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Embodied

Experience:

Design
as Practice
for

Unveiling

the

Sensible

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
EINA - Centre Universitari
de Disseny i Art de Barcelona

Doctoral Thesis
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Supervisor
Gerard Vilar Roca

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ABSTRACT

This investigation, through the lens and disciplinary practice of design in dialogue with other fields of knowledge, interrogates the contemporary reality of the disciplined and objectified body in relational action. As a counterpoint, it proposes a series of episodes that grant access to the sensible body, weaving together theoretical reflection, critique, and experimental material interventions. Here, design operates as a practice of reflexive mediation to reposition corporeality as a primordial territory to reclaim in a global society increasingly defined by the virtualization of relationships and the intensification of the body-machine project.

This research project concentrates its practical contribution through four essays mediated by experiences composed of objects, space, and sound. These interventions function as proposals that destabilize interaction norms, thereby reactivating, if only episodically, the body's sensible front. The results of these experiences emerge as revelations affirming materiality's potential to create epistemic spaces in the social automatisms of the body, exposing symptoms of estrangement and vulnerability while also proposing a re-signification of encounter and touch. These fissures underpin the public session model applied in the practical experiments, which are configured as moments of decontextualization from daily life to redesign participants' bodily experience.

In this research, design consolidates itself as a practice of provocation for revelation, making conscious the possibility of transformation and a renewed relationship with the body and the gestures that arise from it, particularly its relational action.

Keywords: design and experience; body; relational action; experiences of mediation; revelation of experience

Partiendo de la mirada sobre el diseño y de la práctica de la disciplina en diálogo con otros ámbitos del conocimiento, esta investigación cuestiona, en la contemporaneidad, el cuerpo disciplinado y objetificado cuando en acción relacional. Como contrapunto, la investigación propone una serie de episodios de acceso al cuerpo sensible, articulando reflexión teórica, crítica, e intervenciones materiales de carácter experimental. Aquí, el diseño actúa como práctica de mediación reflexiva con el objetivo de reposicionar la corporeidad en tanto que terreno primordial a rescatar en una sociedad global cada vez más marcada por la virtualización de las relaciones y profundización del proyecto cuerpo-máquina.

Este proyecto de investigación centra su contributo práctico a través de cuatro ensayos mediados por experiencias compuestas por objetos, espacio y sonido. Estas intervenciones constituyen propuestas que desestabilizan las normas de interacción para reactivar –aunque de forma episódica– el carácter sensible del cuerpo. Los resultados de estos experimentos se presentan como revelaciones que afirman el potencial de la materialidad para generar espacios epistémicos en los automatismos sociales del cuerpo. Exponiendo síntomas de extrañamiento y vulnerabilidad, proponen además la resignificación del encuentro y del toque. Estas fisuras fundamentan el modelo de sesiones públicas aplicado en los experimentos prácticos, que se configuran en tanto que momentos de descontextualización de los días como forma de rediseñar la experiencia corporal de los participantes.

En esta investigación, el diseño se consolida como práctica de provocación para la revelación, de modo a tornar consciente y posible la transformación y la nueva relación con el cuerpo y con los gestos que de él emergen, en particular su acción relacional.

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OPENING

This research is based on a series of three previous projects that are the foundation of its existence. These projects, collectively known as “*Projectos de Proximidade*” (“Proximity Projects”) (p. 19), through their material actions translated into objects, work on proximity, interaction and relational action between people.

This cluster of practical interventions uses design to mediate human relationships in contexts of increasing social distancing. All the interventions, developed at different times (pre- and post-pandemic), explore how objects can challenge norms of interaction, promote physical closeness and reflection on intimacy, touch and presence.

As well as highlighting design as a tool for reconfiguring relational dynamics, these practical precedents reveal some shortcomings to be explored in this research, namely: the need to structure and think of objects as elements of an experience, as well as the need to analyse and reflect on the experiences provoked in order to gauge the impact of their intervention and leverage the next one.

In addition to these practical indications related to design, it also became clear that from design it is possible to think, reflect and reimagine other scenarios for human relational action, which has undergone various changes originating in each individual’s body. These eminently practical interventions triggered the start of a deeper reflection on relationships and the body, based on the thoughts of some authors, such as Bauman and Descartes.

The practical background is therefore a warning device for the decision to carry out this research.

