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COVER SHEET

Bodies in Transition

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Abstract:

The research project BODIES IN TRANSITION (2023-2024) searches for sensitive and collaborative bodies of the future by interlacing voices and materials from the Wadden Sea into a cosmology of plants, animals, bacteria, humans and planets. In the context of global crises, which appear as symptoms of a patriarchal and hierarchical self-understanding of human existence, three performers travel to the island of Sylt (Germany) to relearn ‘being’ in this more-than-human-world. Performative research is undertaken in the protection zone 1, the Morsum cliff and the mudflats near Munkmarsch. These dynamic ecosystems, with their tidal rhythms dictated by the moon and sun and their diverse life forms, ranging from Japanese berry seaweed to Pacific oysters, make the world’s processualism perceptible and remind us that our lives are intertwined with dynamic ecosystems. The performers immerse themselves in a fluid space of video, sound, natural materials, and performance, rethinking and questioning the diverse relationships between the organisms of the Wadden Sea and their own state as living beings. The leading question of this research is what we can learn from this dynamic interplay, to transform our existence with planet Gaia and all its organisms into a sensitive and resilient future.

Keywords:

ecology, transition, gaia, embodiment, performance, water

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Page description: A collection of images, videos and text arranged on a white background. The images and videos are different sizes and separate from one another, they fit together irregularly to form a tightly arranged rectangular page, which resembles a large poster. The text is mostly accessible in blocks and columns but at times, where directly related, it overlays the images. Although the format encourages scrolling over the image material, the text follows a sequence flowing from the top left to bottom right corner of the page.

How can we transform our bodies with the organisms in the mudflats in mutual care and sensitivity to form collective, resilient bodies?

Bodies in Transition

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Image description: A dark, organic form with hair-like texture lies half on the sand, half in the shallow water at the edge of the surf. Small waves surround the object, which resembles a shed body part, a living being, or possibly a marine plant.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3015256 to see the image.

The research project ***BODIES IN TRANSITION (2023-2024)*** is searching for sensitive and collaborative bodies of the future. Against the context of current global crises (the climate crisis, wars, pandemic, violence and precarisation), which appear to us as symptoms of a patriarchal and hierarchical self-understanding of human existence, we set out to the island of Sylt, into the Wadden Sea, to unlearn this self-understanding: to become fluid and to connect with Gaia, in order to learn from her agents. These experiences and encounters were arranged in the performance *MESOKOSMOS: Performing Bodies in Transition*.

This exposition can be understood as a research map in which we unfold traces, embodiments, and encounters to bring them into contact with each another.

With the expression ‘mapping,’ we do not refer to a fixed cartographic system but to an unfolding process: performative, relational and temporal. Like a map being opened through movement, our performative research generates situated coordinates that hold ecological, corporeal and sonic dimensions. These mappings are not linear but layered, resonating with the multiple temporalities we encountered: geological, tidal, somatic and affective. In this sense, mapping becomes a mode of sensing and composing within what Bruno Latour has termed the ‘Critical Zone’ (2018, 2020). With the term ‘mapping,’ we refer to a performative

and embodied method of orientation in landscape: less a cartographic record than a situated sensing of relations, resonances and temporalities.

In our context, ‘performativity’ refers to embodied acts of sensing and knowing, that do not illustrate existing concepts but bring up relational knowledge through doing. Drawing on perspectives from performance studies and artistic research, we understand performativity as a mode of engaging with material, temporal and ecological forces in ways that are affective, situated and co-constitutive. The body is not a neutral tool but a sensing participant in the becoming of knowledge: responsive, permeable and always in transformation. This is connected to the ideas explored by Jens Hauser and Lucie Strecker, in their article ‘On Microperformativity’ (2020) where the authors describe practices that do not merely produce representations but act directly upon the world through embodied, metabolic, and symbiotic processes.

Water is a connecting means of communication between bodies, places, elements and thoughts. Water permeates bodies, flows through and transforms from here to there, from now to the same, from warm to cold, from cell to cell. Water enables transitions from body to body to body. The physical properties of this element allow us to think of all bodies as shared water, shared knowledge and a sensitive body of community.

