

Joker

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Now, your personal alchemist, with infinite love, puts your feet in place of your head and head in place of your feet: so you better understand where you are going, and your mind runs as it has never done.

Overturning.

Your alchemist, gently, positions your eyes in your ears and ears over your eyes, so that you see what you hear and listen to the music of what you see. The alchemist brings your heart to your mouth and gives a mouth to your heart, so the words are meaningful and the feelings do not remain silent.

Everything is near, nothing far away.

What if we could extend our sense of hearing so that you can hear your body?

Intro

I am not a scientist, I am not a neurologist and I am not a sociologist.

I am someone who is more interested in the human being rather than in the objects that surround us. Or, even better, I am intrigued by how objects and materials are in relation with our bodies, and how these relations create a secondary effect on our behaviour, the human behaviour.

I am a Joker.

I am an artist.

An artist is like a Joker in a deck of cards, who doesn't have to follow a specific path and rules and is allowed to make space for improvisation and intuition.

Where do I place myself in the society? What make us human? Is empathy a creative tool? How do I value my work? How can I expand and use my knowledge? How do I value my knowledge? How much do I care? What is a human being? What is the body? Why I am fascinated by it? Why the body? What connects body and mind? What is a Joker? Do I have to be a Doctor to work in the Hospital?

Somewhere in the back of my mind there is a conversation going on already for a while, a few years I would say.

I am having conversations with my sister, who is studying Medicine in Groningen; with my mother who would desperately like to give a name to my career; with Davide who is a great psychotherapist and my old professor, and since years is feeding my hunger for knowledge. Moreover I am talking with Natasja, head of a Clinic Department for Alzheimer and Dementia patients where I am

developing a project; I am talking with Tessa, a woman who just found out having Dementia; I am talking with Paula, who is responsible for the distribution of funds for project support; with the Head of a Healthcare Department of a well known institution who is trying to support independent projects to improve the Healthcare System.

At the very beginning it was a polite conversation; I was there to learn, I was curious, and I never had enough. Questions, after questions, after questions. It went on for years, this hunger of knowledge, to try to make it happen, to fail, to ask and to inquire, to try again and again. It was exciting. At a certain point the conversations turned into a loud scream!

An intense tug of war between question and exclamation marks.

Now I want to make this scream clear by answering the questions. I will try to define the value and the possible role of a Joker in a very specific environment, the hospital. I will explore the Joker's function and give a voice to the tools that he/she is carrying around.

What makes us human?

Since the age of five I have been practicing Judo at a competitive level, four or sometimes five times per week. It started as a funny game where I was allowed to roll, fall, run, trip and cling to friendly hands to get up.

It later became not only a physical practice, but also a mental and moral discipline. Judo's most prominent feature is its competitive element, where the objective is to either throw or take down an opponent to the ground, immobilize or otherwise subdue an opponent with a pin, or force an opponent to submit with a joint lock or a choke. But the Judo response is to give way, not to meet force head-on. However, this is for the purpose of defensively beating the oppressor. When the appropriate Judo-based action takes place, it may not appear to be gentle. The action was a result of what happened, how it happened, and what the future implications will be.

Each match required a study of the body, as intense as quick, that I was going to fight with: which leg is the weaker, what is going to be the next move, where can I find space, where can I break the balance, and so on.

Anticipating, accepting, embracing and dancing together until one of the two bodies would fall down. A continuous contact, getting to know perfectly the limits of my own and another's body, an intense study to acquire a knowledge that can be performed today with closed eyes. It made me aware of how bodies are moving around me. It increased an instinctive attention towards all body matters. When I was fourteen years old I developed an allergy for almost all fruit and vegetables, and many more "unusual things" like grass, cats, some trees, pollen, and the list goes on. It changed my diet drastically, affected my immune system. It made me become even more aware of how my body works, and how it relates with external

agents. It took a few years to turn a feeling of paranoia and fear into harmless awareness. I started to notice how easily I could integrate objects and mediums as defence guards between me and my allergies. I learned of the beauty and the power of skin, and its importance as the first element of my body that physically comes into contact with my fears and my enemies and also my friends and pleasures.