Chapter 1 - The body and the relationship (p. 29) proposes a reflection on the body as the founding axis of human relationships, exploring how its construction, control and transformation at different times have moulded - and continue to mould - social dynamics. Starting from the premise that the human being is established in the relationship with the other, as highlighted by Coimbra de Matos, the text covers a time span that goes from the primordial experience of the body (at birth and in the first tactile contacts) to contemporary complexities, marked by the virtuality and mechanisation of interactions. Firstly, the body’s organic and instinctive relationship with the world is analysed, supported by authors such as Freud, Winnicott and Luís Fernandes, who emphasise touch as the primary language of survival and identity construction. We then investigate how, at different times, the body has been disciplined - from the social prohibitions of the 16th century, analysed by Silvia Federici, to the Cartesian dualism that fragmented the body and mind, reducing it to a productive “machine”.

The chapter moves on to criticise the present, questioning how virtuality and technological devices reconfigure corporeality, transforming it into an image or an object of consumption. It thus questions whether the migration of relationships to digital spaces does emphasise a loss of tactile sensitivity and collective alienation, inherited from social control projects, as Foucault reminds us.

Without exhausting the answers, the text invites reflection on a central problem: reconciling the primordial human need for bodily connection and access to its sensible front, which is now automated and controlled. This problem serves as a guiding thread to explore the contradictions of a society that exalts the body but imprisons it in norms, screens and efficiency, challenging us to rethink its place in the current conjuncture.

Chapter 2 - Objects and the experience of the body (p. 45), explores design as a mediating practice between the human body and the material world, questioning how objects - from everyday utensils to advanced technologies - mould (and sometimes subvert) sensible and relational experience. Based on the vision of László Moholy-Nagy, who defines design as a critical and transformative attitude, the text analyses its duality: on the one hand, as a tool for connection and emancipation; on the other, as an instrument of control and alienation.

The reflection begins with a brief analysis of the intervention of design on different fronts supported by Rawsthorn's critique, highlighting its ability to translate human needs into tangible forms (such as Moholy-Nagy's explanatory posters for the London Underground). He then confronts contemporary examples - such as the "Snoo Smart Sleeper" carrycot or the "Telenoid R4" robot - which illustrate a central tension: the progressive replacement of bodily interaction with technological mediations, often masked by a sense of superficial humanisation (affable voices, proper names given to some entities' virtual assistants). Reflecting on this collection of references reveals that design can take two types of stances: at the service of progress that contemplates the individual and the collective, or one that risks being at the service of only a few who empty the individual and collective body in the name of the interests of a minority who aim to discipline and obey.

The chapter moves on to a discussion of the aesthetic experience, understood not as a mere exercise in style, but as a process of sensible revelation that rescues the body from the condition of "machine" to reposition it as a sensible entity and interpreter of the world. This reflection, supported by authors such as Fátima Pombo and R.D. Laing, explores the idea that the materiality of experience - when designed with coherence between form, function and meaning - can deactivate social automatisms and reactivate bodily awareness.

Without offering definitive answers, the text proposes a critical reflection on the place of design in the service of the body and how it instrumentalises or can instrumentalise its action.

Design, in this investigation, is not placed in the position of presenting solutions, but rather as a discipline, which dialogues and provokes, which proposes to reflect on the place of the body and its growing virtualisation.

Chapter 3 - Designing the experience (p. 59) consolidates the transition from theoretical research to experimental practice, focusing on the creation of short material actions that challenge the relationship between body, object and context. Based on initial empirical concerns (explored in the Background) and theoretical foundations such as the disciplining of the body (Foucault) and the invisible structure of materiality (Pombo), a series of practical exercises are proposed, using three objects, designed to destabilise crystallised relational habits and reactivate bodily sensitivity.

The objects designed for these actions - such as the glass object "*Para a boca e para os ouvidos*" ("For the mouth and ears") or the "*Objetos para uma relação*" ("Objects for a relationship") in knitted wool - function as critical mediators, exposing tensions between physical proximity and emotional barriers. Through structured sessions in controlled and informal environments, the text analyses how the materiality, transparency and fragility of the objects amplify gestures, silences and strategies for escaping experience, revealing dynamics of power, vulnerability and intimacy in pre-existing relationships.

The dialogue with the work of Lygia Clark - in particular with her concept of "*fantasmática*" ("phantasmatics") and relational objects - enriches the reflection on how material interventions can reveal unconscious layers of the body, transforming it from a productive machine into a sensible body. The research also confronts methodological limits, questioning the extent to which aesthetic experience can approach therapeutic processes and how design, by humanising or replacing interactions, oscillates between emancipation and control.

