

MUDvibes 2016 REPORT

Haptic Communication 1.12.2016 Sao Paulo Biennale
one-to-one studies of touching in darkness

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The participants were asked to take part to an experiment that studied what kind of knowledge is possible to transfer in the darkness merely by touch by two strangers. Talking was not allowed.

The experiment happened in the Biennale inside Pia Lindman's mudhut which was built for her work *Nose, Ears, Eyes*. It was a peaceful and closed environment to share an intimate moment. The participants were asked to step inside the hut using sleeping masks to block their vision during the whole experimentation. Salla Keskinen was waiting for every participant inside also wearing a mask, while Cecilia Rotenberg and Flora Tzanno were instructing participants, escorting them in and taking them out after 15 minutes. What happened inside was not a ready made choreography. It was up to every participant what would happen. Keskinen was reacting to that.

The information the participants got before going in was to feel free to touch each other and try to get to know each other. They also knew the gender of the person waiting for them. Also they were told they could leave at any time but try not to talk.

After the experiment every participant wrote answers to these questions in their own way. The participants were free to answer in Brazilian/Portuguese or English. Salla Keskinen also made notes inside after the meetings.

1. What kind of knowledge can you get from the other by touching?
2. Is it possible to see with hands?
3. Was it possible to communicate feelings through touch?
4. What did this experiment give you?

The texts had to be translated later so some inaccurate misunderstandings might have happened. Also some hand writings were hard to read and not everyone answered to all questions but gave more like an overall answer.

For question 1:

Many mentioned that they could get knowledge of bodily things like the warmth, texture of the skin, body shape, posture and age. But as many mentioned that they could feel emotions, personality and intensity. Also it was written that our bodies tell things that we might not even think of sharing, but can't hide in an interaction like this. It was also said that this kind of knowing is intuitive and very sensitive.

For question 2:

Everyone answered that it is possible to see with hands. Some said that it's even a better way of seeing, more precise. One participant wrote that with touch it is easier to understand the uniqueness of all bodies.

For question 3:

Everyone answered that it is possible to communicate feelings through touch. It was also written that it is also possible to produce feelings with touch. One participant wrote that touching is just another way of communicating and really sensible as such.

For question 4:

There were many different kind of answers. All of them were positive, though the strangeness of the situation was mentioned in one or two. Here are some things mentioned: it was challenging to be left alone with a strange person you didn't see, questions of trust and letting go had arisen, a notion of people living in a lack of touch and caress, feelings of peace, care, brotherhood, love, lightness, sensitivity, gentleness. Also some positive notions about having challenges to keep oneself stable.

All together there were 8 participants, of which 4 were men and 4 women. 6 of them were Brazilian and 2 foreigners. They were allowed to stay in for maximum 15 minutes, but nobody left before the time ended.

Skin is our biggest organ that gives a lot of input all the time, and still it is often an underrated sense. Touching each other is always a question of limits and borders of one-self and the other, about being under influence. Trying to sense what the other is experiencing is dealing with uncertain information. Trying to transfer the bodily knowledge to language is a challenge. It includes the uncertainty in interpreting the impulses of the other and trying to give words to something that is not related to logic by nature. In the participant's answers the emotional and bodily feelings seemed to mix together with intuition of the other. Their text didn't always correspond to the feelings Keskinen had had inside with them or they might have written very little.

Our aim was also to investigate how would the darkness and anonymity created effect the situation by turning it something special from the mundane. We wanted to know if it was easier to concentrate to touching that way and it seemed to work.

The feelings and feedback were really loving and hopeful. It was good to notice that it was a positive experience to people, and gave a lot. From Salla Keskinen's point of view people were really loving, gentle and playful. Everyone acted respectfully. Only two of the participants were just receiving touch and not being active in that way.



Our group in front of Mudhut: Cecilia Rotenberg, Salla Keskinen and Flora Tzanno.