We all are fleshy, pulsing colonies of tens of trillions of cells. We are all these things and yet we are not just “these things”. We, human beings, are writing, investigating, creating, and looking for the most absurd things. We combine genes, divide atoms, launch rockets. And even more extraordinarily, we look inside ourselves, trying to solve the wonderful puzzle that is our brain.

I am getting dizzy thinking about it.

How can a gelatin mass, weighing less than a kilo and a half and able to rest in the palm of your hand, imagine angels, question the meaning of the infinite, and even investigate what is its place in the Universe?

Everything we think, do, or not do, happens thanks to our brain. The structure of this brilliant machine determines our possibilities, our boundaries and our behaviour. We are our brain.

Nowadays, exploring the brain is not only investigating mental diseases, but is also an attempt to try to understand why we are the way we are, why we do what we do, and why we try to understand who we are.

Our brain is inextricably part of our body, which in return is a lively sensory system that interacts with the world to produce a personalised habitat; the body is the platform that produces experiences.

Artist Sissel Tolaas says that we have something for free from our

life: our body. She called the body “the hardware”, and she renamed the senses the “softwares”.

We can activate these amazing softwares that are in our hardware. ¹ We can touch, embrace, perceive, listen and behold with our entire body. Our body becomes the centre of everything and the house of our memory and identity.

All human senses, including vision, are the extension of the sense of touch. Skin is the membrane that is constantly in contact with the world. Skin is our border, protection, and ultimate limit before we get in contact with what surrounds us. It is our medium of communication. This membrane is the oldest and most sensitive of our organs. The cornea of our eyes is protected by a transparent layer of modified skin. ²

Being a kid who wakes up in the night to use the toilet, I was performing quite a funny game. I loved to feel goosebumps on my skin. I loved feeling all of the miniature muscles, attached to each hair, contracting in the cold of the night. On the way back from the toilet, before jumping in my warm bed, I swung up my skirt and rubbed my belly against the cold wall. I did not know, of course, that my body was releasing adrenaline in that moment. I was simply jumping into bed to experience the wonderful feeling of my goosebumps, slowly disappearing.

Our skin is an amazing organ. It is covered with more than 5 million nerve ends, or tactile corpuscles, that reach to every physical sensation. Our bodies are built to touch and be touched. It is a constant haptic need.

Skin is a complicated organism. It has history; it even has its own culture and its particular beauty. Skin is the organ for thought, as it reads the texture, weight, density and temperature of matter. Our skin traces temperature of spaces with unerring precision.

Skin allows our body to touch, Skin covers our ears and eyes and nose and mouth. It is my opinion, that ‘touch’ therefore, is the predecessor of all the other senses. I believe, the task of the Joker is “to make visible how the world touches us”, as Merleau-Ponty said of the paintings of Cézanne.

Skin condition and appearance have a significant influence on mental and physical health, and are among the most important determinants of self image, identity and socialization in humans. Cultural influences have played a role in shaping the cognitive perception of external body appearance and internal bodily image in both genders explains Ossama T Osman on Expert Review of Dermatology.³

I have mentioned already that the importance of the skin is its role as the initial point of contact between the external and internal environments. Internal psychological factors and emotional suffering may eventually find the skin a suitable organ for a visible expression of turmoil. This close relationship between the skin and the psyche has long been recognized in the scientific literature. Embryologically, both the skin and the brain are developed from the same ectoderm germ layer, a fact that invites many thought-provoking connotations.

It is maybe all a very romantic vision and idea, but I truly believe that touch is the sense that can weigh, read, make us aware of three dimensional things that are extending around our body in every direction. With touch we can, via the eyes, caress far away surfaces, edges and outlines. We can have a unconscious tactile feeling even before approaching a surface and determine ahead if it will be an pleasant or unpleasant experience. Just imagine to stand in your kitchen in front of a hot pan, looking at the smoke rising up from its incandescent surface. Your clever hands already know the feeling that would encounter by touching the pan. “The hands want to see, the eyes want to caress”, says Johann Wolfgang von Goethe.

