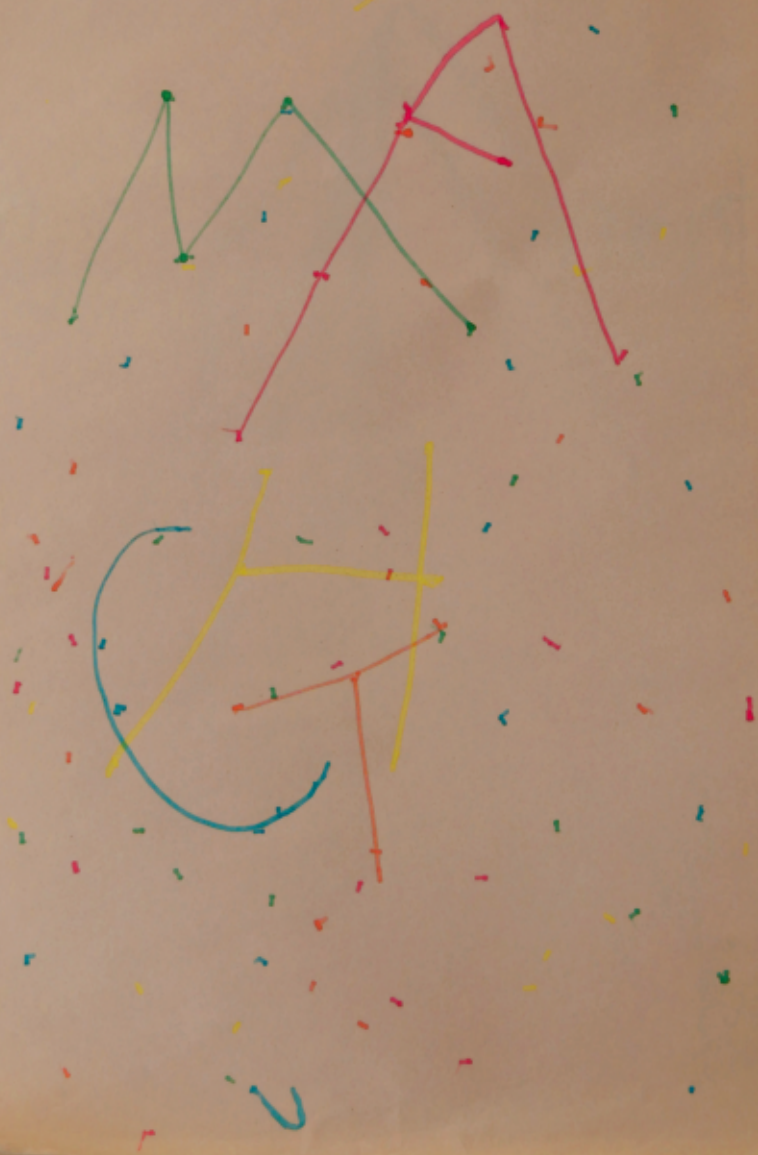


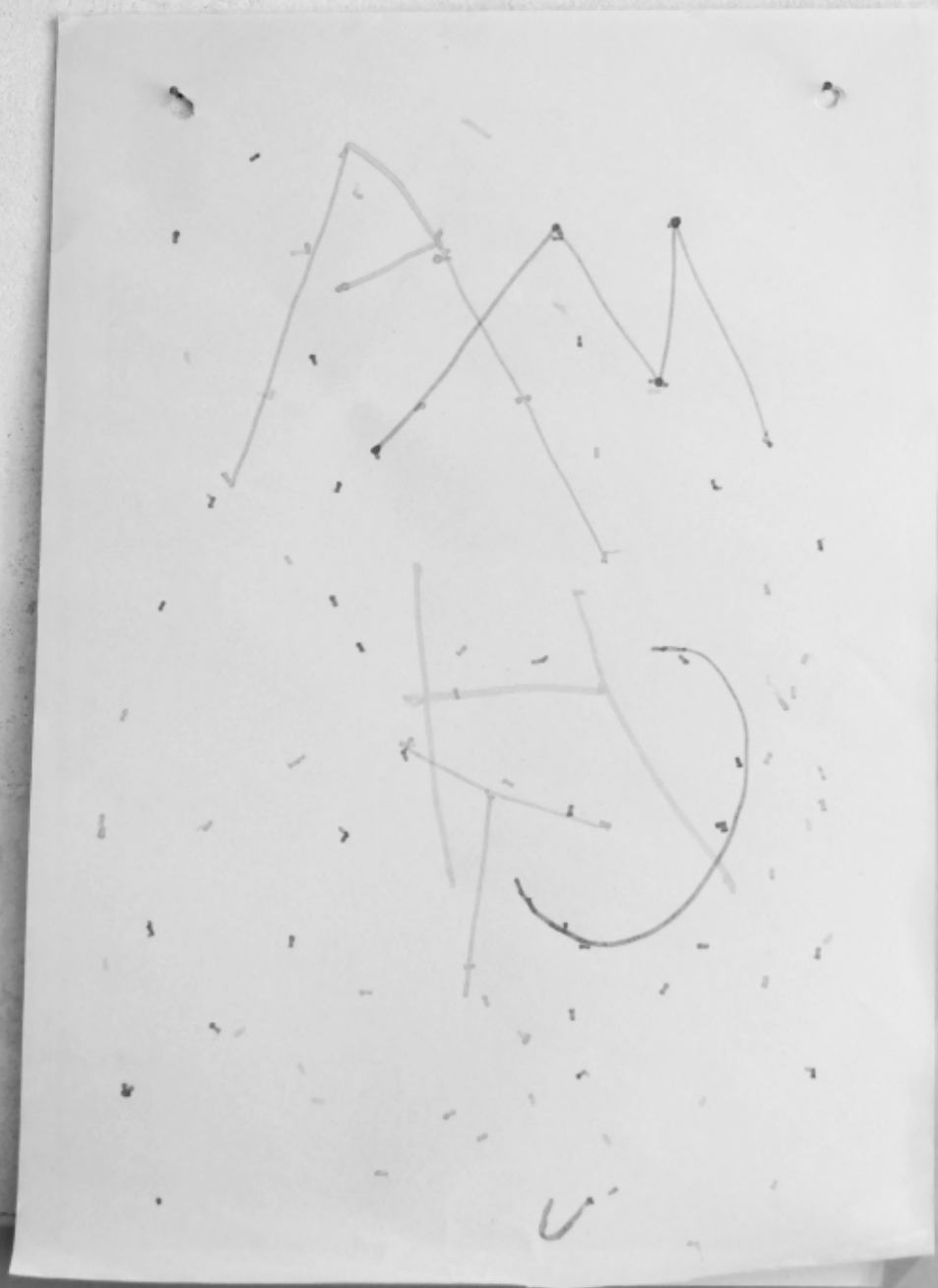


POWER

POWER

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Tel.: 9000XXXXXX (kostenfrei), www.deppowerment.org






a depowerment manifesto

assembled, written, edited and designed by
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www.stephaniehanna.de

web edition / not suitable for printing
Berlin, December 2017

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www.depowerment.org

thank you

for sharing your perspectives on power and depowerment,
for proofreading, commenting, and being supportive,

Alexa Wilson
Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt
Ann Wertheimer
Deborah Black
Deborah S. Phillips
Inta Balode
Miguel Verde Garrido
Momin uz Zaman
Nicole de Bouvrie
Noel Perkins
Palle Dahlstedt

and
the anonymous contributors of drawings
the future contributors and collaborators
as well as all my other teachers
and collaborators along the way

a depowerment manifesto

attitudes and practices
to fairly rebalance the world

Stephanie Hanna zu Thun und Lassen







de power ment

de ment

People sometimes forget when they get into power.

Forget what they wanted to use it for, originally,
when they started to fight for it.

And then, once they have it, some forget to share it.

Possibly, there is a line that links our words.
One could call it chronology.
It suggests a cause and effect as it goes
from here
to there.

And possibly, there are many other lines linking our words,
there are many other words left out, unspoken,
or even unthought.