Sound brings the waters into resonance and form. Our resonances with the waters, the humming, whistling, rushing, chirping tones allow us to become a chorus of Gaia’s organisms. The movement of the water, the song of mud crabs, the immersion of our hands in the mudflats, the berry seaweed in the waves, the wind. All the movements of Gaia as a choreography.

In her book *Bodies of Water. Posthuman Feminist Phenomology* (2017), cultural theorist and hydrofeminist Astrida Neimanis focuses on water as a connecting medium and invites readers to radically rethink their bodies and understand them as fluid entities that mix, transform, flow and are always in the process of becoming. Neimanis claims that ‘we are bodies of water’ and that ‘changing how we think about bodies means changing how we think about water’ (Neimanis 2017: 19). Understanding one’s own body as a watery entity that communicates with other bodies of water—exchanges, is intertwined, is changed—strongly influenced our research and our stay on Sylt, surrounded by water and more water. One of the greatest challenges of the project was to move between the discrepancy of the touristy, fish- and oyster-devouring everyday life, the sober systematics of marine research and our own experiments wading into the mudflats under a full moon. Sticking to Neimanis’s ‘experimental investigations’ (2017: 24), which are inspired by Maurice Merlau-Ponty, we pause before putting the oyster, our aquatic companion, to our lips to change the way we treat the more-than-human-life that surrounds us. ***Bodies in Transition*** should be understood as an attempt to encounter, to question, to allow ourselves to be surrounded and changed.

From this perspective, we as human life forms can learn to act as ecological agents within the Critical Zone.

In his conceptualization of the Critical Zone, Latour refers to the narrow and fragile layer of Earth. ‘The Critical Zone is this narrow layer of a few kilometers where life is possible, where everything happens’ (Latour 2020: 99).

It is just a few kilometres thick and in there all life takes place. This zone, ranging from the

treetops to the groundwater, is not merely a geophysical layer but a deeply political space. It encompasses the complex interactions between soil, air, water, organisms, and technologies. Latour suggests that in the Anthropocene, we must shift our attention from abstract global perspectives toward the grounded, entangled conditions of terrestrial life.

Our artistic research can be understood as a practice of 'landing' within this Critical Zone: by engaging with the elements of mud, water, wind and microorganisms, we seek to reposition the human body as a responsive and resonating participant within Earth's interconnected processes. As Latour writes, 'we have to land somewhere. […] We are not living on the globe, we are entangled in the Critical Zone' (Latour 2018: 83f). The mudflats, in this sense, become a performative terrain of planetary entanglement.

The Critical Zone paradigm invites us to think ecologically and relationally. Rather than viewing the Earth from a detached perspective, Latour's framework draws attention to the immediate, embodied, and interdependent conditions of life. This resonates with our somatic practices in the Wadden Sea, where we engage not only with symbolic meaning, but with actual material agencies: mud, water, oysters, microorganisms, tides. Our bodies become situated, entangled and responsive to the forces of the Critical Zone.

In various try-outs, we went out onto the mudflats. In addition to the protection zone 1 in which Laura performed, we found two more places for performative research. Anja explored the Morsum Cliff and Marko immersed himself in the mudflats near Munkmarsch.

The cosmological time scale of ebb and flow, and the exposed geological time of the Morsum Cliff taught us to think in terms of connections – through the water in the bodies of Gaia: our cells, the dewdrops on the cliff, the singing of the wind, the immersion in the mud. Water, as a constantly transforming element—from rain to cloud, to the sea, to the river, to us, seeping into the Earth's layers—is omnipresent and invisible at the same time. As we lost track of time, we forgot that water connects us to everything. The water that shaped the stone at the Morsum Cliff, the water that draws the sand ripples in the mudflats, the water-film between the claws of the mud shrimp. The water that flows through the body of the oysters was at some point in us or will flow through us again.

Image description: A curving, shallow stream of water cuts through the wet sediment of the mudflats. Reflections of the sky on the water surface emphasize the calm, open landscape and sand formations. The lighting is bright and diffuse.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3009089 to see the image.

Sound Ecologies

On the basis of these sounds, we experimented with developing sonic spaces and sonic ecological structures, placing particular emphasis on assigning each sonic element its own space in the frequency spectrum. In *The Soundscape. Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*, R. Murray Schafer, the founder of classical sound ecology, emphasizes that ecosystems with little human sound influence are hi-fi and high-resolution (Schafer 1977: 43).

