

## **MUDvibes 28.11. - 03.12.2016**

A master course for art and design students from Finland, Russia, Belgium, and Brazil, coordinated by Pia Lindman

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### **Breathing as Sensing Space with Pauliina Jokela and Roberta Assy**

The experiment is a part of Pauliina Jokela's ongoing artistic project on the act of breathing and how it makes us feel connected. The experiment was implemented in the Sao Paulo biennale as a part of MUDvibes course with Pia Lindman, working in cooperation with Roberta Assy. During the experiment, the team aimed at creating a situation where a person could perceive and discover a connection with the surrounding space through focusing solely on her/his breathing.

The experiment had seven participants, who entered the experiment one at the time with the exception of one couple. The duration for each session was 30 minutes and they happened in three different spaces: In the mud hut by Pia Lindman, in a narrow non-space between a wall structure and a window and in an open crossing point in an exhibition hall. Participants were led to each space and asked to find a comfortable position, cover their eyes and focus on their breathing. In each space, the participants were introduced to different breathing methods or exercises, which helped them to find their natural rhythm of breathing. Each session was documented by recording, photographing and through interviews.

After the experiment the participants were asked the following three questions:

*1. How did the breathing feel like in each space, was there any difference between them?*

All participants agreed that breathing felt different in the different spaces. There were several factors that influenced focusing and perception, such as temperature, sounds, light, the physical moving between the spaces, if the space was open or closed and also the given breathing exercises. According to the participants, focusing and connecting with the space was easier to achieve in the mud hut than in the other spaces. They described the spaces as follows:

The mud hut

light and temperature were nice, comfortable, safe, protected, feeling like being under water, not focusing on the body, peaceful, meditative, energy floating easily and instantaneously, natural and easy to concentrate and experience even more breathing energy, i could feel myself better, I was

able to have a trip inside myself.

The narrow space

physically uncomfortable, more restless because of the sounds, light was hard, I could feel the walls around me and the ceiling above, it was more about the structure, harder to focus on breathing, too much noise.

The open space

The middle spot was too hard, more physical. The breathing exercise was quite strong; heat on chest, heat on head. I was standing still, so breathing was more deep. I could feel the entire building, not just this floor. It was like the growing thing, the mudhut, then the floor, then the entire building. Difficult to follow the instructions. I felt something in my ribs. It was very good, I forget to breathe sometimes. It was hard to breathe, desert, hot, maybe because of holding the breath.

*2. Was it possible to find a natural breathing rhythm in the situation and connect with the surrounding space?*

All of the participants were able to find their own breathing rhythm during the experiment, but how easily it was achieved depended on the space. Some said that the rhythm was changing during the experiment. In the mud hut, all the participants found their breathing rhythm easily. Since the space was closed, it created a womb-like feeling of safety. Also, in the mud hut the temperature was comfortable and there was no wind. Some said that there they felt the rhythm more deeply.

Some participants could also find their rhythm easily in other spaces with the help of the breathing exercises. Others found it harder to find, because of the noises and an awareness of the openness and the exhibition audience walking there.

Connecting with surrounding space was natural to some participants, but some did either not find a connection at all or did not feel strongly about it. One of the participants said that there was not so much connection with the space but she/he could definitely feel or sense it. The person felt that she/he might have connected with the surroundings more deeply if given more time.

*3. Was there any changes in the perception of space during these exercises?*

Observing the possible changes in perceiving the space was different for all the participants during the experiment. Some of them were more disturbed by noises in the exhibition hall, which

influenced their perception of the space. Some participants told that there might have been some changes in their perception of the space, but the changes were minor. One person said that she/he started to become aware of sounds in a different way. Another felt that she/he was able to enlarge her/himself with the surrounding space for the first time. One participant described the change in perception as follows: It is like related to bats; like they understand the space through ultrasounds, I understood it through breathing.

## Conclusions

Breathing, in all its simplicity, is the thing we all have in common. It is the basic human thing from within. This is probably the reason why the experiment became very intense and intimate with each participant. All the participants entered the experiment with great seriousness. Some of them described it as a meditative experience. Some mentioned they found a totally new way of perceiving space through breathing. All of the participants were also willing to discuss and share their experiences afterwards.

It was interesting to work in the biennale environment with people who were committed to the experiment. For this experiment we had relatively short time and a small take (7 participants). Still, it was interesting to see how the experiment demonstrated that by focusing on breathing there is a possibility for a person to reach a state of mind where she or he can feel more connected with the self and the surrounding space. It will be interesting to continue the project in other places and conditions.

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