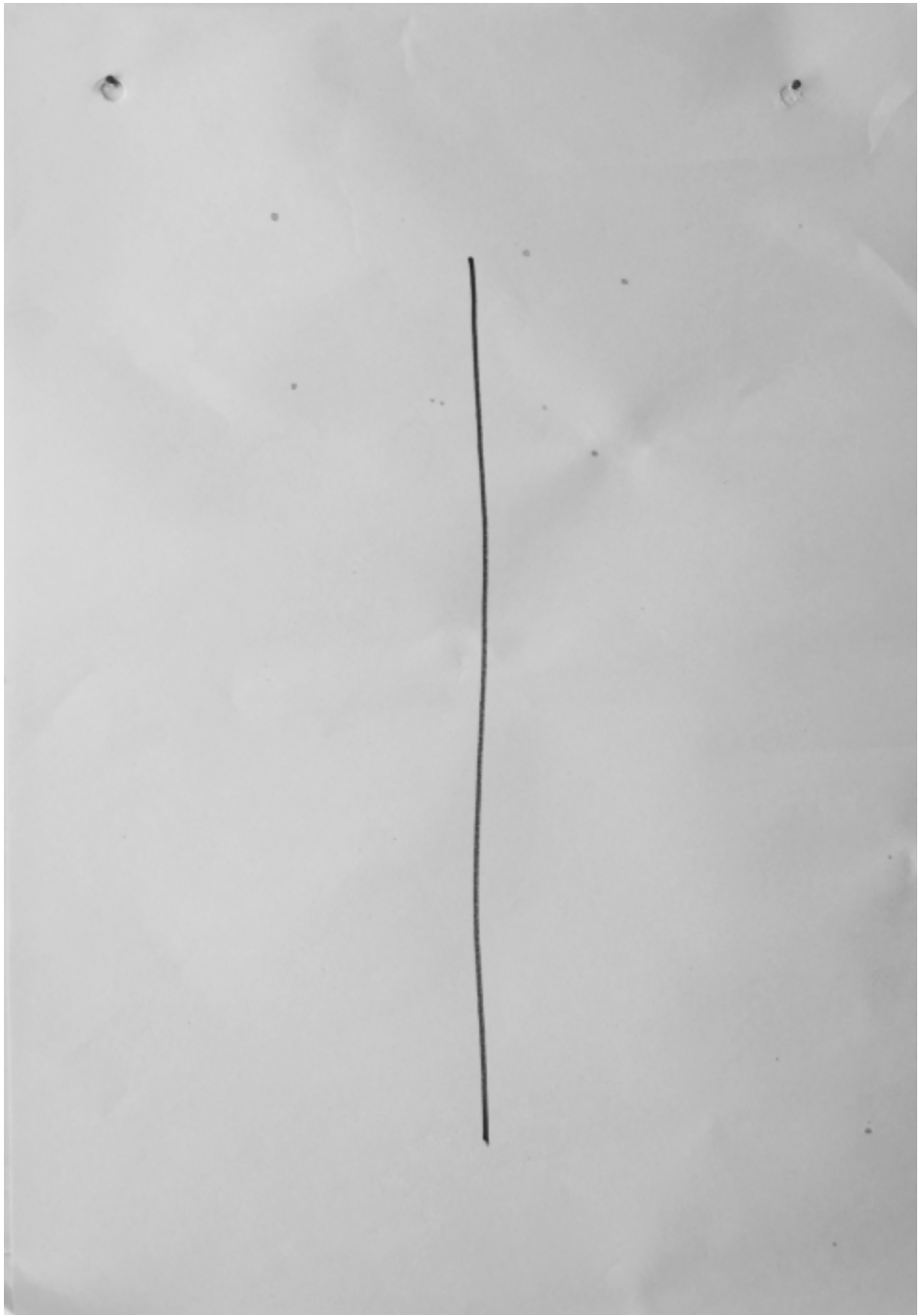
Sometimes we get a notion of their existence.

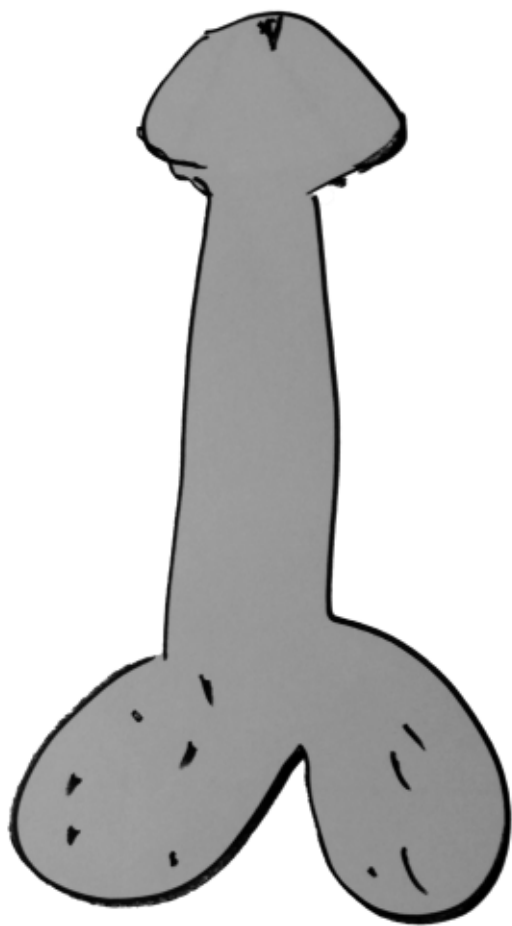
We sense the other possibilities.

Language is power. It directs our mind.

To name other possible thoughts and perceptions
already makes them halfway real.

Sharing is realizing.





shapes of power

The illustrations you find in this book show forms that people drew to depict their understanding of power. They were contributed after a first and very brief introduction to the idea of depowerment.*

The word DEPOWERMENT is not commonly used.**

It might not even exist, officially. (Who decides that?)

The word disempowerment does exist, though, signifying that specific (groups of) people are blocked from accessing power.

In contrast, you can only depower people or structures that have accumulated a surplus of power in relation to their surroundings.

Thinking about depowerment is a consequence of empowerment.

It points to ways of leveling out social injustice by keeping power continuously in flow and accessible to all.

I assembled this manifesto by presenting the idea in its stages and also by opening the process to input from others. This book is my response to that practical field research. It is only one step before the next stage. Rather than offering possible solutions, I am sharing my observations and questions. All of them are connected to my artistic practice and everyday experience. Now I wonder if and how they will connect with yours.

If they do, I invite you to interpret this manifesto based on your experience and share the ways that you find helpful for depowering injustice in your art and life practice.

This book has to be embodied.

* at the summer party of the Association of Performance Artists in Berlin at gr_und, August 19, 2017

** as of summer 2017, I have only found it in open source encyclopedia, e.g. urbandictionary.com

depower your ego

depower ignorance

depower appearance

depower attention seeking

depower manipulation

depower domination

depower deception

depower seduction

depower bullshit

depower fakers

depower the hype

depower vanity

depower narcissism

depower privilege

depower exclusion

depower hypocrisy

depower righteousness

depower money

depower the myth

depower hierarchy

depower bureaucracy

depower interest rates

depower power addiction

depower your inner censor

depower oppression

depower destruction

depower dependency

depower superiority

depower inferiority

depower fear

depower greed

depower causality

depower mindfuck

depower bossiness

why depowerment

How would we interact if everything were to stay the same, except that everybody wanted to become more empowered, continuously? Empowerment can show possibilities, but can it create balance?

And can there be justice without balance?

So, how can we level our power relations?

Do we maybe need a limit at the top to protect ourselves from greed?

Or could it be that if we start moving and changing our structures at the bottom, we could create an undertow that will eventually flatten out the hierarchies on top as well as if they were made of sand?

Empowerment did not get us into a balanced state of being.

Neither did it bring the existing power relations into balance nor did it stop the exponential increase of injustice dividing our realities.

When people are empowering themselves or others, their motivation can very well be to individually function better within a system that is based on competition.

Could depowerment become an antidote to power struggles?