We can test this when we stand in the mudflats: if there is no strong wind filling the entire listening space, we can hear very precisely and very far, because each element has its own tonal ‘location’ in the sense of frequency occupancy—layered through geological time.

In a heavily populated city, by contrast, the soundscape is often much less balanced, with urban infrastructure such as road traffic occupying broad sections of the frequency spectrum. These insights guided our compositional work with recordings from the field, electronic textures and the human voice.

In addition to this spatial dimension, our research was concerned with rhythm—as the mode of interaction between elements. We focused on how the sonic components can unfold their own temporality, while still interacting rhythmically. This may occur through mere simultaneity or through responsive triggering, like a full moon initiating a mating ritual. Thus emerged a set of sound ecologies, resonant fields of co-temporality—where multiple time signatures coexist, intersect, and attune to each other.

Video description: A short video (3.20) opens with a close-up of an open mouth, lips shaped into an oval. The wind whistles audibly through the mouth cavity, causing shifting tones as its form subtly changes. A person is seen bubbling in a shallow puddle of coastal water. The visuals alternate rhythmically between the vibrating mouth and the bubbling soundscape. A thin strand of saliva blows in the wind. Whistling, bubbling and the scratchy sound of sand on fabric blend into an immersive audio experience. The screen fills with undulating sand textures, wave-like patterns formed by wind. In the distance, a lone figure appears on the shoreline. The viewer is drawn into a sensory experience that evokes the taste of salt and the feeling of sand and wind against skin.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3040207 to watch the video.

Human Voice

In the medium of sound, participation, mixing and sharing between human and non-human actors is fundamentally laid out: we resonate with each other, are set in vibration. The sound space is never separate from us; it is the medium we are entangled with. Our voice returns to us, modulated by the surfaces and atmospheres it encounters.

The polyphonic structure of such ecologies evoked for us the image of a chorus: not in the classical sense of harmonic unison, but as theatre scientist Ulrike Haß describes it: a figuration of the plural body, ‘held together only by the breath they share’ (Haß 2016: 19). In our sound experiments, we began to understand these more-than-human compositions as such plural breath bodies, shaped by tidal time, sediment resonance and vocal modulation.

To deepen this exploration, we invited classical singer Kerstin Pohle to collaborate with us both in field research and studio settings. While our early expectations were not yet precise, the voice experiments proved revealing. Her trained voice filtered through electronic textures and embedded in the muddy soundscapes; it oscillated between clarity and dissolution. The voice did not dominate the ecology; it was folded into it, becoming a sonic body among many.

Image description: Image description: A hand holds large, wet, green leaves of sea lettuce against the backdrop of a shallow coastal landscape at sunset. The water glows in warm light. It is low tide.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3801087 to see the image.

Reflexion: Sound Ecologies as More-than-Human Vibrations

In sonic ecologies, listening becomes a form of attunement. Each vibration generated by crabs, tides, wind, or voice situates itself within a frequency mesh that is not random, but historically, materially, and ecologically composed. Our experience on the tidal flats resonates with Murray Schafer's notion of hi-fi soundscapes, where every sound has space to unfold: when the wind paused, the land spoke in detail. Crackles, clicks, distant gulls each sound claimed its acoustic niche, its ecological pitch.

But sound is not only a spatial phenomenon; it is also temporal. Following Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of rhythm not as metric regularity, but as the emergent patterning of difference and the marking of territoriality through expressive qualities (1987: 313), we began to perceive sonic ecologies as assemblages of time. A mudflat chorus, a delayed echo, a triggered mating call: these are not isolated events, but expressive thresholds, rhythmically deterring and reconfiguring territories of perception.

Our engagement with sound thus became an act of deterritorialization: unsettling the fixed roles of emitter and receiver, human and non-human, composition and resonance. The tidal flat became a plane of immanence where sounds, crab clicks, water pulses, oyster vibrations marked territories not by ownership, but by vibration. In this ecology, rhythm is not imposed from above, but arises from the relational logic of bodies becoming attuned.