It is from the material actions developed for this chapter that, for the first time, the word "session" is used to organise the various moments in which the various experiences presented here were activated.

The actions described - from tensioned photographic sessions to the deviations of interactions - function as critical intervals, inviting us to rethink how objects and scenarios can reconfigure our relationship with materiality and the presence of the other.

Also in this chapter, based on the first material actions, three operative lines are outlined to be considered in the experiences of the following chapter, in which the emphasis is on understanding the tacit and empirical body and decontextualising it so that it reveals itself.

Chapter 4 - Essays on the body (p. 89) brings together four practical essays that investigate the body as a territory of encounter, touch and sensible awareness, organised in such a way as to favour a narrative logic that aims to gradually deepen the theme. Based on criticisms of the current human relational situation and the reflection generated in the previous chapters, the essays propose practical experiences that challenge social norms and reactivate corporeality through material mediations and face-to-face interactions.

Encounters for the Body (2024)

This 1st essay (p. 91) explores the reinvention of risk and chance in relationships, contrasting controlled virtual spaces with physical encounters mediated by objects. Held in Avis, Portugal, this practical essay uses a space, two types of objects and a sound piece to choreograph interactions, emphasising non-verbal communication and the body as the event and reason for the encounter as opposed to the virtual image. The experience reveals the human need for proximity and the ability of objects to destabilise routines, introducing chance and unpredictability into reflection.

Touching the Body in Parts (2023)

The 2nd essay (p. 104) focuses on touch as a gesture of curiosity about the other, using objects called “guts” to bring together parts of the body that are not usually touched (noses, elbows). The various sessions held around this practical experience, with pairs and groups, expose tensions between intimacy and the norm, revealing how material mediation can de-automatise gestures and expand tactile maps. This essay highlights the skin as a negotiating frontier between the individual and collective body, questioning the powers and hierarchies implicit in access to the body.

The Whole Body (2024)

The 3rd essay (p. 122) moves on from the experience with the “*Máquina do Toque*” (“Touch Machine”), a structure that episodically renders bodies partially anonymous. This experience allows us to explore vulnerability and trust through the mediation of a relational action that promotes full-body touch.

This essay focuses its reflection on the practical experience that makes it up, as well as the testimonies that bear witness to it, bringing evidence to the discussion that is a reason for analysing the following experience. The reflection of this essay is particularly accompanied by Laing’s thinking, which highlights the gap between

the “self and the other” and explains why this practical experience was leveraged.

The Weight and Lightness of the Whole Body (2024)

The fourth and final essay (p. 144), which comprises a practical experience using stone objects, a space and a sound piece, focuses on the dimension of the body, questioning the limits and care of relational action. The practical component of this reflection is based on Schultz’s Autogenous Training, a body-mediated approach to relaxation based on concentration on the individual body.

The practical experience of this essay was developed in Évora, Portugal, unfolding in several collective sessions that transformed the old slaughterhouse into a space of care, where the interaction between facilitator and receiver revealed invisible layers of the body. Also in this essay, testimonies were collected that emphasise the paradoxical lightness caused by the sensation of weight provoked by the objects, reviving the affirmation of the body as an intermediary in the world.

The four essays build a progressive narrative: travelling from the relational surface to the tactile depth. The experiences that drive each essay are articulated as a counter-narrative to the body-machine. Mediated by objects, the experiences do not offer solutions, but reveal cracks in the project of disciplining the body, proposing design as an experimental practice of de-automatisation.

By provoking episodic experiences of sensible presence, these essays reinforce the pertinence of the research by showing that: reconnecting the body is a necessary action in a hypervirtualised world, capable of finding a balance between the individual and collective body.

After the experiences - the body (p. 175), summarises the reflective and practical journey that crossed the previous essays, articulating empirical observations, theoretical dialogues and concerns about the body in contemporary times. Starting from the shared position of researcher - simultaneously designer, participant and observer - the final reflection confronts the tensions between the organic presence of the body and its objectification, problematising how virtualisation and automation transform the body into a territory of control and simulacrum.

Organised around three main axes - observation, practical responses and critical projections - this final reflection revisits the experiences developed in the previous chapter in order to leave this research open for the future.

By evoking Adrienne Rich and Lygia Clark, this research argues that the body, even if disciplined, retains a “primordial naivety” that can be reactivated through experiences that reinscribe it as a place of refuge and protest.

This research, which is an invitation for collective action, suggests that design’s task here is not to solve, but to reveal - to discover, through matter, the armour that separates us from ourselves and from others. This reflection ends with an open horizon, with the question: “What will become of the body?”.

ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The narrative of this research is organised on the basis of a progressive construction, establishing a path that combines practical experiences and theoretical reflection. Throughout its development, questions and concerns emerge, rejecting the prior definition of objectives or initial questions. This gradual process allows the objectives to be formulated during the research, as new layers of analysis and reflection emerge - addressing immediate concerns and, at the same time, giving rise to new questions.

The body and its relational dimension with the world remain the central axis of theoretical study, driven by practical material experiences that challenge the norms imposed on the body. By placing design in dialogue with other disciplinary areas (such as phenomenology, social psychology and other critical studies), this research shows how the practice of design can operate as a tool for critical questioning, exposing tensions between the lived body and the controlled body.

Taken as a contribution to an open debate, the research refuses definitive solutions and is therefore based on a model of continuous action-reflection, which favours the formulation of questions about the place and action of the body in societies marked by contradictions between physical presence and digital dissolution. Their insistence lies precisely in reinforcing design as a discipline capable of materialising and therefore revealing concerns and widening the space for discussion about corporeality.

Note: This document consists primarily of bibliographic references in Portuguese, Spanish, French, and English. The translation criteria for citations were as follows: when a reference originates from a text in its original language, the quotation is preserved, followed by a parenthetical note stating “own translation”; when an existing English translation of the reference was located and accessible, the published translation was used.

However, the majority of translations provided here are “own translations”, as it was not possible to locate all published translations, and some simply do not yet exist.

BACKGROUND

Proximity Projects

This research was preceded by a series of practical projects that revealed the importance of objects in human relational action. These projects are grouped under the heading “Proximity Projects”. Each of them was planned for different contexts and despite the motive and principles that relate them, they have different characteristics in terms of their materiality and utilisation.

The “Proximity Projects” are a set of practical exercises that aim to physically bring people together through designed objects that serve as mediators of encounters to trigger different actions of gestures and movements of closeness.

These objects are proposals for mediating proximity between people, based on the collection of everyday observations that confirm the project of distancing human relationships.

The reasons for these “Proximity Projects” are to be found in this collection of daily observations that mean Design can be a discipline that contributes to reflection on human relationships, with proposals to raise awareness of practices for more interaction, and less distancing.

These projects, presented below, are based firstly on a self-proposal exercise¹ and then on a commissioned proposal, which means that they have different characteristics and consequences. In this case, on the one hand, the self-proposal exercises mean that the objects are less committed to those who use them and more focussed on the results to be obtained from their use. On the other hand, in the case of objects that respond to an external proposal, although with the same concerns, they have a greater commitment to their users and reach a wider audience, which leads to a greater diversity of experience.

In each experience, I intentionally assumed myself as the first participant, recognising that awareness of one’s own body - especially in relation to the body of another - gains depth when mediated by objects that I have designed in an informed way.

1. The expression “self-proposed exercise” is used to define a project that arises from one’s own will and initiative.

- fig. 1. Neck object that confines two people in close proximity.
- fig. 2. Object to view the other, that focuses interaction solely on gaze and visual communication.
- fig. 3. Object for two mouths that creates an unconventional action of conversation and shared breathing.



fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3

Objetos de Concentração para Pares (Objects of Concentration for Pairs) (2018)

“Objects of Concentration for Pairs” are the response to a call for works for the 2018 *Bienal Internacional de Arte de Cerveira* under the theme “Traditional Plastic Arts and Digital Arts - The Discourse of (Dis)Order”.

Although this event was not dedicated to design, the theme and format of the event provided the essential circumstances for thinking about the reality of digitalisation and the virtuality of human relationships. Thus, the proposal for “Objects of Concentration for Pairs” - in a pre-pandemic period - emerges as a project of resistance to the distancing experienced in relationships, based on three objects that are seen as mediators of a controlled approach. Of the three objects, the neck object (**fig. 1**) puts two people in a place where they can look at each other from a very short distance; the eye object (**fig. 2**) allows you to concentrate only and solely on the eyes of the person in front of you, cancelling out any surrounding scenery; the mouth object (**fig. 3**) establishes a connection through voice or breathing, as if your mouth were connected to someone else’s mouth.

In the experience of using these three objects, it was noticeable that in addition to mediating a certain distance and proximity, they also activate spontaneous actions in their users that are revealed by the discomfort that these objects provoke, such as: being and feeling surrounded in a very small space with another person whose only possible action is to look at the person in front of them, and given the proximity, to smell the other person’s breath and body odour; or to look at the other person without any other element or action apart from the eyes and the exchange of glances; or having to exchange breath with another person through an object that only allows this action.