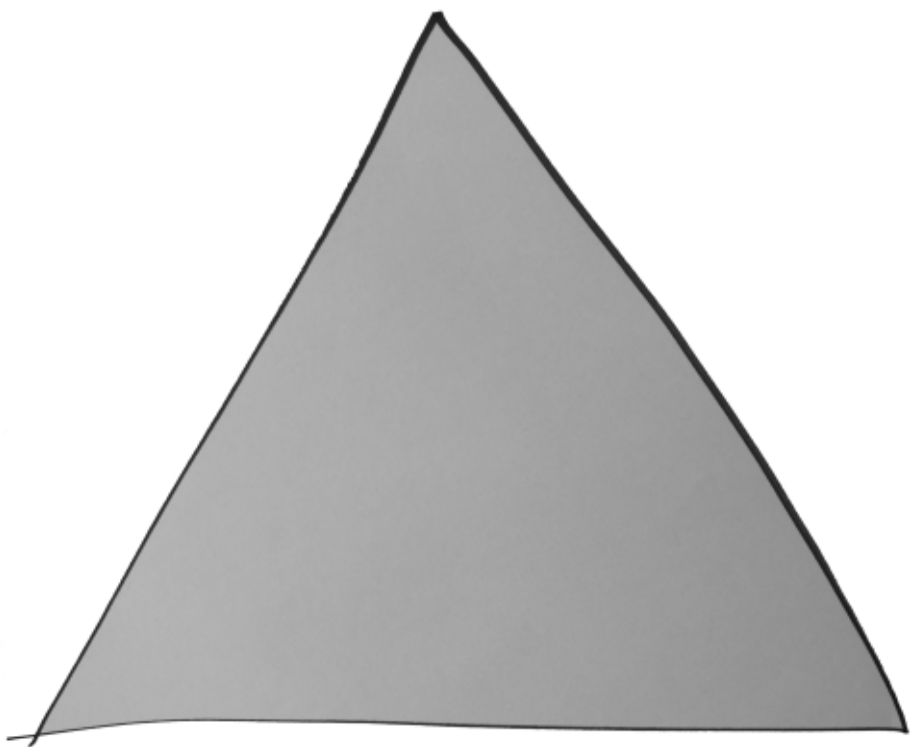
As far as I know, it has no harmful side effects — all it can do is balance power relations by circulating the power, making it available to all and depowering only those that hoard power, seeking individual profit.

Depowerment manifests itself peacefully and empathetically. A growing awareness about it is enough. To depower a situation, we have to be empowered and in a depowered state of mind ourselves. We have to give up any desire to win, stand out or overpower other beings.

The depowerment of the individualized being

is the empowerment of the connected being.

And it can be realized through our imagination.





get perspectives

While it is not necessarily helpful to empathize too much with people that abuse their power and status, fighting overtly against the mechanisms they use to keep the power relations hierarchical and to their benefit does not help either. Counterforce only builds up to the next conflict.

The solution to a conflict is often to be found at the root of the problem, which will of course have something to do with a power unbalance.

To understand any problem, one should look at it from different perspectives. And our power relations are a problem. There are as many perspectives as there are people on the planet — plus the perspectives of the many other beings that are influenced by us and our power games, struggles and wars.

To really understand these other perspectives, as far as that is possible, one has to connect with the other beings. One has to be genuinely interested in finding out how they might be affected in a given situation. I do not think it is possible to ever fully understand the perspective of another person, and even less of another form of being. There will always be some projection, gaps filled in by our imagination, and other distortions. And that is also not the main point, as it is the connection on the basis of a sincere and innocent interest in the other that forms the groundwork for depowerment.

The main idea behind this publication and its extension into the future, which will be a series of explorative meetings, is to build a network of connections to those that also (want to) practice depowerment for the benefit of a peaceful being together. Together, we may find many more ways to depower the status quo.

where to start, and how

here to start, and now

How can we depower our state of mind?

stop making sense

start sensing

talk less

listen more

enjoy the



he power



grow into empathy

Once we manage to depower the familiar but unbalancing power relations we have grown into, which other patterns of relating may evolve?

How do we become more aware of how our actions and non-actions affect our surroundings and fellow beings?

Maybe if we can understand ourselves as being just one part of an extended organism, one that encompasses planet Earth and beyond, one that will always contain the unknowable?

How can we accept and include the other, our fears and our shadows?

We can practice our empathetic imagination through nonverbal communication with all kinds of beings and life forms.

We can become aware of the pleasures and pains of other parts in this organism by encountering them.

We can (re) learn to feel with other beings, even if we have lost this ability earlier, for instance through trauma.

Instead of learning how to outwit and cheat each other in order to survive in a competitive society, we can collectively focus on being together, encouraging each other, learning and growing together – without fencing off outsiders from any side.

Can imaginary models help our comprehension and maybe also show ways of becoming one interrelated, integrated organism? What can we learn from embodying the various forms of connection and communication we can find in fauna and flora?

What can we learn from swarming, sponging, shrooming, etcetera?

grow into trust

Just imagine the day when we are all connected in our awareness: there would be as many perspectives as beings in this world, and we could get to know all of them simultaneously. A multi-faceted life would become our average everyday experience. On that day we could connect all of our talents, capacities and energies for the free use of all. We would be integrated. Nobody would feel the need to take advantage of the situation, because everybody could get their essential needs met in the free flow of power and opportunities for self-realization and joy.

Ideally, I imagine power to be used most effectively when it is freely accessible for all. The circulation of power would strengthen every part of the collective body, so there would always be more power flowing back into the pool. We could grow together, each of us contributing to the collective needs whilst having plenty of possibilities to self-actualize in one's work. We would all be equally empowered.

As power simply is there, always, a shortage of it has to be created artificially, for instance by accumulation. Sometimes, that can be helpful, thinking about batteries, or dams. As these accumulations become effective in the release, though, the accumulated energies should be regularly released. Also, of course, a release of the accumulation of common energies should also benefit the whole, inclusively. In other words, privatizing the profits of collective efforts heavily unbalances the power relations today.

Even though we know and criticize this, something gets in the way of the free flow of powers in practice. What exactly is it?

Let us look at that on an individual level:

What can we change within the power relations we are engaged in?

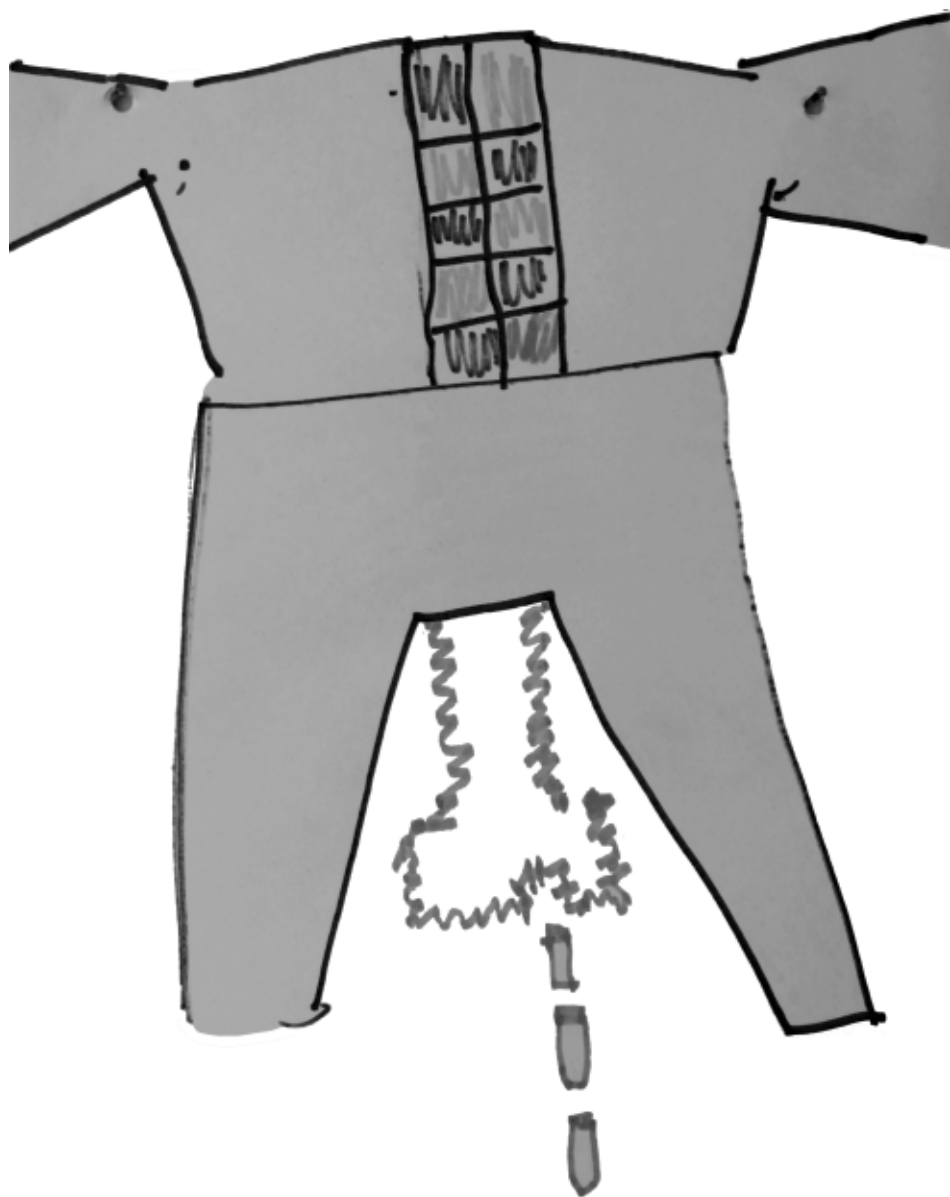
or is it just another matter of self-importance

