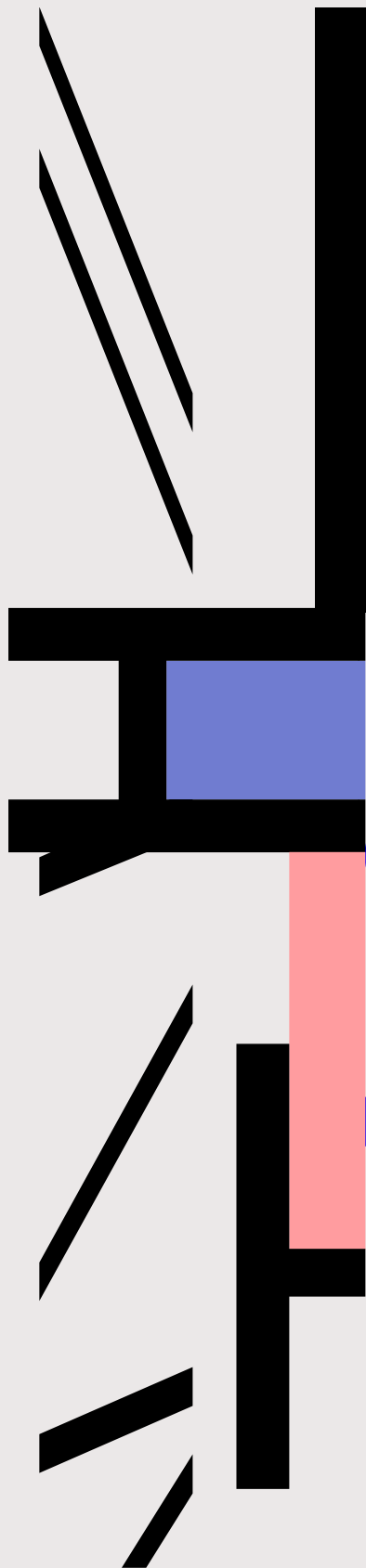


**Codes of
Accessibility–**
Reflecting and
Thinking With
the Rehearsing
Hospitalities 2021
Programme

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Irina Mutt



Reflections on

Gathering for Rehearsing Hospitalities

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Rehearsing

Frame Contemporary Art Finland's *Gathering for Rehearsing Hospitalities* programme, 8–11 September 2021, navigated matters of hospitality, care, safety, and security. The programme started at Vantaa Art Museum Artsi with an exhibition, screenings, and performances. Artsi Museum is located in a building with other community facilities like a library and cinema. It also has a shopping mall in front of it with various restaurants and stores. Between functionality and gentrification, these services allow people to meet each other, or at least pass one another.

The cinema in the Museum building looks like a tiny time capsule of 1980s aesthetics, with its furniture and carpets. I jokingly tell someone that it seems like a location from *Twin Peaks*, something between nostalgia and the uncanny. When entering the cinema hall, I stumble through the darkness and the narrow lines of seats. I realise that entering this room with a wheelchair would be a challenge, if not impossible. One of the first videos, *Pleasurable Ecologies – Formations of Care: The Impossibilities of Invitation* (2021), by Ama Josephine Budge, resonated with me. While sitting alone in the cinema theatre, I thought about how often invitations are followed by the impossibility of rejecting them. I have serious issues with saying 'no' to work proposals.

Frame proposed that I write about *Gathering for Rehearsing Hospitalities*, and I said 'yes' without thinking, despite the invitation coming at the last minute. I said 'yes' for several reasons, the most urgent being that I needed the money. However, there was both a pressure and a will to feel part of the context; and additionally, for nostalgia, since I participated with my friend Sumugan Sivanesan in the gathering's 2019 iteration. Moreover, it was also out of genuine interest; I believe there are ways to displace certain hegemonic narratives, decentralise the centres and overpower them through art. So I was truly curious about this year's programme.

Then I panicked after accepting the invitation because of several obstacles: a lack of time, it was my first publication in Finland, and it had to be written in English. English, which for me needs a translator, tools and dictionaries, proofreading

and corrections, and writing more slowly. When one needs others to write a text, English acts as a mediating language in the global art world—language here is a limit and condition. “An artist who cannot speak English is no artist” (1992), said the Croatian artist Mladen Stilinović in one of his artworks. English is the language that allows us to understand each other while appearing in the global art scene. Language is both hospitality and border, as inside and outside.

Writing is always a free fall with no guarantee of success. I feel vulnerable when writing this text, but the discomfort often pushes me to do something. If there is discomfort, there are problems. If there are problems, there are urgencies and needs. Among other things, one must ask oneself why someone might feel vulnerable when writing, speaking out loud, or occupying a place.