The body and its movement are in constant interaction with the environment. Body is a very rich physical identity, because in our bodies we carry memories and dreams, past and future. We can remember through our flesh as much as through our peripheral nervous system and our brain.

Our body reminds us everyday who we are and where we are located in the world. The body is our medium of communication, it is the home of memory, feelings, imagination, reference and protection. Body is the sense of self, that in the medical world is called the sense of proprioception.

Proprioception is an automatic sensitivity mechanism that receives information from the body's senses and then sends message through the central nervous system. The central nervous system then sends messages to the rest of the body on how to react and with the correct amount of tension to apply to the muscles.

Proprioception is a sense, often called our sixth sense, that we overlook because it is only subtly distinguished from movement. And, unlike sight or hearing or taste, we rarely experience the absence of proprioception. Yet, a total loss of proprioception might be even more devastating than going blind or deaf. Without sensory information coming in from our muscles, we would be unable to monitor and correct our paths of motion. Imagine trying to walk, gesture, or eat if you had no sense of where your limbs were without looking at them.

Once I read a short real story written by Oliver Sacks, who was a famous British neurologist, naturalist and historian of science, where he describes in one of his books a brain injured woman who had lost her sense of proprioception. She was, therefore, not able to move her muscles and her body in the way she wanted anymore. But here comes the terrific and extremely interesting part of the story: she could move her muscles only when she was looking at it, her eyes were allowing her to direct her body's parts. By staring at

her hand she would probably be able to shake it or open a door, but in the exact moment she would change her view, her hand would fall down as an object without life. ⁴

This story affected my way of thinking a lot, because it was extremely hard to get myself in the shoes of this woman, still knowing that her body is not that different from mine.

It showed how powerful and magical the brain can be, and how much it can affect our body, and therefore behaviour, and our way of living.

It naturally brought me to start analyzing the connection that exists between the brain and body, and between the body and the objects that are surrounding it, and moreover, how the stimuli comes back again to the brain.

All human beings need a hug.

Autism Disorders have a deep effect upon social interactions. People with this disorder lack the sensitivity to sensory stimulation in relation to other people. Their disorder makes it uncomfortable and impractical for them to turn to other human beings for comfort. A big help for people suffering with Autism is the 'Hug Machine' or also known as the 'Squeeze Machine'.

It is a machine invented by professor Mary Temple Grandin as she understood that applying a deep pressure around a body would calm hypersensitive people and reduce anxiety and sensory issues. This machine is made from soft materials, wraps the body and applies pressure, replacing a human hug.

The Joker in the White Cube

An artist is like a Joker in a deck of cards, who doesn't have to follow a specific path and rules and is allowed to make space for improvisation and intuition.

People call it the White Cube or the White Building. It can be a gallery space or a laundry shop, it can be anything. A space with bright lights inside and shiny corridors!

People call it the White Cube because everything inside it is white, clean, and sterilized. The staff that works in there is dressed in white coats, white gloves and sometimes white shoes. It's the place where nobody wants to go, but at least once in their life they have been in. White Cubes are hospitals or clinics. They all have the same smell, same look, same protocols, same scenarios. If you have been in one, you have been in all of them. You find a hierarchy inside, that you have to learn to deal with very fast if you want the answers that you are looking for. In the White Cube there are protocols based on efficiency to provide the best use of the time, to be cost effective, to reduce uncertainty and to avoid failure.

The relationship between the staff and the patients is based on very strict rules and protocols. Every move, every word has a reason to be made or said. Every step is studied ahead to avoid uncertainty and, especially, mistakes. The working method has been very well defined for centuries, and there is no room for improvisation. No failure is contemplated, and nothing is left to the unknown.

We can ask if this is good or bad but none of these questions have relevance. The question is: can the Joker with his/her tools improve the health of the patients or bring any benefits?