In composing with field recordings, voice and electronics, we explored not how to overlay sounds, but how to let them listen to one another. The oyster reef did not require accompaniment; it demanded room to reverberate. The human voice was not central, but porous: shaped by the air, refracted by the surroundings and modulated by the more-than-human.

These constellations of sound and body began to coalesce into something else: a chorus, but not a harmonious unison. The sounds we worked with—voices, oysters, crabs, tides—formed a figuration of the plural body (Haß 2016: 22): a collective that never becomes one, but pulses with difference.

When Neimanis writes of bodies as resonant hydrologies: fluid, echoing, and always becoming (2012: 85), the same might be said of voice in sound ecologies. It is never singular, but already plural: bouncing back, distorted, absorbed. The sonic body becomes a membrane, a confluence.

In sound ecologies, the self is no longer a source but a receiver. To sound is to be sounded. To listen is to vibrate together. To be part of a shared breath.

The Geotope Morsum Cliff: Into the Depths of Time

SCORE FOR THE MORSUM CLIFF

Communicate with the sand. Touch each other. Travel in time to where the sand came from. How does it resonate in your body?

Morsum Cliff is a geological window that reveals the processes of time (sedimentation, erosion, tectonic activity) and makes them visible in the rock and the entire geotope. In contrast to this, we find the strong influence of man on the island through dikes, landscaping and construction. Land is scarce here and in great demand. Every year, the island becomes smaller at its edges.

Thinking in terms of deep time relativizes this understanding of landscape as a commodity and image. In the research for ***BODIES IN TRANSITION***, we tried to get in touch with deep time and thus to experience ourselves in a different relationship to Gaia.

Image description: The crumbling edge of Morsum Cliff reveals visible layers of soil and rock. Loose stones are scattered down the slope, and sparse vegetation clings to the surface.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3015491 to see the image.

When we look out from the solid ground of the island onto the open sea and the sometimes slippery mudflats, we are automatically confronted with the forces of nature. Wind and waves, the sea comes and goes in its rhythm. The tides automatically make us think of time in broad sweeps, in geological and cosmological dimensions. The moon determines the times of ebb and flow, and their constantly shifting rhythm. This rhythm was our guide in the research. A cosmological understanding of time allows us to look further and further into the past and teaches us humility when considering the significance of human beings.

> What we obviously lack culturally is an ecology of time. The maxim at all levels should be: deceleration, slowing down, pause. (...) We have to learn time elasticity in order to constantly redefine our goals. (von Lüpke 2020: n.p.)

Video description: The video (3.36) begins with a camera gliding slowly across the red rock formations of Morsum Cliff, revealing fragile, jagged stone structures with visible sediment layers and darker mineral inclusions. A low, distant rumble fills the soundscape. A hand enters the frame and gently traces a raised line across the rock surface, as if reading the layers like a geological archive. Despite the delicate touch, grains of sand break loose, revealing the stone's vulnerability. The textures are dry, brittle, and full of fissures. Later, a figure wrapped in white fabric lies still in front of the cliff, echoing the rock's fractured structure. In the final moments, birds can be heard faintly in the background.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3040431 to watch the video.

«The soft, red, almost flowing sand crumbles under my feet and hands. I hardly dare to act here with my body in this fragile geotope. I see the vandalism in the rock: A+C, Love and other initials have been carved into the vulnerable stone. My hand runs over the stone. The wind has worked its way into the rock, forming hundreds of fine grooves. Birds fly back and forth incessantly from the small caves, which are about 3–15 cm in size. A spiderweb on the rock. Roots digging through the sandstone. I slide down – I seek the connection – the red, the age, the water in the rock – the life.» (Anja about her experiences with the geotop)

Image description: A person, fully wrapped in white fabric, leans forward with their upper body pressed against the reddish rock of Morsum Cliff. The scene evokes a sense of vulnerability and contemplation.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3801085 to see the image.

Reflections from Morsum Cliff: Stratified Time, Eroded Agency

At Morsum Cliff, the Earth has folded time open. Marine clay, iron-rich sandstone, and kaolin sands, layers spanning up to eight million years, have been thrust up to the surface by glacial movement. Here, geology writes itself in exposed strata and time is no longer abstract, but sedimented.

In this layered archive, we found ourselves confronting the fragility of material history. The site, eroded by wind, rain and human vandalism, resisted our touch. We hesitated. How to engage with a landscape that dissolves even as we approach it?