After this exercise, understood as the first experience of mediating objects to relate to people, the next exercises and projects took into account new elements that arise from the “Objects of Concentration for Pairs”, such as: the ability of these objects to activate new behaviours in human relationships and the questions they raise about our intimacy with the known and the unknown.



fig. 4



fig. 5

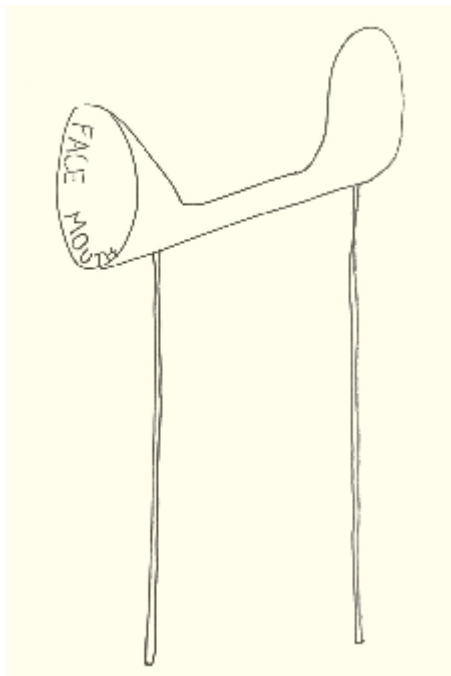


fig. 6

The following project, entitled “Public Devices for Therapy”, is the result presented for a commission from the *5th Istanbul Design Biennial* under the theme “Empathy Revisited: Design for more than one” at the invitation of curator Mariana Pestana. Based on the theme and the knowledge put into practice in the previous exercise “Objects of Concentration for Pairs”, instruments were developed to bring people together, already in a pandemic period,- for the public space.

This project started before the pandemic and its scale was going to be different – proximity objects for domestic use - with the outbreak of the pandemic the project gained scale and moved into the public space, which was the only possible space to use during the pandemic.

These objects were first installed in a harbour space, the Port of Besiktas, in a place to contemplate the landscape (**fig. 4**) and then moved on to their final installation in “Sanatçılar Park”, known in the West as “Artists Park” (**fig. 5**). The fact that these objects were placed in a public space and outdoors meant that their size and materiality were designed for this purpose. Thus, the objects presented are made of metal and have a scale that allows those who use them to use them autonomously, i.e. without it being necessary for the gesture to conform to the action of the object, but rather the opposite, that the object conforms to the action of the user. These objects are static and fixed to the ground, unlike the previous ones which had the characteristic of being mobile objects to be handled. In this way, the “Public Devices for Therapy” are instruments that, when used, indicate to the user the type of gesture and movement to be made. This communication with users takes place through two elements: the formal composition of the objects that suggest the use of a part of the body (**fig. 6**) and through the instruction engraved on the place where the part of the body to be used rests (**fig. 7**).

Given their contextual characteristics in the spaces where they are installed, this project is a training ground for proximity and physical encounters. Of the five objects that make up this project, one allows for touch (**fig. 8**), and it is precisely with this object that we understand the intimate side that exists in purposefully touching, outside of the common action of greeting someone, a part of another person’s body, in this case the hand.

The remaining objects suggest broader actions such as: being with others and looking (**fig. 9**) at just one person (**fig. 10**). And more detailed actions such as: looking into another’s eyes (**fig. 11**) or talking to another (**fig. 12**). This division of actions takes place so that there is a cadence of use, ranging from broader actions, which are



fig. 7



fig. 8



fig. 9



fig. 10



fig. 11



fig. 12

- fig. 4. Public Devices for Therapy implemented in its first location: Besiktas Port.
- fig. 5. Final location of Public Devices for Therapy in Sanatçılar Park.
- fig. 6. Sketch for usage instructions for the object.
- fig. 7. Implementation of usage instructions on the object.
- fig. 8. Objects that enable touch and that provoke reflection on the intimacy of intentionally touching someone's hand.
- fig. 9. Objects that create a shared space for being and coexisting with others.
- fig. 10. Face-support objects enabling extended face-to-face interaction.
- fig. 11. Object for gazing into another's eyes. This object references the piece shown in fig. 2, p. 20.
- fig. 12. Mediation object for a two-person conversation.

therefore considered less uncomfortable and simpler, to more detailed actions, which are therefore closer and perhaps less comfortable.