The staff that work in the White Cube have a very precise goal: cure the patient, solve the problem, cure the body. The problem to be solved is hiding somewhere inside of the patient's body and that is where all the focus goes. To keep the organs together, to keep the body together.

There is so much more to be considered than only the sickness of the body. There is an all other world to be explored that can affect human health, outside of the body as well as what is inside of it. The body wears clothes, it lays, it tastes, it smells, it hears, it clings to handles, it sinks into chairs and mattresses. It is the interface between the outside and the inside, it is a surface that can be activated, body is a medium that can be manipulated and treated. It is a platform that does not stand under the nose of the White Cube staff. Some patients are left in clinics for several years, some remain in hospital for other long periods. The four walls around the bed become the only possible world they get to know over that time. The corridors are the path to wander around. The white coat is what they wear to meet family and friends, and instead of a handbag, they walk along with a cold metal IV pole. The food that is served does not always satisfy the palates. Light never changes and colours remain opaque in this sterile environment.

Everything around us is changing with an incredible speed, in particular technology's evolution is affecting all possible fields and situations. Nowadays cars are able to park themselves independently, kids are playing with virtual balls, and sometimes virtual friends. The way human beings communicate with each other is changing drastically with "thanks" to developments of new apps, mobile phones, how we use the internet, and so on. The same is happening in the White Cube system: new machines, new surgery approaches, new faster protocols, and while this change sounds amazing, only one thing remains the same: the humanity, or rather, the quality

of the state of being human. In the end we always come back to the same point; we are humans, linking bodies, fleshy vessels with emotions and skin to protect these feelings.

“All of us, at one point or another, are going to be patients. I know that when I end up in a hospital bed, I will want a physician who understands that I will make better decisions when I am dressed in my street clothes than when I am half naked in a hospital gown. And I will want a care team that knows that the food in my refrigerator deserves as much attention as the prescription of my medicines cabinet. And I will want a system that recognizes that my needs and my care team’s needs are not opposed, but rather part of a larger human system designed to support us both.” said the designer Samanta Dempsey.⁵

But you know, there is another world aside from the White Cube. A place where failure is part of a working process without a negative connotation, where the best discoveries have origins in failures, where the unknown leads to unexpected results, often the best results. People living in this world are not magicians, but they do own a very special tool box. They are Jokers and their goal is very aligned to the White Cube’s, only they reach it in a more alternative way.

Humanizing the White Building.

Designer Alissa Rees was, as a patient, attached to an IV pole for weeks, without any moment of separation. She realised how the IV pole restrains the possibility of freely moving around the hospital. Quite difficult to go outside, difficult to go to the toilet, or even enter an elevator.

She resolved that stimulating mobility helps to speed up recovery.

She designed a portable IV pole that, instead of a cold metal pole, is soft and flexible. This change in material evokes warmth, it can be worn, it hides the medical equipment, and it can be used as a personal apparatus to show the patient's identity.

With this simple change patients can move with more independence, have free hands to shake a hand hello, or carry a food tray.

They can hide the medical equipment that they rely upon, therefore increasing their sense of wellbeing.

In this other world, the focus is on improving the entire experience of being a patient of the White Cube and not only to cure the diseases. Jokers are there to design the invisible, thanks to the invisible tools they carry around. They act as a detective would, they show up in person, they talk and they observe. They are trained and comfortable with exploring the space with an open mind. They are excellent listeners, who make the invisible visible. They ask when they don't know. They build bridges between different types of people, or fields of knowledge. They are interdisciplinary by nature, and they seek to understand and incorporate varying viewpoints. And importantly, empathy is the ingredient that makes the magic happen when it is added to the pot.

Empathy

Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. Basically, “I understand what you're going through.”

A large number of the staff of the White Cube have little or no contact with clients. This allows misconceptions and stereotypes to flourish in the absence of regular, authentic experience with clients and families. This lack of contact with clients, enables the White Cube's staff free reign to waste time talking in circles about what 'they think' people would do or want, or worst, what they themselves would want.