Instead of inscribing ourselves into the cliff, we listened. The sand crumbling under our feet, the wind entering our mouths, the birds nesting in hollowed stone. Our bodies were transformed with all this information, in resonance, in being and listening with Gaia. We had entered the Critical Zone: that thin, unstable surface where life, matter, and atmosphere interact. But here, this zone felt precarious, worn down, commodified, endangered.

The red sand we touched was once seafloor. Its water still circulates through clouds, tides, and blood. Echoing Neimanis, we sensed that ‘matter remembers’—and that our bodies, as ‘bodies of water,’ are part of these circulations (Neimanis 2017: 2).

The body at Morsum became sediment-sensitive: attuned to weight, erosion, and depth. In place of mastery, we practiced vulnerability. If Gaia is not a stable home but a dynamic composition, then performance here is not a claim, but correspondence.

To stand on Morsum Cliff is to feel one’s scale collapse: not just in time, but in agency. The cliff does not need us. And yet, by standing here, we become part of its ongoing refiguration.

Image description: A hand gently reaches through fine green dune grass. A drop of water is visible on one finger. The background shows reddish-yellow sand, and the light appears warm.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3015493 to see the image.

The Oyster Reefs in Protection Zone 1: Learning Resilience

Video description: The video (3.22) starts with the view of a person crouching low in the shallow waters of the Wadden Sea at dusk. The figure wears a shimmering blue garment. The tide has retreated, revealing a wide reef of Pacific oysters scattered across the tidal flat. The person gently touches the oysters, slowly establishing contact with their body. Their gestures are careful, almost reverent. The atmosphere is calm and intimate, accompanied by distant bird calls, the soft movement of wind, and subtle underwater sounds. The moon appears behind a veil of clouds, casting silver reflections on the water's surface. Later, a close-up reveals the iridescent, layered inner structure of a Pacific oyster shell under the microscope – glowing with rainbow hues. The scene then returns to the person interacting with the oysters, followed again by the moon. The sequence is enveloped in quiet stillness and nocturnal light.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3040340 to watch the video.

In **the protection zone 1**, in the north of the island of Sylt, we were particularly interested in the reefs of the Pacific oyster: an invasive species that has transformed the entire ecosystem in a short time. The breeding of Pacific oysters, an alien species, began on Sylt for culinary reasons in the 1960s, because the local oyster stocks had been almost completely wiped out by overfishing. At that time, it was assumed that this species would not be able to spread independently in the cold North Sea. However, just a few years later, the Pacific oyster, which reproduces very quickly, began to settle in suitable places in the open Wadden Sea. Many areas originally settled by mussels. The initial assumption that the Pacific oyster would displace the mussels would be refuted. The two species live in coexistence and the oyster reefs also form habitats for other organisms.

> The mussel reef is closely interlinked with the surrounding area. The filtering of the water is linked to the environment of the oyster. It releases cilia-filaments, which accumulate and are used by other organisms. The habitat is structured by the oyster reefs and provides a habitat for other species, such as the Japanese seaweed. The mudflats are like a spider's web – everything is connected. (Annika Cornelius, marine biologist at the Alfred Wegener Insitut Sylt, from an unpublished interview with the authors)

The Japanese oysterweed was able to establish itself so well on the mudflats because it can

use the oyster for attachment. Inside the hard oyster shell, which could almost be mistaken for a stone, lives an extremely resilient creature that has existed for over 200 million years.

> Marine animals have survived the dinosaurs, comet impacts, ice ages, and every episode of global warming—and they certainly nourished the first humans. (…) As early as the Triassic period, which began around 251.9 million years ago, oysters could already be found worldwide. Their scientific name is Gryphaea, and fossilized remains are still discovered in fields and high up in the mountains— even in the Bavarian Alps, up in the Karwendel region (…). Oysters are older than the mountains themselves. Back in the Triassic, the world was still united in one supercontinent called Pangaea. Only later did seas and mountains form—and oysters witnessed it all. (Ammer 2022: 89–90, author's translation)

This ancient knowledge of the resilience of oysters is another reason for choosing the organism and the oyster beds in protection zone 1 for our performative research. One reason for this resilience is their ability to build their own reefs. The animals can reproduce unhindered and, due to their almost concrete-like clumping ability, the oysters can escape commercial use. This resistant quality and the fact that oysters resist easy commodification due to their tendency to cluster together, became another aspect of learning from the oyster. To harvest them as individual shells, farmers must physically separate them every day to prevent them from fusing into solid reef structures.