2. “The most important realisation of virtual proximity seems to be the separation between communication and relationship. Unlike old-fashioned topographical proximity, it does not require ties to be established beforehand, nor does it necessarily result in their establishment.” (Bauman, 2006, p. 86. Own translation)

Since this project came about during the pandemic period and is therefore experienced in a regime of distancing, the objects installed in public spaces, which inhibit the spread of the virus, fulfil the distancing established at the time, but suggest that the meeting of bodies present is not lost. This concern to keep bodies in the same space, and therefore suggesting an encounter, is due to the denunciation already made prior to the pandemic period about the loss of social skills and the distancing that technologies impose on us.²

Humanário (Humanarium) (2021)

With the knowledge acquired from the observations of the use of the objects in the previous exercises, a new object called “Humanarium” (**fig. 13**) was installed at the launch of the fanzine “Zine-Zita” where a gathering of people was planned. This object was intended to engage people, get them talking and make them stay in the event space, as if it were an open-air chat room. So, an object was designed to be a space where people could enter and stay in contact with each other. This space was designed using a geometric shape - an enneagon - to accommodate nine people who can communicate with each other. Based on the design of this object, its materiality and its installation, people can enter a kind of open-air conversation room. This enneagon-shaped object, materialised with a type of “non-woven fabric” and suspended with threads so that it can easily adapt to pre-existing structures, divides the heads from the bodies of its users, so that only the heads are visible after sticking them through the holes in the object. The dichotomous structure of the project - which separates body and head (**fig. 14**), referring to the Cartesian dualism³ - directs users of the Humanarium to concentrate on the upper plane of the body, favouring the gaze (their own and that of others) and conversation as priority forms of interaction. As soon as they leave their seat, from one of the object’s nine holes, they can only see the bodies of their “roommates”, almost playing a guessing game as to which body corresponds to the familiar face.

3. «The body is conceived as brute matter, completely divorced from any rational qualities: it does not know, it does not want, it does not feel” (Descartes, 1985, p. 123. Own translation).

The “Humanarium” is not a very intimate experience - people are not very close and do not touch each other - but once they are in their place they can only interact with those in the same “room” (**fig. 15**) because once the body is divided (**fig. 16**), the hands are no longer the protagonists and so there are no objects attached to the conversation (**fig. 17**), such as the use of a mobile phone.

Although this object does not stimulate physical touch, it does provoke some revelations in the actions of those who use it: by materialising a formal space for conversation, users resist the relational commitment it demands, opting for brief and superficial interactions.



fig. 13



fig. 14



fig. 15



fig. 16



fig. 17

- fig. 13. "Humanarium" object in its first presentation.
 fig. 14. Body-head division provoked by the object.
 fig. 15. Second experience with the 'Humanarium' object, clearly demonstrating its capacity to generate a particular space.
 fig. 16. Bottom view revealing interaction without visual communication.
 fig. 17. The object's space evokes a conversation chamber.

Of the various times this object has been used, three types of experience are reported:

1. the use of the object to talk, with the subject of the conversation being the object itself and the strangeness of the action it promotes
2. turning an object into a game in which people move from place to place
3. using the object only for quick use, which consists of quickly entering and exiting the object without coming into contact with any other user.

The three points of observation are confirmed as deviations from the action that the object wants to implement, since human relational action is undergoing transformations.⁴

4. As explored in Chapter 1 - The body and the relationship, p. 29

PRACTICAL BACKGROUND

These three exercises, called “Proximity Projects”, were presented in different contexts and experienced by people with very different standards. However, despite the fact that these objects were available in various spaces and to different audiences, there was no reflection plan developed for these proposals in relation to their implementation and experience of use. The lack of this careful look is because these projects were designed as isolated objects and not within a sequence of research and reflection on the theme that unites them. In other words, the theme that unites them is a haphazard consequence, only realised later.

The “Public Devices for Therapy” project is perhaps the one with the best conditions for a more in-depth study of the experience it can generate, given that it is still installed in the same public garden today.

Since these projects are unrelated because they are not part of a thematic study and action plan, the conclusions that do exist are based on perception and anecdotal observation of the use of these objects, including the following points:

- These objects activate certain behaviours, actions and sensations during the choreography of use. These activations are established with the user themselves or when they interact with other users.
- The use of these objects questions the limits of intimacy and the public body⁵, through the proximity they establish and the touch they allow.
- The appearance of the objects, because they are not part of the common typologies of objects, causes some strangeness in the interaction with them and incites a performative reaction from those who use them. Thus, these

5. “Public Body”, an expression used to explain the body as a place of touch.

objects have a performative character due to the lack of a category to assign them to.