In an essay entitled 'Some Thoughts on Empathy', Columbia University psychiatrist Alberta Szalita stated, “I view empathy as one of the important mechanisms through which we bridge the gap between experience and thought”.

Empathy goes hand in hand with sharing, and it speaks the language of connection. It allows a deeper understanding of the needs of the

patients, and why, sometimes, a solution can be good for someone and not for someone else. It allows stronger connections, not only between patients and staff, but within the rest of the medical staff. It gets easier to explain the reasons of your actions and your ideas. It brings awareness to another level, adding humanity and sensibility to any kind of approach.

Empathy is the tool that helps you to stick to an idea, that does not allow you to give up, that makes the difference when you desire to communicate deeply about a certain topic with someone. It requires an extra effort and is likely to engage you emotionally. It is the strongest tool that opens hearts and eyes, and does not consent to turn your gaze elsewhere until the goal is reached. Empathy helps to increase communication levels between each group of people that use the White Cube at any time.

The patient is a human being.

Stress has a high impact on the successful management of Diabetes. After field research, it appears that Diabetic people are actually stressed by the device they must use to check their blood sugar level. Stress releases more sugar into the bloodstream, thus creating a vicious circle. The current devices focus strictly on quantifying blood sugars with numbers, and leave no room for personal feeling, sensation, or subtlety.

The first proposal by designer Mickael Boulay, was a glucose meter which used the position of a LED light to literally express how high or low the blood sugar level is, instead of showing the result with numbers.

This more intuitive and sensitive language allows people with Type II Diabetes to relate easier to their blood sugar level, while staying in touch with their own feelings. The focus shifted from quantifying numbers to experimenting with sensorial experience for the patient.

To Observe (the language of the body)

It has always been there.

Staring at people.

I always do that. When I talk with someone I look fixed into the eyes, or if I am sitting in a large group, or in a tram, I often lose myself in the facial expression and body movement of someone sitting in front of me.

It is quite often annoying for the other person but totally unconscious from my side. This habit comes from a game I was used to play with my mother when I was a kid. Every morning on the way to school we always had to wait in the car at a very long red light, and she asked me to look at people walking by and try to guess everything about their life. Just by looking at their clothes, movements, gestures and poise, we were creating together incredible stories about their life.

We even gave them fantasy names.

By now I learned that it is not very polite to stare at people, and it can be interpreted as rude, but I can't stop the contemplation that arises by watching hands tapping on the table, bodies sliding into chairs, chests swelling with breath or eyebrows revolving. And the game starts again: why is the shoulder so far from the table? Why is the hand rubbing that plastic corner? For how long can the chest hold the breath? How does the wrist stay comfortable in that position?

Most people are not aware that eighty percent of communication is estimated to take place outside the verbal channel. The voice is usually what we identify the truth of the person, but actually it is the whole body that we read first; the flicker of the eyes, the depth of the smile, the shake of the hair, gestures, clothing

Here I introduce another tool from the toolbox of the Joker: to observe.

Observing means
detecting,
discovering,
examining,
inspecting,
looking at,
noting,
monitoring,
recognizing,
paying attention,
witnessing,
studying,
viewing,
contemplating,
perceiving,
inquiring and more.

It means to absorb information with your eyes, while analyzing the details at the same time. Observing brings up questions and doubts. Not a passive look, it is instead an active investigation of the scenario, an examination.

The Joker observes the language that the body speaks to us. Body Language is not a new language, it has been subject to several studies for a thousand years.