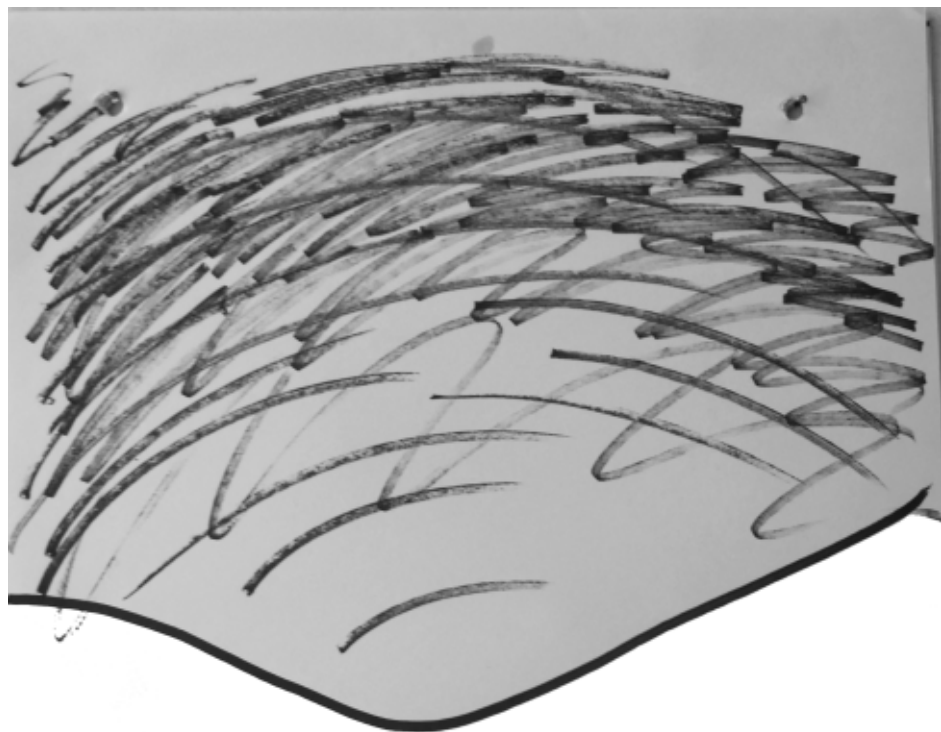
How do we establish, repeat and maintain unbalanced power relations?
How is that happening in our environment, in the fields of arts for example?

It looks like the main motivation behind much of today's cultural production is the desire to be seen. While being seen has always been a motivation for people to become culturally active, nowadays the struggle for survival that many artists feel depends on their visibility has built up enormously. Artificially, as we are collectively living the individualizing lies of a neoliberal capitalism that is based in virtual futures and where the available abundance is simply not shared.

In spite of the increased accessibility of the means of distribution, it seems that making art has become a more privileged occupation again. A lot of the art that is made reflects that very well. Competitiveness is increased through the threat of invisibility and the fear of losing opportunities. On purpose? Who decides what is said, shown, seen, and heard? Whose voices get heard, how and when? I often had to observe that artists who demand a lot of attention of others in order to realize their work in the end not only get more attention, but also space and promotion of their work. Attention seeking is thus systematically rewarded.

Additionally, all kinds of substance as well as emotional dependencies are stimulated, encouraged and promoted. Works that are produced under certain conditions will lead to reproductions of these conditions — not only spreading amongst other cultural producers, but also amongst the followers, amongst recipients and consumers. Thus, the dependencies are perpetuated. How to leave this cycle?





share the stage

A recurring interest in my artistic practice is the division between artistic consumption and production, or more specifically between sender and receiver.

From theater productions to the dramaturgy in exhibition design via art mediation and participative art projects to visual and performing art, I experimented with ways to dissolve the fourth wall, to create immersive and reflective experiences, to engage and activate spectators.

My idea of participation is that if it does not at least change the perception of the artist — or the government, or whoever calls for it — it is merely a label or a decorative element that might be used to fool the recipient into consuming more and questioning less.

Participation starts when you allow an autonomous other to take part, produce original meaning, possibly contrary and surprising, not only reproducing. In artistic processes, I like to invite participation to discover other perspectives and also to possibly encounter the unknown.

The moment you share the stage, you give over some of your authority — and you share the power. The moment you let others influence the direction of your work, you let go of some control — and you make new discoveries.

The moment you start to improvise, you listen and interact with what is going on around you.

The purpose of any connection is sharing.
Share what you have got.

turn on the bullshit detector

Maybe it would also help if some people shut up once in a while, and make space for the many other more quiet or hesitant voices.

One of the power relation dynamics that entrenches inequality is that those who speak out more will speak out more. Of course, it is not necessarily the ones that have the most to say that have the most say; it might as well be the loudest or fastest, the least self-reflective or simply the ones that want the attention the most.

One way to prevent the repetition of traditional power relations is being assertive about equal speaking times and visibility in discussions. Being aware of gender balance is a must, as it is still too common amongst men to spread their issues through time and space without necessarily noticing the relations. A timer or a speaking object* can be helpful to maintain the balance in public meetings. These tangible measures train the awareness regarding the time, space, and attention one asks from others. Otherwise, it is good to keep our bullshit detector tuned and eventually take some necessary depowerment steps.

First of all, do not deceive yourself, since then you will be able to see others more clearly as well. Then, learn to detect and deflect defense mechanisms. People often try to protect their status and access to power through the use of exclusive language and coded communication, and through the unquestioned reproduction and abuse of the hierarchies and power relations they have been subjected to themselves. The most popular defense mechanisms are really just types of elitism, from obvious to subtle: insider and outsider scenarios and hierarchies based on categories such as age, knowledge, class, race, and gender.

* which you hold while speaking and cannot speak without holding

What You Talk about
is what you are
not yet.

EXPLICIT LANGUAGE

depower (self-)deception

The more honest you become with yourself, the more you will see through deceptions of your self and others. And the more you learn to see through deception, the more you will get to know about yourself. This can become an endless as well as pleasant journey, discovering veil after veil and mask behind mask.

Start small. Be gentle and firm. Do not force it, persist. Trust your intuition. Trust that things will fall into place. Do not resist the flow. All you really need, you will find now, in resonance with you and the world. Cut out the rest.

The injustice and stupidity that humankind is capable of can be overpowering, especially if you feel isolated in your perception and expression thereof. Yet standing alone is most empowering. If you are not able to stand on your own, apart from (former) peers, families and traditions, you will not be able to depower anything.

As long as you take part in that tapestry of social interdependencies that you grew into, you will not be willing to let go of its warp threads, the basic structure of the power relations that shape our shared beliefs, the conventions and hierarchies to which we find ourselves subordinated.