Academic degrees, important languages and high-paying jobs, bring with them the renunciation of accents, of leavings, of foul-mouthed language, of old but comfortable clothes, of the body’s freedom to get fat, to get hair on your legs and whiskers on your face, to grow old, to smell of sweat, to eat with joy until you’re full and beyond. Academic degrees bring with them a narrative of history that told us of civilisation, of progress and backwardness, of barbarism, that marked the misery of the system as our shame, those backward people who lived among the cattle, in those places where no kings or heroes or leftist leaders or great trade unionists or Newtons or Platos or Virginia Woolfs or Kants or Foucaults or Dostoyevskis or national ballets or anything that would have contributed anything to the world, or at least anything worth remembering, were ever born. Academic titles also bring with them right and wrong words, words that exist and words that don’t, even if they have been used in your house all your life and work better than any new word that only you will understand.

–Brigitte Vasallo, *Lenguaje inclusivo y exclusión de clase*, 2021 (my translation).

During one of the breaks in Wednesday’s *Gathering for Rehearsing Hospitalities* programme, I went outside to smoke a cigarette. I was standing alone, trying to look busy by the mere act of smoking. A man fell on the ground a few metres away from where I was performing this smoking ritual to defeat solitude. He lay flat on the concrete floor, shouting and crying, like a little kid throwing a tantrum. I felt empathy, but at the same time, I froze, not sure how to react. Should I go and ask

if he's ok, despite the fact that I have a language barrier and I'm not sure if the outcome will turn out to be unsafe for me?

Other people witnessing the scene remained still. Maybe because he seemed intoxicated, it was acceptable to behave like that person was not there. But I saw him, and I felt bad. There he was, a middle-aged white Finnish man (shouldn't he be the paradigm of privileges?) lying on the floor, shouting and crying. Luckily, a man who seemed to be his friend talked to him and lifted him off the ground.

After some days, thoughts around *who* has access, and to *what*, was still resonating with me. Ideas about how in order to feel that you don't have access to something, the distance between you and that thing has to be quite near. Otherwise, you might not even try to get in. I wonder which codes of accessibility are explicit and can be confronted in the art world? Which are implicit and cannot be seen or grasped?

Wouldn't the possibility of rehearsing something become an invitation to share a vulnerability or open the door to doubt and tremble together? I don't think this



REHEARSING HOSPITALITIES COMPANION 3. IMAGE BY SHEUNG YIU. DRAWING BY SHUBHANGI SINGH.

word, 'rehearsal', is fortuitous in the programme. Rather, it responds to rehearsal as a space of uncertainty, a practice of trial and error.

Rehearsing Hospitalities raises themes that are repeated and crossed throughout its editions and years. The programme is about knowledge, positions, other possible narratives, additional epistemologies, and further imaginaries. Themes and concepts move spirally around the same points but never at the same height. Rehearsing could also be a strategy to remain on the threshold, to place oneself at the crossroads, in the fluid and non-binary—in a never-finished project. The crossroads perform as a place of uncertainty, non-evidence, and strangeness—doubt, not as weakness, but as potentiality.

Hospitalities

The programme continued with an online round table discussion on Thursday: *Curating with Matters of Security, Safety and Care*. It raised concerns about shifting epistemologies and what it means to be included. Panellists reflected on the complexity of 'the other' and how the more intimate curating becomes, the more complicated it turns out to be.

Who is left out of the narrative? Which centres can be overpowered with the push of voices and bodies that generally do not occupy those centres? My concern with the art world's exercises in solidarity, friendship, accessibility, intersectionality, and all the rest is: What happens to this knowledge and practice once you walk out the institution's door, the symposium ends, or you finish the book? Who will take care of you once you complete the lecture? What structures support you if you fall? How to imagine a trans-feminist, post-humanist, and anti-colonial future from the unemployment office in a suburban neighbourhood when the money is not enough to pay a dentist, much less to manage your mental health? How to announce these stories from a fortified Europe with increasingly lethal borders? How to imagine and produce a future when the world is in flames?

How can we inhabit, or instead occupy, the spaces of power that we know will not be offered to us? How to navigate, or rather pierce, institutions and administrations

that do not care for all equally? How to overpower, with our words, the dominant narratives that do not speak of us? What gestures and strategies must we invent, contaminate, and make our own?


We know, since the slave revolution in Haiti and the subsequent Afro-American, feminist or queer revolutions, that there are at least four ways of struggle against violent institutions. The first is their destruction. This requires a radical change in the systems of interpretation and production of reality. And therefore, it takes time. The second is the modification of their legal statutes. The third is the transformation that occurs through its dissident uses. Although apparently modest, this is one of the most potent ways of destroying institutional violence. And the fourth, the escape, which, as Deleuze and Guattari insisted, is not flight, but the creation of a critical exteriority: a line of flight through which subjectivity and desire can flow again.

- Paul B. Preciado, *An Apartment on Uranus: Chronicles of the Crossing*, 2020.