The ancient Greeks, notably Hippocrates and Aristotle (384 B.C.), considered the aspects of Body Language probably through their interest in human personality and behaviour. The Romans, notably Cicero (63 B.C.), related gestures to feelings and communications. Francis Bacon (1605) explored gestures as reflection or extension of spoken communications. John Bulwer (1644) considered the 'what' of hand gestures, and Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia* (1806) looked at using gestures to improve speech-making. Darwin could be regarded as the earliest expert to have made serious scientific observation

about body language. Charles Darwin's (1800) work pioneered much ethological thinking. Ethology began as science of animal behaviour, properly established during the early 1900s, and increasingly extended to human behaviour and social organization. Ethologists have progressively applied their findings to human behaviour, reflecting the evolutionary origins of much human non-verbal communication. Desmond Morris (1971) linked human behaviour to human 'animalistic' evolution. ⁶

Observing feels like touching the scene with the eyes, caressing the details, tasting the movements, eavesdropping imperceptible reactions. It is a continuous process, and the body in front of the eyes represent a land of discoveries where each sighs is meaningful. We live in a world where technology has allowed an exponential growth of visual input. They are easy, fast, shiny, entertaining and easily forgettable. But every time you adjust a scenario, an object, a setting that stands around a human being and touches its body, we create a reaction.

Visual inputs are taking over as much as technology does, which is making our life easier and easier, but it is also making us lazy and unnecessary. We think less, move less, interact less. I am not talking only about human interaction, but also the way we relate with daily life objects.

A few months ago I witnessed two children playing with a virtual ball on a virtual field that a video projector was screening on the floor. It scared me thinking that we are on the way to losing our capability of experiencing physically with our body and with our sense of touch.

What a napkin can do.

In the clinic that holds Alzheimer and Dementia patients, I was sitting and thinking: what can activate these people? What can I give them to feel alive for few moments? Their world is not as normal as the one they used to live in. Something has changed, and they are sitting and waiting for that moment to come back again. I started to explore their tactile perception, and considered how they might benefit from being stimulated by textile surfaces. This is something that has already been done a lot with these patients, but so far only by altering harmless objects as pillows or blankets.

Through my exploration I questioned, what if we could create 3D patterns on the walls, that indicate the path from the living room to the bedroom? What if all the cutlery on the table is engraved with a geometrical drawing? What if the handle of the chair is a fluffy piece of material with a protruding texture? What if the surface of the table is made by different materials with different colours?

Joseph, a patient of the clinic, always plays with his food and it takes him twice the time to finish his meal than everybody else.

Sometimes he even falls asleep in the middle of the lunch. That day he was showing curiosity for something laying on the table: one of his hands was following the lines drawn on the napkin, up and down, up and down. The other hand, not as busy as the first one, began to accompany french fries from the dish to his mouth. A slow and almost imperceptible movement, but he was eating!

The rhythm of his hands was synchronized: up and down, one frie after another. He finished his meal this day, and the next day as well. Actually, the object he was curious about was not a napkin. It was a white plastic 3D printed texture that was laying next to his dish, representing a napkin. But, this simple change in function revealed me the power of the sense of touch.

The senses are amazing tools that belong to us, and we should be aware of them and use them for our own benefit.

Sight, our visual sense, allows a fast exchange of information that rapidly runs into our brain and with the same speed are forgotten after few minutes or days. While what we touch gives a completely different stimuli that leave a sign, not only in our memory, but also on our body.

We should not ban technology from our life as it has also a big beneficial power for uncountable aspects, but we also should not forget where we come from. Technology is not able to sense the space as humans do, it is not able to collect and process the infinite reactions that links our body with our feelings. These reactions help us determine the state of human being as good or bad, impatient, intolerant, agitated, calm, hysterical, sleepy, bored, excited and so on. Body is the bearer of an huge number of non-verbal messages. Body talks with different words and is giving a modified speech made of movements of limbs, head and fingers, micro movement of the muscles, sweating, positioning the body in relation to other people or things.

The necessary next step for the Joker is the understanding of these messages as positive or negative. Answers will not be always showing up immediately, they require time and tryouts, often experimentation, patiently collecting feedback and distilling the information until the last drop. It is an ongoing process in a constant evolution, characterized by constant learning and questioning. Jokers like kids who are not afraid to ask ridiculous questions, without feeling ashamed of showing their ignorance, but they are ready to knock at many doors to find out what they are looking for. This attitude generates contacts and connections between people, studies, work, ideas and so on: linking two different fields of knowledge leads to new discoveries, faster processes, creations of new models and working methods.