To question these beliefs at first seems to shake the ground under your feet. But in fact, that ground is just a conventional illusion. Let it dissolve and discover your own connection, your roots and your sensors to the world.

All the power relations, hierarchies and interdependencies that make up our reality are merely conventions. So we can change them. We just have to do it.

be true to yourself and change accordingly

Be the change you want to see.
Imagine all the ways you can make that happen.

Realize them within your reach, within your reality,
within your work and life.
Be as you want to be.
Be who you want to be.

Be aware of what is going on with you, how you are feeling,
what you are reacting to, what is happening around you.

Be aware of the other beings that you affect. Communicate.
Use verbal communication as honestly and precisely as you can.
Find your way into nonverbal forms of communication.
Learn to sense others. Be in connection with the world around you.
Become a vessel. Drop your ego. Be like water. Drop your shame.

Listen more than you talk. Do not dominate or manipulate others.
Approach all other beings with respect. Keep your awareness up
and awake. Keep surprising yourself. Regularly actualize your self.

Find your ways to keep your mind open
and stay in contact with your body.
Take your time.

Be ready and willing to really meet other beings,
experience and share the present moment with them.

Feel good with as many different people
and situations as you possibly can.



turn your own shit into gold

To be able to speak for yourself, you have got to know your shit and get it together as well. This requires an ongoing radically honest self-reflection, which can be painful at times. If it is not, you are probably missing some important shit.

This is the real work that needs to be done now.
We all have to integrate our selves into this world.
Our encounters are healing.

To hide behind strong and acknowledged quotations is understandable and might even be emancipatory for some time. But when referencing becomes the norm, it restricts and distances cultural production. Then, it makes us lose the intuitive connection to what we see, lose our trust in our capacity to recognize quality by following our interest. So we become dependent on references, and start to search for them in artist statements and in their CVs. Referencing creates exclusivity, for instance by making art that requires specific knowledge in order to be appreciated. That kind of art stimulates a sort of intellectual kick that happens only virtually, the promise of an orgasm that will forever remain in the realm of sheer possibilities. No wonder this kind of art is the preferred playground for the economists of hope.

To exit the vicious circle of a narcissistic market-oriented culture and the ongoing reproduction of that which is already known, you can ask yourself:

Do you allow yourself to produce meaning without referencing?
Do you still trust your own judgment? Do you need labels?
And last but not least, can you let go of judgment from time to time?

depower artist myths

Good artists copy, great artists steal

If you can afford it, art education will teach you how to conceptually cheat your way through business. And since the crafting is easily outsourced, you can produce art that seems to be interesting by copying as well as by stealing. In order to touch people through your art, though, you have to go searching and find your ways into the light. Otherwise you just impress.

Exclusivity sells

Artists have to carry an air of mystery and pretend there is more to them than meets the eye. If you show your hand, nobody will be interested in playing with you. People might even steal your ideas. But is that really so? By laying your cards on the table, you can uncover and end games you do not wish to play any longer. Also, if you all lay your cards on the table, you can develop new games together, not against each other.

Referencing your work to something relevant makes it relevant

It is better to just go out and discover the everyday realities of the places where you (show your) work. There, you will find plenty of relevance that might write history, define politics and be reflected in philosophy later. Plus, everybody that perceives the world with an open mind will be able to connect to your work, not just some educated few.

Be as critical as you can be

Just don't. Negativity is the biggest killer of spontaneous creativity. I wish more visual artists would consider basic feedback rules, such as: Describe what you see and experience without being judgmental, speak from your subjective perspective, sum up what you personally like about the work. Forget about that critical comment or point you could make. It will very likely already be in your words — in a positive way.

depower normativity

Where do you find yourself on a scale between performing and conforming? Is that point fixed? Do you feel comfortable with it or obliged by it? Do you have the flexibility to break out and improvise? How important is it to you what others think about you? What do you consider socially acceptable?

Challenge yourself every day, question both your rules and others' rules, check the reasons behind these rules, their effect and proportionality. Love incomprehensible shapes and things and states. Challenge your perception. Practice unlearning. From time to time, let go of some of your habits.

Speak openly about your thoughts and feelings even if you are not sure they will be understood. Do not speak in the place of others. Do not talk behind anybody's back. Don't be afraid to lose your privileges. Do not participate in the economy of hope. Depower fakeness and illusion. Raise your awareness. Share your life.

Informal social hierarchies are shaped subconsciously, by our ideas about ourselves as well as by our projections onto the other. But anytime, we can reactivate the process of our subjectivation and actualize our selves, orienting towards the values, ideas and feelings we consciously chose now.

When we adjust our position or attitude within a structure, we change our experience of it. In consequence, we get different responses, the dynamics can shift. And if a critical mass of people self-actualizes, the societal structures will eventually change...

unpower

undo

unlearn

unknow

uncompete

unreference

unhistorize

unstigmatize

unpolarize

unfence

unjudge

unfollow

unravel

unleash

understate

uncontrol

unhate

unend

unend

unhaste

uncontrol

understate

unleash

unravel

unfollow

unjudge

unfence

unpolitize

unstimulate

unhistorize

unreference

uncomplete

unknow

unlearn

undo

unpower

be your own authority

Following your instinct will depower any need to follow any guru. It will turn on your bullshit detector as well. To find and level your inner compass, you might still have to liberate yourself from some of the social norms that do more harm than good. Calibrate your ethics around doing no harm to any beings, neither to others nor to yourself. Looking away from injustice is also doing harm, as well as is ignoring dangerous situations in spite of better knowledge.

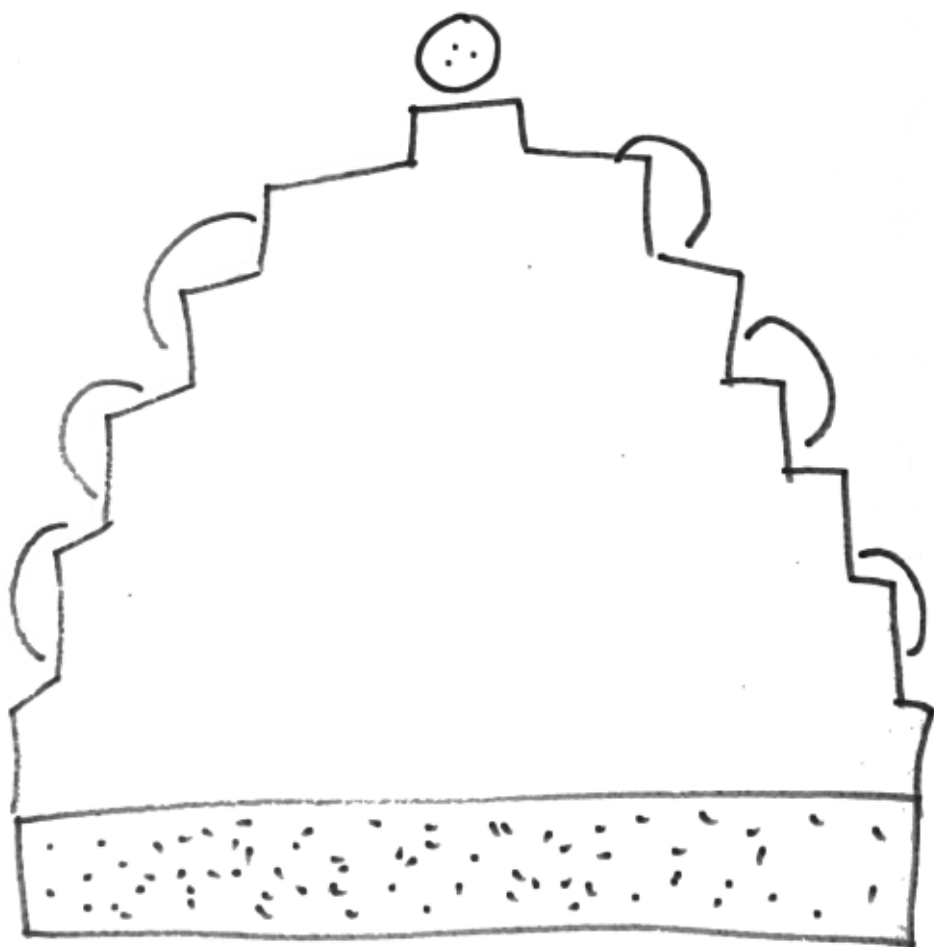
For example, as our free access to clean water, a fundamental human right, obviously, is in danger because private corporations want to profit from this collective natural resource, you should simply not buy bottled water from corporations. This is common sense, so use it well. It can depower deception, seduction, the hype, and many other ailments.