Several artists, theorists, academics and activists have passed through *Rehearsing Hospitalities*, offering content, narratives, and other ways of doing and being. Throughout the programme and concurrent publications, there is the strategy of the quotation as a way of *thinking-with*. I'm also making use of quotations as a way to feel accompanied, and to offer company, by inviting more voices. I'm situating things at the crossroads—to question in terms of relationship and potential, rather than identity.

The consciousness of Non-being is a first step on the long road to decolonisation. As we have seen, coloniality has functioned and functions differentially in each part of the world. Therefore, all people and civilisations today need to exercise a decolonising dialogical introspection that can only be approached from that first consciousness of Non-being: When we come to fully understand how coloniality has functioned and functions in our structures of thought, what have been and are, the mechanisms that silenced, blocked, erased, subjugated and broke our epistemologies, our knowledge and knowledges, our ways of being and staying in the world; and when we become fully aware of what is our location in the scale of hierarchies of the modern/colonial world-system.

- Sirin Adlbi Sibai, *La cárcel del feminismo*, 2016 (my translation).



We are facing gore capitalism and ideologies against bodies and minorities. Precarity and inequality produce a new financial hegemony that can be known by the restriction of democratic rights, criminalisation of poverty, rejection of migration, and the pathologisation of all forms of dissent.

I write about art, accessibility, and struggles from a privileged position—from a safe home, a European passport, and a body that doesn't raise many questions about who I am or where I come from. So maybe I'm failing in this rehearsal about hospitality, reflecting on power structures, companionship and solidarity? The only thing I know is that it's impossible to overpower the centres without others, without pushing from different sides and positions, together in companionship.

Companion

Each edition of *Rehearsing Hospitalities*, since 2019, has been accompanied, anticipated, or traversed by a publication. Each edition is numbered and with a different cover colour. In 2019, Companion 1 in green, in 2020, Companion 2 in lilac and in 2021, Companion 3 in pink. In this last month, those three publications have accompanied me. I have carried them in tote bags and backpacks, they have been near my bed, I have turned their pages while drinking coffee or eating, and while travelling by subway or bus. With myriad notes in the margins, their pages are marked, the text underlined. The three publications have been worn out; their covers are stained and wrinkled. Carrying markings of time, the texts have materialised into objects. In an attempt to think with the programme close to my body, they accompanied me to all the places I went—a naive and failed attempt to break the distances between text and life.

Friday's programme was *Experiments on Togetherness: Herding in Helsinki Central Park*. As the title suggests, it happened in a park, in an area constructed and arranged for the 1950's Olympic Summer Games. We walked to an empty equestrian track for competition and training. The scale of the space was intended for horses to trot and gallop. We occupied the arena with our slow



EXPERIMENTS ON TOGETHERNESS: HERDING IN HELSINKI CENTRAL PARK BY EERO YLI-VAKKURI, MARI KESKI-KORSU AND CHLOË BASS AT RUSKEASUO RIDING MANEGE, 2021. IMAGE BY KIRA BJÖRKLUND.

walking, unintentionally performing a sort of choreography. Under less than ideal conditions, the location was not so accessible or safe—rain would have spoiled the whole experience with muddy soil. The mere act of reaching there implied a body capable of walking by its own means (or maybe riding a horse, but that was not the case.) We were also there to listen to an audio tour, taking for granted that all the participants had no hearing issues.

Despite those access and inclusion glitches, I got emotional with *Garden of Agency* (2021), an audio-guided tour by Mari Keski-Korsu. Two little fabric sacks with herbs inside were handed to us to carry along for the exercise. The soft voice on the other side of the audio recording invited us to sit with the moment and just feel the environment, observing each other from a distance. The simple act of being aware of each other made me feel a little bit less alone, or at least that we were all sharing our solitude. At some point, the audio invited us to smell the little fabric sacks we carried along the journey. One of the sacks was filled with plants that help clean the body, taking away pain and sorrow, like backup support for

difficult situations. The other sack was stuffed with plants that make one feel strong and resistant. Maybe this plant could be our revolution, the voice suggested.

I was sitting alone with eyes closed, listening, smelling, feeling, and my eyes started to get wet in an uncontrolled reaction. I tried to hide those inconvenient tears while striving to figure out what those tears were telling me. I guess it was because I was aware of my loneliness, of how much I needed others, humans and non-humans, to make a revolution, have a backup, or merely survive—also feeling the longing for companionship within the art world, a context where many times I feel alone, precarious, and unsafe. There's no way to feel safe in a context where your permanence is not guaranteed. And not having guaranteed permanence is quite a thing in the art world, subjected to a bunch of variables: social-economic background, nationality, race, health, age, and a long etcetera that makes many people feel that their presence in the art scene is ephemeral, a trend, a lucky strike, but not a place where one belongs by right. Who would come and help any of us if we were the ones collapsing on the ground and crying one day? What kind of vulnerability is accepted in order to keep a position in the art world?