Image description: A large, partially opened oyster shell lies on fine, light-coloured sand. The surface is irregular and shows traces of deposits and marine life.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3018432 to see the image.

The oyster filters around 240 litres of water a day. This connects its vulnerable, soft body with the environment. The oyster digests everything that passes through its cilia and filters out what it can use as food.

What we also found interesting about the oyster as an organism is that it can change its sex several times in its life. Neimanis suggests that the water constantly flowing through her might enable comparable transformations:

> As it works its way down the esophagus, through the blood, the tissues, and to the index finger, the clavicle, and the left plantar fascia, it ensures that our being is always a becoming. An alchemist at once profoundly wondrous and entirely banal, water guides a body from young to old, from here to there, from potentiality to actuality. (Neimanis 2012: 52).

Our bodies should also learn from this transformative potential and be allowed to change in the same way, becoming a fluid and resilient being.

The transformative power of sex change not only flows through the Pacific oyster, but it also flows through streams of power, culture and economy. It is therefore not only an ecological research object on the island, but through Germany's only oyster farm, Dittmeyer's Oyster

Company, it is also a symbol of luxury and power. Champagne and oysters belong to Sylt and its beach restaurants, like cheese fondue belongs to Switzerland. Those who can afford it show it with champagne and oysters. Eating oysters has become a gesture of superiority. The encounter between man and oyster takes place here on the plate of the noble restaurants. This gesture of superiority over nature could not be more archaic and at the same time more inconspicuous, because after all, we are eating the animals alive. The oyster is closely linked to the development of humans; the first human-like skull bones found were dated using oyster shells. We celebrate oysters with a glass of champagne, as we possibly owe our development to them, as a protein-rich food.

Image description: An extreme close-up of a layered, iridescent surface showing moist, crystalline patterns; a microscopic view of the structure of an oyster shell.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3801079 to see the image.

Reflections from the Oyster Reef: Temporal Bodies, Fluid Sovereignty

In the shallow tidal basin of protection zone 1, we approached the Pacific oyster not just as an organism, but as a structure of time. Within its shell accumulates a history of resilience, its ancestry reaching back to the Triassic, its present entangled in human cuisine, its future uncertain in warming seas.

As we performed, the reef resisted our presence. It neither fled nor fought: it simply continued filtering.

When Neimanis reminds us that ‘our being is always a becoming’ (2012: 96), for the oyster, this is literally so: it changes sex, cycles nutrients, refuses static identity. What if we read its life not as an exception but as a proposition? To become-with the oyster is to think transformation not as rupture, but as rhythm.

Biologist Lynn Margulis’s evolutionary vision of symbiosis finds new resonance here: ‘life did not take over the globe by combat, but by networking’ (Margulis and Sagan 1995: 15).

The oyster reef is not singular; it is a colony, an architecture of mutual embeddedness. Its existence alters water chemistry, invites algae, anchors other species. This webbed being complicates the notion of agency: action is distributed, slow, accretive.

The oyster metabolizes the sea. In our score, we imagined the body as filter, as interface, as resonator. We asked: what flows through us, unnoticed? What economies, ideologies, sediments?

And what does it mean that this ancient creature is now eaten alive on porcelain plates next to champagne flutes?

Performing at the reef meant confronting multiple scales: geological time, metabolic time, colonial time. The oyster is both kin and commodity. It reminds us that resilience is not robustness but relationality, the ability to persist by becoming-with.

Image description: An underwater image showing dense algae and small snails and mussels on a rock. The image is slightly blurred, and the water is greenish-blue and cloudy.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3018415 to see the image.

SCORE FOR THE PROTECTION ZONE 1

Let the movement of the water resonate in your body. Make yourself permeable – watery.
Your waters flow into the sea.

Image description: Translucent, gelatinous jellyfish rests among seaweed on sandy ground. Their soft, slippery bodies contrast with the darker textures of the algae.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3019279 to see the image.