The rest I leave to you, the reader. You will figure out in your practice if depowerment makes sense to you, and how. I am curious to know, what are you doing to nurture inclusive and solidary communities?

Of course, there is not only one way to bliss. Find your own by following your curiosity. For me, somatic practices work best to balance, connect, and align my body and mind in space and time.

There are so many ways that can help you get into that state of awareness that I suggest you find your own by experimenting with the body and mind practices that appeal most to you.

Try out different paths, and combine your favorites. It might not be the quickest way, but it will be yours.



be aware of yourself in your surrounding

To give you an idea of the bandwidth of possible training grounds, these are some artistic and cultural practices that, besides many other factors in life, helped me develop spatial and social awareness:

drawing

- detailed observation, overview, quiet mind

capoeira

- spatial awareness, responsiveness, physicality

yoga

- sensing inner alignment, stretching outer limits

body mind centering

- connecting senses and imagination

sound improvisation

- listening, daring, connecting

acting, dance and movement improvisation

- honesty, self-awareness, spontaneity, response-ability

Some of my favorite exercises that specifically address the sense of self in connection with the surrounding space:

- discovering a space from not-knowing
- moving with the awareness on a single sense
- moving blindfolded, ears plugged, backwards, etc.; with and without guidance
- shifting through the senses at variable speeds (from minutes to days)
- visually zooming in and out, from peripheral vision to focusing details
- observing one's mental state and body speed while shifting the focus as above
- opening and closing eyes at intervals; moving through the snapshots
- shifting awareness from inside to outside and back
- slowly shifting scenes of bodies and objects in space
- visual and acoustic improvisation practice

mirror yourself in the other

How can depowerment be manifested in writing and still maintain its depowering quality? To claim that one word could hold an array of artistic practices is a practical compromise to the usual labeling and defining practices that I questioned in theory... Can this work out? How do ideas around depowerment resonate with other artistic and cultural practices?

Returning has a power of depowerment. It is giving people the time to find their voice. LAUKKU (lauku.lv) brings contemporary arts to people living in the countryside. Workshops, talks, performances, actions and interactions — who knows how all those are called. We return. Sometimes many times over the year. It has become so clear that returning is a powerful tool to level out the hierarchy. If new people come in, they are immediately immersed in the established spirit. When we meet once, people are nice but they would never say the same things, they would never get involved in those amazingly open conversations about the performances they experienced. In the beginning, almost nobody spoke after the show, but a couple of months later, they have a lot to say. If we would not have come back, we would never have gotten to know. If we would not have come back, we would never have taken the risk of not being liked, of being criticized — and also the risk of being loved and missed.

Inta Balode, dance writer and curator, politician and performer, Latvia

The whole basis of a dance (interaction) is a mutual meeting which means learning the skills to read a partner — to know when interaction is invited and when its not and all the nuances in between. It is an active tuning, sensing, listening, what kind of dance does my partner want moment by moment. And accepting that each dance is totally different, what is welcome one day might not be the next. In that way we dance with respect for each others' boundaries and choices, no one is a possession or piece of furniture to be exploited.

Noel Perkins, Contact Improvisation facilitator, UK

The image of the posture that usually signalizes the Activist is something we easily recognize: an energetic person who leans forward, stretches upward, and raises his hand for justice, freedom and independence. Many times the stereotypical activist is a young and angry man, running, screaming, shouting, even throwing stones. Adding on to that, leaning forward and running is a usual daily posture for many of us, running to catch up with time. And further something that not all of us have experienced: leaning forward, running for our lives, running to leave something impossible behind. While running, we forget the space we pass through, and we forget to relate to the people around us. While fleeing, space and people might no longer exist.

Is there a way to act, and to move forward at a slower pace, and without the goal set only into the future? Is there a body posture which can be positioned in past tense, presence and in the future at the same time?

I am proposing an ongoing co-creative performance, which means that we will all perform a slow walk together wherever we are in the world. This slow walk has a name – suriashi. Suriashi is a method for acting, to act in traditional Japanese theatre and dance.

How:

I bend my legs, I tilt my pelvis, and I lean backwards. I put one foot in front of the other, and walk without lifting my feet. This is a very different posture than the young male activists. We will walk together, we will not lean forward, we will not project our bodies out in space. We will instead lean back in time and reflect on who we are, and where we have been, and who walked here before us, we will acknowledge our ancestors. It is a walk that reminds us of its historical background, its mythological origin, and last but not least: its utopian potential, the portrayal of nonhumans, spirits, and ghosts, and the psycho-physical space to acknowledge your ancestors while leaning back.

Who is walking behind you, who was here before you?

Ami Skånberg Dahlstedt, choreographer of mortal monuments, Sweden

If I look at the ocean for long enough, I see beauty, order, chaos, a force that cannot be controlled for very long. I feel softness, and danger. Each water molecule knows its work in the whole, but can't map out its specific journey. Weeds have the same effect. Japanese Knotweed can kill a forest. It propagates in three ways, ensuring its success. Rhizomatic structures are exciting because they show the determination and perseverance and infinite possibilities of branches and pathways. Postmodern movement improvisation taught me this. Each person in the laboratory is a weed, a molecule, a jellyfish. We learn to invest fully into our individual work and research, examining occasionally the work of the others around us. Then and only then, are we strong enough to lean into the future and create the society in which we wish to live. And just like the branches and pathways, we can live with many solutions as long as we work with care.

Deborah Black, theatre and dance artist, Viewpoints teacher, poet, USA

Too often, the easiness of simply looking from one perspective wins out & much of what is there remains unseen by the beholder. Everyone experiences this when an object cannot be found: by looking from higher up, or from a completely different angle, the sought-after thing becomes visible. As a visual artist, one of my goals is to make viewers have to look twice, look from a different angle, open a book to any given page. There is too much staring straight ahead going on, often at screens. Hopefully, the person will then set forth with this idea & gaze at an installation from various angles, walk in & out of a screening of 16mm works that have no clear beginning or end, that are series of images that make their own dynamic by following the work that is the case. The painting/collage on paper works with any side being the top & is turned every once in while. The slide collage has 8 sides since it can work, taking advantage of the qualities of transparency, flipped over. (see deborahsp.wordpress.com)

The advantage of growing up with alphabets in more than direction might not always be clear to those who aren't familiar with that approach to left & right, right & left. A page can meet in the middle. It can be constantly turned, around and around.

Deborah S. Phillips, visual artist, Berlin

empower conscience and depower ego
 empower grace by losing authority
 empower freedom by letting go
 empower respect and depower humiliation
 empower responsibility and depower lack of interest
 empower diversity and depower racism
 empower truth by challenging the status-quo
 empower justice by enabling trust
 empower hope by enabling compassion
 empower truth by challenging corruption
 empower freedom and depower mind control
 empower talent and depower hunger
 empower skill and depower poverty
 empower values and depower fashion
 empower wisdom and depower ignorance
 empower simplicity and depower lust
 empower inspiration and depower intimidation
 empower happiness and depower suffering
 empower love and depower hate

Momin uz Zaman, thinker, writer, social observer and researcher, Pakistan

To be able to solve unexpected problems quickly – through improvisation – is a valuable survival skill. An improvisation can be seen as creative navigation in an ever-changing space of possibilities. In my practice-based research, I have over a number of years experimented with tools for navigating such spaces, by improvising on carefully designed unstable chaotic generative music systems. From this, a number of strategies have emerged to deal with upcoming situations.

The naive approach is the good old trial and error, but it can be refined into performance patterns such as probe and react, find and rest, explore and contemplate (what you have before you lose it). Or ponder and vary, discover and exploit, or possibly even: go to the limit and jump ship.