These objects are not intended to impose concrete relational actions, but rather, from the choreographies⁶ that they suggest, to question apparently common actions, and as a consequence of using these devices, to suggest alternatives or behavioural possibilities that would not otherwise be established.

6. The terminology “choreographies” is used here to define common everyday bodily gestures and actions and not as a definition of the disciplinary area of dance.

The three founding projects, although limited in their reflective component, gave rise to the research presented here. Superficial observation of the use of these objects allowed us to identify not only flaws in the dynamics of interaction, but above all a resistance on the part of the participants to relational commitment. This resistance, it was concluded, does not derive solely from insufficient elements of the experiments, but from a cultural transformation that is taking place: the replacement of corporeality with fleeting connections mediated by interfaces.

Chapter

1

The body and the relationship

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BODY

The individual exists and grows in the relationship it establishes with others, as Coimbra de Matos says “it is, in fact, in the deep and sustained relationship with the other - and others - that it builds its Universe of Culture, its natural and essential habitat for its survival and living as an intelligent, sensible and poetic being, precisely the creator of the civilisation it enjoys.” (Coimbra de Matos, 2016, p. 5, Own translation). The phenomenon of social relationships, which is largely due to a sought-after encounter, happens because Man is an eminently social animal, as Aristotle argued⁷, and as such, it is an organic need for subjects to get to know each other, to be together, to interact and to relate.

7. Mentioned by António Coimbra de Matos (Coimbra de Matos, 2016, p. 5)

Despite the human need to establish relationships between people, the pursuit of relational control through the body can be found in (Western) history right up to the present day. Silvia Federici⁸, in her book “Calibã e a Bruxa”(2020) - Caliban and the Witch (2021)⁹, gives several examples of attacks on social relationships using the body as a means, including this episode in the mid-16th century in England and France: “Gambling was banned, in particular games of chance, which as well as being useless, affected the individual’s sense of responsibility and “work ethic”. Taverns and public baths were closed. Nudity was punished, as were many forms of sexuality and sociability that were «improductive»” (Federici, 2020, p. 204. Own translation). This is one phase of history, among others, in which we realise that the body is a target for gaining control of societies and making it the instrument at the mercy of the interests of installed power.

8. Silvia Federici (1942) is a feminist activist, teacher and writer. She is the author of several books on women’s history, colonialism, globalisation and labour exploitation, including “Caliban and the Witch” (2020), a milestone in the radical feminism debate.

9. English title: Federici, S. (2021). Caliban And The Witch Women, The Body And Primitive Accumulation. PENGUIN BOOKS LTD.

These prohibitions, through the “disciplining of the body” as defined by Foucault¹⁰ (Federici, 2020, p. 199) and through punishment, determined a collective distancing and a consequent class disorganisation, imposing control and the end of the space for meeting and the time for recreational activities seen as superfluous and disorientating for the individual.

10. Michel Foucault (1926–1984), French philosopher and historian.

With these impositions, the body is subject to the will of the dominant power with the aim of creating a society that is controlled and subjugated to the interests of a minority. This project, which is still present today, had the backing of the philosophy of the time, known as “mechanistic philosophy”¹¹ namely with the development of the duality of Descartes (1596–1650) and the theory of Hobbes (1588–1679), later countered by Marx (1818–1883) who explains why Descartes divided the body and the mind and why Hobbes entrusts the body to power, which is explained by the “reduction of the body to mechanical matter” (Federici, 2020, p. 211. Own translation). Above all, Descartes’ definition, which distances the

11. The implementation of social distancing policies, the transformation of the body into a labour force, the abolition of the existence of magical phenomena, led philosophy to seek a new field of speculation through the understanding of nature and the body as machines, the search for rationality.

body from the mind, stating that the body is a mere “aggregate of limbs” (Descartes, 1985, p. 123. Own translation), is the explanation for the understanding of a raw body with few social and relational capacities and lives as a production machine, in which gestures and behaviours are controlled. It was at this time, with the intention of mechanising the body, that for the first time “torture was used for scientific purposes, because there was a need for blood and torture in order to “create an animal” capable of regular, homogeneous and uniform behaviour, and indelibly marked with the memory of the new rules.” (Nietzsche, 2000, p. 59–61. Own translation).