Collaboration

To solve today's more complex problems, we must refocus our attention. The Joker is an investigator who seeks cross-pollination from different fields of thought, they are a behavioural scientist, a perceptual psychologist, and a literary storyteller. Only benefit can be generated from working in two different worlds.

Who has heard this sentence at least once: "You two should team up and work together, and learn from each other" or, "You should learn from each other's mistakes"?

When you are a kid, you have a naive and uninhibited approach to the world. At four years old, a kid can find out fifty different ways to use a screwdriver. A big carton box becomes a boat, a fort, a pirate hideout, a comfortable house and much more. Lightheartedness.

Everything is a discovery, everything is a mystery to be unraveled.

It is a shame does not exist yet, and the curiosity and desire to explore are ruling the mind. What happened after, when too much has been revealed?

Knowledge comes. Objects and situations begin to lose their charm. Imagination turns into common sense and playing assumes a negative connotation. Imagine what would happen if we could merge adult knowledge with the dreamy mind of a kid. This is why collaboration is also popping up from the Jokers' tool box: Jokers are using their time to follow their personal intuitions and fascinations, not knowing all the answers but ready to involve anybody in order to grasp new material to work with.

They can imagine different scenarios, visualize alternative solutions, alter the reality if they please. It is one of the most human features to create connections. The functionality of our own body is based on any kind of connections.

Fun fact: do you know that more than fifty percent of the cells that constitute our body are not human but microbial? It's a complex society of microbes that live in and on our bodies, more than hundred

trillion microbes. They communicate with each other, with microbes of others humans and with our own brain. An example: two control groups ate yogurt without such bacteria or ate nothing.

Brain scans of the probiotic-yogurt eaters indicated changes in regions that could be associated with a less-anxious response in fearful or stressful situations compared with the control groups. Scientists are even exploring whether gut microbes might treat some brain disorders. Or again, if a mother gives birth through her vagina, the bacteria on her vagina are going to send a message to the brain that stimulates the production of milk that most hardly happens with a C-section.

Collaboration often breaks the standardised working procedures, giving birth to unexpected results. There are several examples, even in the most unexpected fields, on how collaboration generate good outcomes. Nowadays, there are many artists and designers involved in Bio Matters, researching how to use new biodegradable material in their work (fungi for instance). Many artists collaborating with scientists to create better visuals of their works, or they might step in during the research process with a completely different angle and perspective. Artists collaborating with neurologists where they can see, and therefore emphasize, the beauty and the value of weaknesses and defects of the patients.

It is a beautiful way of working in which I personally truly believe in. By exchanging tools and knowledge, accepting the fact that we can learn everyday and being willing to change the working routine to make space for something new. It allows for moments of chaos and serendipity that are proven gateways to innovation.

And, in the end it is all about fighting the fear of failure, thinking outside of the box and embracing the uncertainty by holding the right tools in our hands.

With care.

There is not only noise in an airport landing strip.

Sound.

“I want to sleep”

Doors slamming. Voices talking. Steps echoing.

“I need to sleep”

Noise.

Rolling carts. Ringing phones. Screaming baby.

“Mum, did you manage to sleep a bit today?”

“Yes. Finally I could sleep. He gave me these special headphones”

“Who?”

“I don't know, a very nice guy who works here brought me these yesterday”

“I see, well that was very kind. They look like the headphones for airport workers stuff..”

“Yes, but they are much softer and nicer. I can sleep with them anytime now”

“I should thank this guy, where can I find him? what does he looks like?”

“I don't know who he is, not a doctor for sure! But I see him often around taking notes in a red book and walking up and down the corridor”

“Like a spy-detective? Come on mum.. seriously!”

“I am serious. Look, there he is! See? Notebook in his hand. Let me rest now love, I'll see you later”.]

In the end

I am not a scientist, I am not a neurologist and I am not a sociologist and yet I am a bit of all of these together.

I am a Joker.