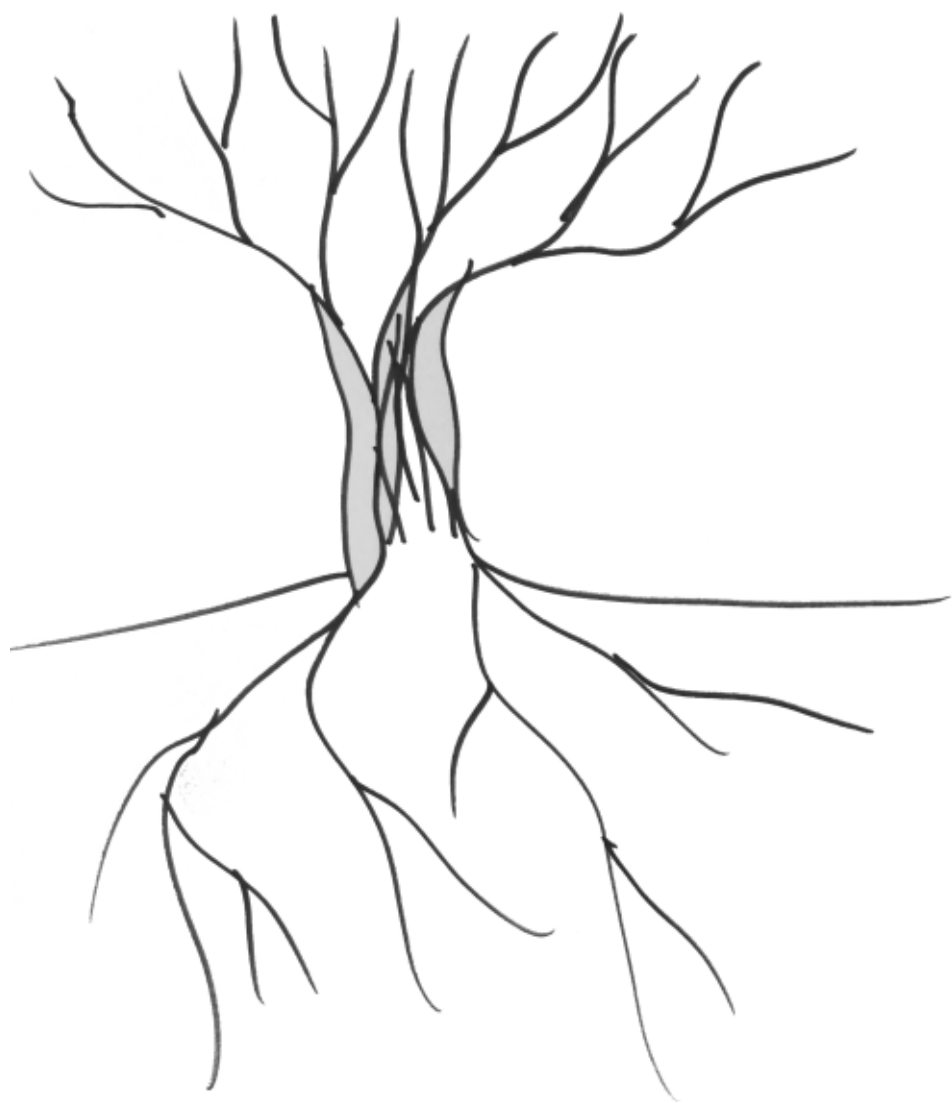
Palle Dahlstedt, composer, improviser, pianist and researcher, Sweden

I was invited to contribute to this in a transition between projects and countries, quite deterritorialized, between a collaborative project with an African American artist in New York (myself as a pakeha or European New Zealander, living in Berlin) exploring embodied states of breath/lessness in a climate of surveillance and political overwhelm, often immersive with the audience, and Berlin, where I am preparing to curate and facilitate a performance residency in the Indian countryside for 6 weeks. I am always present to the context from which I am speaking in an aim for transparency and self-contextualization. Caught between places, projects and selves, the depowerment manifesto brings my attention to my motivations as an art practitioner in a neoliberal climate.

In activating spaces for political topics to be confronted via a roller coaster of emotions and layers of ideas, the aim of my work is to generate authentic responses, which are not necessarily tidy, to empower people to think and feel genuinely for themselves. In activating immersive works which are political and philosophical in intent, through both strong imagery and guided audience interactivity, the space for intimacy, connection, exchange and sharing is generated. It is a risky space, because people have been conditioned to know their place even in performance. But it is one in which shared emotion enables people to feel a communal understanding of issues facing us collectively and individually today. The barrier between people is broken down on difficult topics. This work is the opposite of Television and expects agency from an audience, so it may seem alienating or even confronting to begin, while it is merely activating the honesty implicit in realizing how much power we actually have together, a power which is not about power over, but a “depowerment”. With a responsibility to this.

With relational work, audiences are implicated as a community, not within a spectacle of separation, and with that implication, particularly within the frame of political work, it can seem confrontational, but actually it is largely empowering and most audiences respond by sharing openly and being part of creating the work in a very activating and powerful way. Because if it is a space held in which they feel liberated (and can laugh also), then anything is actually possible.

Alexa Wilson, performer and visual artist, New Zealand



regarding a depowerment manifesto

by Nicole de Bouvrie

I would like to write something that is true. Beyond all measure. Beyond worlds. That whoever sees it, or reads it, or hears it - to consider and think 'it is true'. But is that even something you can think? Is it something one would ever think, unless asked to think precisely that? And what does it mean, if someone considers something true?

Am I asking again about art as representation and why I want to write and why the fish that swims in the pond does not write but sometimes jumps so that he is all above the water and falls back with a loud splash and am I stuck in my own world?

I don't care anymore.

[This is my privilege talking.]

[Privilege is having the opportunity to not care.]

[Can I just write that I don't care, if that is which is what I care about?]

Anything that cares, has something to lose. Can be controlled.

Can be overpowered.

This pain, of not wanting to care anymore, of wanting to truly make everything disappear so we can start again. Of knowing that every word, every pointing out, every care, is already reestablishing the structures that be.

Real change starts with yourself.

[Another lie they force-feed us. To make us reflect on our own life before we point a finger. But it is change that starts with a finger. The finger. Fingers on the keyboard. Fingers pointing at something. Fingers held up in the sky.

(Or one single finger.) Fingers into the eyes of the blind.]

I do care. I care too much. I... there is always this 'I' that gives everything an urgency. I want, I need, I lust, I care. I want to figure out this thought before I'm interrupted again. Before my body desires water. Before I need to pee. Before I fall asleep.

regarding a depowerment manifesto — 2

[The problems for humanity started when our waking hours became longer than the ones we let the unknown overpower us.]

Everyone wants to be heard. To be liked. To keep up appearances. To pretend that people care about them. So they care, for their own sake. They care to keep it all in place. Whoever has something to lose, will try to keep it. Even if it is pain. Even if it is money.

[Why mention money here? Why is it obvious that people don't want to give up money? When did money become us? Why not sacrifice our self beyond a point that we can figure out what this 'self' is to begin with.]

And still I care. Deeply.

This is supposed to be a depowerment manifesto.
To manifest depowerment.

[Mani-fest, of course some Latin word that makes us trace etymologies.
We have nothing better to do. Language frames us even when we have no clue.
We can never have a clue, even when we think we do.]

[Manus, hand. Festina? To do. Do something with your hand. Make something.
Or a gesture. A gesture to pretend, to make a sign towards something. Slowly, because who can think of the word festina without lente? Which is the Dutch word for spring, but the Latin word for slow. And they say this is unrelated, but I don't believe anything 'they' say. 'They' don't exist, I have asked and nobody is part of this 'they'. And what is slower than spring, when the snow lies thick on the roofs of the houses and on the pond and the fish might as well all be dead.
Schrödinger's fish.]

[Perhaps it is not Latin at all. Perhaps Mani is that old Norse God of the Moon.
And festo a feast, a Moon festival. A shining brightly when everything is dark.]

[I don't even know what to say about that other word. How can I imagine something that is not? That is de- ? Derailed, demade, dedone, delived?
It is not undone. It is not redone. It is de- ? But is this Latin again?]

regarding a depowerment manifesto — 3

[De-, as down, down from, from, off, concerning...]