Sometimes, we may need to live with our fragility and hardness as a way towards understanding beyond the binary—to contain and be both simultaneously. Yet, a powerful fragility conscientiously situates oneself as interdependent instead of the narrative that 'being vulnerable' is something to overcome. Eclipsing these boundaries could also help with the blurring of other delineations, like those between hostess and guest, between offering and taking.

In our affective path we have become or can become lethal. We wound, we pierce, and we frighten; we have suffocated more than once and we have been suffocated. We are an affective contradiction that comes and goes between desire, fear, anger and the resilience of our times...We have crawled with speed before the catastrophe of our territories, we have entangled ourselves with force to the impossibility and we resist; our strangeness has made us feared, they are afraid of us because we are not afraid... What would this world be, feared serpents, without the powerful and sublime possibility of changing our skin, transcending, transmuting, transforming, transforming again and again, leaving pieces of skin along the way, of ephemeral and contradictory emancipations,

of storms and painful falls, vestiges of skin that nourish the earth, vestiges of skin that remain on the road for the others as evidence of danger, of one's own search for the inner poison, as testimony that where danger is sown, what strengthens you also grows.

- Lia García, *Mantra mañanero II. SERPIENTE*, 2018.

The *Gathering for Rehearsing Hospitalities 2021* programme ended with a meal. We gathered at the courtyard of the Museum of Finnish Architecture. It was late September, and the weather was wet and cold. The meal consisted of lentil soup, bread, and wine. Offering hot food and drink is a gentle and effective way to provide comfort. The programme participants sat around, talking and eating, occupying the public space. Such a rare scene to see a group of people eating together on a cold city day.

I wonder what is the malaise within the art world, or what are, in the plural, the urges that demand radical changes. Is it the inherent precariousness of the art world? Is it the system and its institutions, gatekeepers, and other structures that support it? Is it the constant exclusion and erasure, if not exploitation and extractivism, of non-hegemonic knowledge? The only thing clear to me is that when we are together, we are stronger.

I don't have responses on how to do things in/with/beside the art world, neither do I think that *Rehearsing Hospitalities* aims to provide a clear and definitive one. I'm still learning how to look at other ways and find different directions—figuring out how to improve alliances with humans and non-humans, with the ones who are gone and the ones to come. I'm still unlearning many things as well, perhaps as a counter-pedagogy. Because urgent matters are not about how to display the veneer of allyship, but call one to confront harsh realities, be uncomfortable, take action, and dismantle.

I'm still rehearsing the softness and hardness. To rehearse is an infinitive verb.

Irina Mutt

is an interdependent writer and curator from Barcelona, currently based in Helsinki. Her research ranges from video games to post-porn, to experimental publishing and temporalities outside the hegemonic sense of productivity or linear time. Her strategies include writing and curating from short distances and mixing politics with pleasure. Lately, she has been involved in an open and collaborative radio broadcast in Helsinki, and she still quotes Annie Sprinkle to talk about art.



This text is published in the context of *Rehearsing Hospitalities*, Frame Contemporary Art Finland's public programme for 2019 to 2023. *Rehearsing Hospitalities* connects artists, curators and other practitioners in the field of contemporary art and beyond to build up and mediate new practices, understandings and engagements with diverse hospitalities.

As part of the 2021 programme, Frame and partners hosted *Gathering for Rehearsing Hospitalities Autumn 2021*, a four-day programme of online and onsite events in Helsinki taking place September 8-11. The gathering included exhibitions at the Museum of Finnish Architecture and the Vantaa Art Museum Artsi, discursive and performative events, and a publication.

Contributors to the *Gathering for Rehearsing Hospitalities Autumn 2021* programme included: Panos Balomenos, Karen Barad, Bassam el Baroni, Chloë Bass, Ama Josephine

Budge, Forensic Architecture, Elis Hannikainen & Vappu Jalonen, Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide, Áslat Holmberg, Milla Kallio / FEMMA Planning, Flo Kasearu, Mari Keski-Korsu, Alen Ksoll, Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez & Elena Sorokina / Initiative of Practices and Visions of Radical Care, Kristina Norman, Yates Norton, Nat Raha, Sepideh Rahaa, Annika Rauhala, Shubhangi Singh, Hito Steyerl, Rosario Talevi, Jenni-Juulia Wallinheimo-Heimonen, Eyal Weizman and Eero Yli-Vakkuri.

The *Gathering for Rehearsing Hospitalities Autumn 2021* programme was co-organised with the Museum of Finnish Architecture and Vantaa Art Museum Artsi and produced in collaboration with additional partners the Finnish Cultural Institute in New York and IHME Helsinki.

For more information visit

<https://bit.ly/gfrh2021>