«Who am I in this structure? Am I part of the greater whole? How do I relate to the 'we'? Do my thighs resemble bladderwrack? How many bacteria are cavorting on my skin? What do I want to transform myself into through my encounter with the oyster reef? How do I approach these creatures? They are not interested in my presence. I dare not step on their shells, shaped by the tides.» (Laura about her experiences with the Pacific oyster terrain)

Image description: A bright full moon shines through a veil of dark clouds. The scene feels mystical and dramatic.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3022900 to see the image.

The Mudflats at Munkmarsch: the Performing Bacteria

Video description: The video (3.55) begins with a shot of the tidal mudflats from above. At low tide, the water has fully receded, leaving a rugged surface of ridges and shallow channels where residual water collects. Green algae and plant matter are scattered across the mud. Ambient sounds include distant aircraft, wet suction sounds, seagulls, and breathing. As the camera descends, the mud surface begins to move and bubble. The sediment opens, and a human hand appears, emerging from the mud. Small mud crabs are visible in the hand. The camera moves closer, showing the crabs crawling through the dark grey sediment.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3040370 to watch

the video.

We first encountered the mudflats as a site for performative research through sound: specifically, through the crackling noise coming from the tidal ground. This acoustic phenomenon is caused by mud shrimps active at low tide. These organisms hold a thin film of water between their antennae, which, when displaced, produces a sharp clicking sound. A single animal remains inaudible, but with population densities reaching 1,000 to 5,000 individuals per square meter, the mudflat becomes a resonant field: a sonic mesh of clicking, burrowing life.

Mudflats differ from sandflats in their high water content, ranging from 50 to 70 percent. At low tide, one can walk across them, but only briefly: the porous terrain draws the body downward. With each step toward the open sea, the ground becomes less stable. The mud adheres to the skin, forming heavy, clumping layers.

Beneath the grey surface lies the black reduction zone, a strongly odorous sedimentary layer where anaerobic bacteria decompose organic remains—animal waste, dead plants, and microbial matter. This metabolic process includes the breakdown and remineralization of compounds containing sulphur and phosphorus, releasing gases and triggering further microbial activity (Kock 2015: 20ff).

Our interest in the mudflats was directed at both the mud shrimp and the many different bacteria that decompose the organic material. The connection between our body and the mudflats via the bacterial colonization was a thought experiment to set this special humus in the mudflats in relation to our bodies. The fact that the human body consists, to a not inconsiderable extent (there are a total of around 2 kilograms of bacteria), of other living organisms, and that these make our existence possible, is often ignored. We therefore found the relationship between the colonization of our intestines and the mudflats an interesting micro-perspective. There is some overlap between the bacteria that live in our intestines and on our skin and those that occur in mudflats: ‘Clostridium species can be found in both the human gut and in mudflats, thriving under anaerobic conditions’ (Webster et al. 2007: 78–79).

In the gut, these bacteria are involved in the fermentation of fibre and the production of short-chain fatty acids. In mudflats, they break down organic material under anaerobic conditions. However, since the exact composition and dominance of the bacteria depend on the specific environmental conditions, we would have had to determine which bacteria exactly occur in Marko’s gut and the mudflats in Munkmarsch for a precise examination with samples. Speculatively, we assume that there are family relationships between Marko’s gut and the mudflats. (Kim 2013: 180-182).

Margulis’s most significant scientific achievement is her work on the **endosymbiosis theory**. This theory provides extensive evidence that all animals, fungi and plants originated from the symbiosis of primordial bacteria from which eukaryotes, i.e., living organisms with cell nuclei, developed. Only after that did sexual reproduction develop. Margulis’s central contribution to the Gaia hypothesis, which she developed in collaboration with James Lovelock, was the inclusion of deep time when tracing the system Earth back to its origins in the primeval biosphere. (Margulis and Sagan 2000: 30–34)

The performative exploration of the relationship between the mud and its organisms and Marko's own body, and the transformation of the human body through the impulses from the mudflats led to the choreography of Marko and the mud. Performer and cultural educator Andrea Olsen, whose work on performative scores influenced our research, marks the connection between evolutionary history and movement patterns:

> Just as we carry the saline solution of the ocean in our blood, our structure holds the possibilities of earlier forms of body symmetry. We can move asymmetrically, as in our early morning yawning and stretching, allowing our skin and proprioceptors to be our primary sense organs before the cerebral cortex (the newest portion of the brain) directs our awareness (Olsen 1991: 16).