[Am I allowed to de-construct de-power mani-fest? Who allows me? Are words allowed to say anything, or am I making them do what I want them to do? Is it language that creates thought in my mind, or can I order the letters and sounds according to my own wish?]

I care so much, that language makes it impossible to even point out what this means. I care so much, that I don't care at all.

[Everything combined is also zero. That point in the middle that has no negative.]

Power + depower = zero.

[Zero cannot be manifested. It is the absence of manifestation.]

[Depowering is not important, in the end, because if we start caring for it, it becomes one more thing to depower.]

[To manifest it is to manifest the outcome.]

Wittgenstein was somewhat right. We need to be silent.

[Not because we cannot speak about what cannot be said. Not at all.

This is why he was only somewhat right.]

[We need to be silent to speak the truth about depowerment.]

[We need to be silent in order to manifest the zero.]

[Without the need.]

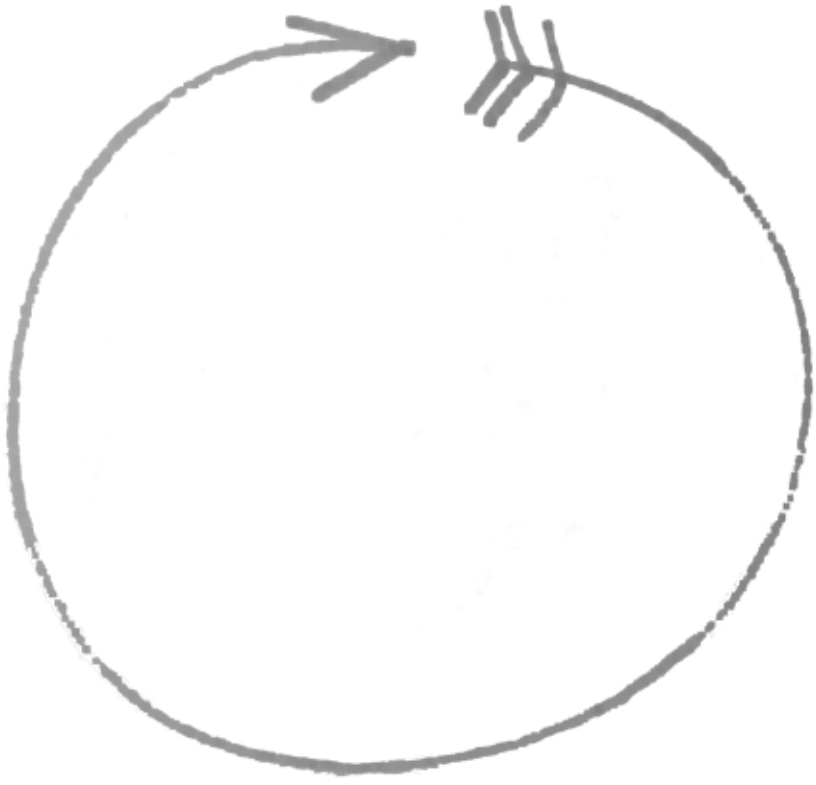
[Without the we.]

[Without the in order to.]

[Without the hand that is involved in the manifest.]

Depowerment is the celebration of the moon, who is only visible because she has the power to reflect another power. Without the sun, we could no longer see a moon. And that's okay. We only care as long as there is something to de-care for.

Nicole des Bouvrie, female philosopher, the Netherlands



trust the circle

share your vision

sHARe YOUr WAY OF dEPOWERMENT ONLINE or
iNVITE mE TO WITNESS YOUR INTerPRETATION
OF THis DEPoWERMENt MANiFESTo.

You are very welcome to share your view, your perspective,
the scenery you find on your way to the free flow of power for all.
There will be meetings to enact, embody and / or interpret
this manifesto. If you want to organize a meeting in your environment,
get in contact through the website.

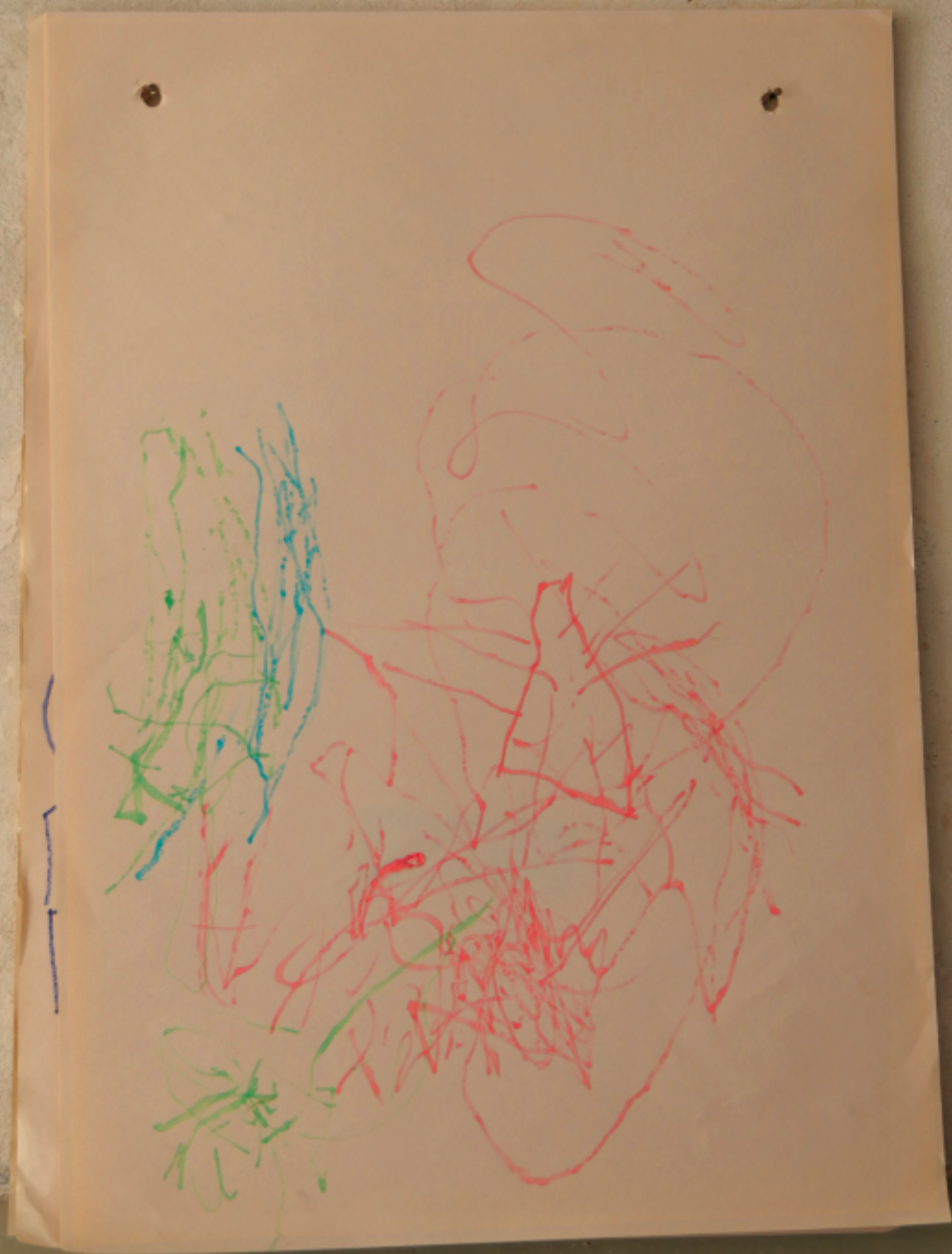
Here, you can also share your experience, documentation,
observations, suggestions, and reflections:

<http://www.depowerment.org>

to do list

- [illegible]





The word DEPOWERMENT is not commonly used.
It might not even exist, officially.

(Who decides that?)

The word disempowerment does exist, though,
signifying that specific (groups of) people are
blocked from accessing power. In contrast,
you can only depower people or structures
that have accumulated a surplus of power
in relation to their surroundings.

The depowerment of the individualized being
is the empowerment of the connected being.

And it can be realized through our imagination.