I learned to use myself as the best possible tool: my fascinations, my empathy, my way of seeing and touching, my sense of caring. Those are my instruments, the Joker instruments. I travel with them, I expand them, I build on them while experiencing. I design the invisible, all the little aspects that surround a human being in the everyday gestures and actions. Invisible details, non-verbal ways of communicating that can tell important stories. There is always the need to make more space for it, for these invisible relationships between bodies and objects.

Objects can cure the mind, can give rest and peace. Objects can activate the mind and create unexpected and magical surprises. Staring at people, coming up with questions, living in my skin, watching your skin, feeling materials, following process, combining knowledge, investigating more. Standing for the value of these instruments. Asking for more space to experience them. Demanding for unconventional spaces where to experience them. Only one thing is sure; there will be always space for questions, failures and uncertainty, otherwise the Joker would stop to exist.

The final scream

I grow up in a society where I soon learned and felt that the contemporary artist is not valued and recognised in the way I expect it to be.

Society has changed after the disappearance of factory work from the lives of most people in the Western world. I belong to a new generation of people who have been told by their parents: “In your life you can be anyone and do anything you want to”! I decided, as another bunch of people of my generation, to be an artist.

This is the most scary nightmare of the majority of parents in the world as they might picture a person sitting under a tree looking for inspiration, a person wearing dirty paint clothes holding a brush, a person walking in his or her own thoughts, they might imagine someone trying to break society’s rules.

“An artist has to be the perfect contradiction at all times.

You have to be just insane enough to want to do something that is so punishing and so difficult. But at the same time it takes a very sane person to execute it all” said Anicka Yi in an article on New York Times. ⁷

And if you ask me why I choose this path I will answer that it is because I care. Above all ‘caring’ is the most powerful tool I own in my tool box. I believe that as an artist I am empowered to create concepts and ideas as well as social bonds and forms of communication and communality. Therefore I can collaborate in creating the values that our society is supposed to be based on today. I don’t feel alone, the group of the artists types is ever expanding. In a society that does not make enough space we have created jobs for ourselves by exploring and exploiting our talents to perform small

artistic and intellectual miracles.

I am also extending my comments to funding systems (private or public institutions that distributes funds for the realization of artistic projects), institutions, companies and patients.

For the funding systems we, artists, learned to write business plans, communication plans and beautiful fairy tales called art statements. We have to shift our sense of care to another business: make sure that the communication plan includes a very high number of visitors, manage to write an art application that often is meant to please the advisors of culture more than describing the real artwork. Filling in a funding request nowadays is almost a work in itself that requires specific knowledge and skills.

For institutions we learned to claim more space and explain them why our presence is worthed. For companies and patients we learned to defend our ideas, to stand up for ourselves and protect our rights. It's an ongoing performance. We, Jokers, are dancing in a world that does not make enough space and freedom for this dance. A world that creates so many new opportunities for curators, fund writers, institutions, advisers of culture, gallery owners, and so on. This theater of characters would not stand without us dancing. And caring.

What if we, artist, could dedicate all of our time to pursuit our practice?

“Designers could revolutionise the health sector by helping patients take greater control of treatments, but at the moment, it's very much dependent on the decisions of healthcare professionals, organisations and institute” according to Sabine Wildevuur the Head of Creative Care Lab of Waag Society, who describes healthcare as a closed system where artist and designer have very little power.

Is it a dream to imagine a society in which art is valued and recognized in any kind of environments? Where a gallery can benefit of an artwork as much as a city hall or a hospital or a bank? Where citymakers, artists and scientists could create together a new society with shared values?

It can happen. There are small institutions in Europe which are trying very hard to bring different disciplines sitting and talking at the same table.

These magical collaborations are leading to the creation of a low cost knee prosthesis which can be produced in Indonesia empowering the locals by creating new jobs and spreading orthopaedic knowledge; to the use of bacteria to colour fabric instead of polluting chemical products; to create bags for homeless which can turn in sleeping bags.

Those are all examples of tiny miracles. We need more.

We need more Jokers!

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