice, especially in terms of time;
- The wish to engage in scientific outreach is not only dependant on time or funding issues but also on personal character and attitude towards the research work as such;
- Meeting and talking to other scientists from the Museum previously not known and to non-scientists was a positive and enjoyable challenge and opportunity;
- The workshops atmosphere and activities allowed for a valuable exchange among people coming from different backgrounds to happen;
- A need for more presence of MfN researchers and practitioners was voiced;
- The choice of reading English texts from Humanities and Social Sciences should be further discussed since it was an obstacle for some participants not used to such content, especially when asked to read out loud;
- The invitation flyers did not convey clearly enough the content of the workshop;
- The Experimentierfeld space could be opened to the external area of the Museum and possibly connected to the “*Zauber Garten*” area. This would integrate the inside and the outside, allowing the Museum visitors to use both spaces freely, even without ticket.

GUEST FACILITATORS

- When working in collaborative projects in between institutions such as the MfN and HU a closer assistance and support is needed during the production phase on the side of the co-designers in order to deal with the many tensions, complications and misunderstandings that can arise, especially when such institutions meet independent, free-lancers from the Arts field;
- The experience of sharing their research practice with the participants was a very positive and fruitful opportunity;
- The workshops could be developed by inviting at least two guest facilitators coming from different backgrounds – i.e. an artist and a scientist.
- Research leaflets and consent forms created an uncomfortable atmosphere described as “too academic” and formal.

GENERAL

- More time for introduction to the key chosen concepts and involved research practices and for discussion is needed when engaging with such complex issues;
- The overall framework of oddkin°labs and the relation to the MfN and the Humboldt University was not clear enough;
- More signs and directions within the Museum space – the communication with the Museum invigilators and desk office staff was not always easy;
- Consider inviting to the workshops also visitors (move it to Museum opening time);
- The use of critical scholarly texts worked differently for the three guests but a further discussion about their use (focus on one, have many but shorter) was considered by all useful to the development of the workshops.

FINAL REFLECTIONS FROM CO-DESIGNERS

In the following, some considerations are presented as critical issues to consider and discuss for a further development of the oddkin°labs format.

CO-PRODUCTION PROCESS

A clear understanding of how responsibilities and tasks are shared or distributed among co-producers since the beginning, as well as an explicit discussion and recognition of the roles of all the collaborators, participants included, facilitates the production process and allows having an on-going reflexion on whether such responsibilities and roles are changing, how and why. Time and resources are needed especially in the production phase in order to properly take care of the new relations and communicational interactions between the people, especially because coming from different working background and knowledge cultures. As already mentioned, considering public engagement in terms of the labour, in this case especially cognitive labour but also affective labour, done by all the actors involved is a fruitful way of planning long-term collaborations. This goes along with openly addressing the reasons why the institution wants and needs to host such projects, how more collaborative projects are integrated in the institutional structure and infrastructure and how the qualitative and processual aspects of the workshops are documented, analysed and circulated after the events.

ASSEMBLING THE PARTICIPANT GROUPS

Meetings with participants beforehand should be planned to allow for a one-to-one introduction to the format idea, beyond the invitation email, especially in the case such format is new to the hosting institution. Such meetings could also give the possibility to the co-designers to take more informed decisions concerning the readings and the specific aspects of the subject themes to focus on. The curation of the participant groups was particularly challenging considering on one hand the wish to have a balance among different practices and, on the other, the practical logistics and time schedules influencing the organization of the events. The suggested option of opening the workshop to some visitors

who are in the museum while the workshop takes place could be a possibility to consider in order to diffract even more the disciplinary categories utilised to curate the critical group. There is the risk though that this choice would add another category – that of “general public” or “visitors” – to the other ones instead of enhancing the “diversity” of the groups. A possible solution would be to focus the workshop activity explicitly on the dynamics of different making that the chosen epistemic or material objects would afford and trigger in the group.

OPEN-ENDED APPROACH

The focus on the processual dimension of the workshops and the intentional openness of the sessions’ outcome need to be clearly presented and explained in the opening section to the participants, making them part of the group discussion itself. A balance is needed between the wish to leave space to the participants’ mode of conducting the discussion and perform the activities proposed and a flexible moderation that keeps the emerging threads and interactions visible and accessible to the participants themselves, feeding back to the group discussion. The value of uncertainty in this transdisciplinary project materialised particularly when different modes of speculating with words or visual representation about how to develop the stories converged in the activities. The participants’ modes of engaging in storytelling activity reflected a multiplicity of “rules”, reference points and possible directions to take and the negotiation about them occurred according to the very contingencies of the sessions: the kind of object discussed, the practice used as framework, the subjective and group performances afforded by the practical activities, the participants’ personal way of relating and interacting, the values, feelings, and ideals at stake, the affective and communicational atmosphere, and other serendipitous elements.

TRANSDISCIPLINARITY

The main rationale at the base of the workshop series was the creation of a space of transdisciplinary engagement with the Museum objects of co-evolution, taxidermy and stones. The intention to test the format by addressing such objects by focusing on artists’ and film maker’s practices was nevertheless unbalanced towards the participating scientists. Some of the feedbacks described the workshops as either too critical or not critical enough.

Such a differential positioning towards “criticality” emerged clearly in response to the theme of taxidermy, which interestingly is a practice that situates in between scientific and artistic worlds. This points to an additive approach to perspectives instead of a transdisciplinary one. The articulation of differences among knowledge cultures emerged especially when professional roles, instead of the epistemic or material objects, were at the centre of the discussion. In fact, epistemic objects (co-evolution), museum practices (taxidermy) and material actors (stones) afforded differently dialogic dynamics and more-than-human relationalities. This is noticeable as well when taking in consideration the role of personal stories during the second and third sessions, which unfolded in direct dialogue with specific taxidermies (behind the vitrine glasses) and stones (through a hands-on experience). Traffics between the different modes of thinking and doing embodied by the presents were made visible by this “undisciplined” setting and an actual mapping of new possible relations among the actors, humans and non-humans, opened up. As already mentioned, it is interesting to notice that this corresponded to the most uncertain and even “unclear” moment of the series, compared to the more structured languages utilised in the other session (game rules and cinematic techniques). A clear limit to the possibility of openly reflecting on the different perspectives in order to map new connections among actors, objects, technologies, spaces, etc. and not merely juxtaposing them can be identified in how expertise were mobilised both by the co-designers and the participants themselves. Grounding the exploration of transdisciplinary possibilities on the “professional identity” of all the participants involved, even if framed in terms of collective crafting of new relations and stories, focused the attention too much on the “who” and not on the “what” or “how” of the experiment. At the same time, in all three sessions, participants deeply engaged with the themes, the objects, the space and each other, developing the initial inputs into specific directions. The material output produced during the workshops – the habitats posters, the video inquiries, and the landscape of stones – differently map some of the relations and the movements of the perspectives that the participants entwined along the sessions. These maps, together with the other documentations, were the grounding bases for the production of three foldable posters, one for each session, currently by the co-designers. In these posters a selection of words and images is graphically curated and re-proposed as a continuation of the conversations started during the workshops.

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