She suggests breaking the dominance of the vertical posture with asymmetrical movement patterns and thus bringing the asymmetrical early structures that we still carry in our hearts, livers and other organs into movement. What Olsen calls the 'belly brain' and the movements around the solar plexus bring attention to bacterial-animal dimensions and enable the body to attune to interspecies relations through embodied empathy. In this way, compassion is not an abstract ideal, but a somatic response that emerges from sensing shared vulnerability. The body becomes critical and learns from its organisms and their movements in the mud. Hauser and Strecker describe how, by paying attention to the bacterial microprocesses and living things within us and the mudflats, we shift and destabilize the human scale, making the macroperspective all the more enigmatic.

> Within an ecological account of natural agency, bacteria are even said to partake in a 'cognitive turn in microbiology' considering that 'bacteria are purposive agents, and purposive agency is the mark of cognition' (Hauser and Strecker 2020: 3, quoting Fulda 2017).

SCORE FOR THE MUDFLATS IN MUNKMARSCH

Listen to the crackling of the mud shrimp. Imagine how your insides are connected from your mouth to your stomach, your large and small intestines, and to your anus. Move this connection and look for resonances in the mudflats.

Image description: Close-up of a thick, grey layer of tidal mud with textured, moist deposits. The surface appears dynamic and alive, with visible flow patterns.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3019282 to see the image.

Reflections from Munkmarsch: Becoming Mud, Becoming Many

In the tidal mud of Munkmarsch, choreography begins at the bacterial level. The thick black sediment, rich in decomposing matter, presses against the body, resisting and receiving. Buried within are microbial lives whose metabolic rhythms mirror those in our own gut. The score invites us to move from mouth to anus, tracing internal resonances outward into the mud.

Our performance did not stage this relation; it enacted it. Sinking, gasping, resisting the vacuum-like pull of the mud, the body became an osmotic interface: inside and outside blurred, as crustaceans crawled over skin and sulphur met breath.

The mud's water content is not background: it is medium and mediator. In the thick liquidity of Munkmarsch, we practiced hydrofeminist attention: tuning into the shared viscera of land and body, of microbial time and flesh.

Lynn Margulis's symbiogenetic worldview helps us reframe this encounter. What if this choreography is not metaphor but ancestral memory? If we are composed by the evolutionary logic of cohabiting bacterial communities, then the mud becomes kin. 'The individual is no longer seen as a singular entity, but as a community of microbial symbionts working together in dynamic interaction with their environment' (Margulis and Sagan 1995: 90).

Following Andrea Olsen, we allowed asymmetrical movement to disrupt vertical posture. We engaged with the 'belly brain'—a site of evolutionary memory that bypasses cerebral control. This made the body porous to forces not our own.

Hauser and Strecker speak of microperformativity as a destabilization of human scale. In Munkmarsch, scale was no longer spatial but metabolic. To move was to be moved by unseen agents. The performance shifted from intention to relation:

Not: What can I express here? But: What systems express through me?

Image description: A person with short hair is crouched low on the wet, muddy tidal flat. Their arms are supporting the body from the front, the head is lowered, and parts of the body are covered in mud. The posture appears animal-like and intensely physical.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3019295 to see the image.

«During the performance in the mudflats, I empty my mind. I feel the mud swelling between my toes. With every step, my legs sink deeper into the mud. My body is bent forward, my arms go into the mud—then my head. Cold and pressure affect my body—the mud – like a vacuum that surrounds the body and does not want to release it. Small crabs crawl on the body, while the cold takes your breath away. I try to transform myself into a being through my body tension and the sudden discharge through powerful, fast movements. To become one organism among many. An organism that rises and falls in the cycle of the tides, that transforms itself anew and withdraws into itself again.» (Marko about his experiences with the Schlickwatt)

Image description: Wet, dark tidal mud with small mud shrimps emerging from the surface. The texture is glossy and porous, evoking a microscopic or close-up view.

Click on https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/3008895/3008896#tool-3801083 to see the image.

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