Inevitably, society has created new patterns of individual behaviour with a strong impact on the collective and its social relations. The alienation of the body and the awareness of it as a brute force, a work machine, with uniform, predictable behaviour, devoid of any unique particularities, pushes society towards homogeneous, controlled and mechanised individual action, achieving an “individual prototype to which everyone should conform.” (Federici, 2020, p. 220. Own translation)

This idea, which overturns a plural but aggregated society, of yearning and desire, of “dreaming of life as one long carnival” (Federici, 2020, p. 235. Own translation), in order to transform its individuals into working machines absent of ideas and will, characterises the first phase of capitalist development and experiences of the sectarianism of society, with repercussions right up to the present day.

Despite the various attacks on the social body with an impact on the collective body, Coimbra de Matos, in his thesis “*Nova Relação*”¹² (2016) - (New Relation (Own translation)), which is shown in the documentary film “*O olhar nos outros*” (2020) - (Looking at others (Own translation))¹³, emphasises the original need for subjects to relate in order to define their own location, such as the first sensations of existence when a baby feels that his mother is thinking about him, or that his mother’s smile contains some information that communicates with him (Varela & della Santa, 2020).

Thus, returning to the primary needs of the body, which are understood to be crucial regardless of the registers of power in force, it is also possible to identify in individuals the need for care and to relate to each other. In other words, there are competences that are inherent to the animal that we are and even if these are attacked, they do not cease to exist but fall asleep or are forgotten. Perhaps relationships, through the body, need to be challenged in order to establish a new relationship with them.

12. “(...) if the evil comes from the relationship, the cure will come from the transformation of the relationship.” (Coimbra de Matos, 2016, p. 11. Own translation)

13. Varela, R., & della Santa, R. (2020). António Coimbra de Matos: *O Olhar Nos Outros* [movie].

The body - the first place

When a new being is born as a baby - empirically - unaware of the new reality that awaits them and unable to establish a relationship between what happened inside the mother's womb and now, their entire body is touched to make them feel, and for others to become aware of the novelty and materiality that this new body brings.

Regarding the first moments of the new body's search for reality, various studies - from psychoanalysis, psychology, sociology and paediatrics, from the oldest to the most contemporary - have shown that contact with another body, usually the mother's, is extremely important so that the new body, still without a context, can begin to build a relationship of trust with the world. It is the body, first and foremost, that mediates the new being with the world through its materiality and tactile pronunciation¹⁴. Luís Fernandes¹⁵, in his recent study "As Lentas Lições do Corpo" (2021) - (The Slow Lessons of the Body (Own translation)), mentions Freud¹⁶ to say that: "It is the surface of the skin, already recognised by Freud, that registers the first experiences of relationships and the limits of the self." (Fernandes, 2021, p. 150. Own translation). This relationship takes place through contact with another body because, according to Winnicott¹⁷, the new body, in primitive nakedness, leaning against another partially naked body, learns to control the accelerated breathing that comes with the shock of birth and to set the mother's heartbeat as a reference so that it can integrate the idea of rhythm and time into the still alienated body (Ribeiro e Santos, p. 35).

Relational expressions in the first moments of life are reciprocal - between the new being and the carer - and reflect the need for survival and the mutual dependence that is established. These expressions, which are mostly tactile, or in the words of Luís Fernandes, "early tactile experiences (which) are central to forming the psychic skin" (Fernandes, 2021, p. 150. Own translation), are representations of tenderness and care, just as the action of breastfeeding may represent something other than feeding. It is understood that it is through touch that the body, at the beginning of individual existence, defines and establishes its first relationships with other subjects in the world. In the absence of other competences, it is through touch that communication between subjects takes place. This touch translates into various gestures that have various representations, from the aforementioned tenderness and care, as well as a touch that soothes, cradles, corrects, a touch that protects, among others that shape the baby's behaviour.

At this stage, the beginning of life, touch is allowed and is absorbed by many, which may suggest the existence of a "tactile bipolarity"¹⁸ (Fontes, 2006, p. 110. Own translation). This relationship established

14. The term "tactile pronunciation" is used in this research to show that it is through touch that the first communications between carers and babies are established.

15. Luís Fernandes (1961), a Portuguese psychologist who studies psychology in the field of corporeality.

16. Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), Austrian neurologist and psychoanalyst.

17. Donald Woods Winnicott (1896–1971), English paediatrician and psychoanalyst. In his book *Human Nature*, published in 1988, Winnicott writes that the baby does not exist in itself and only exists in relation to its mother. Nowadays, we can extend this relationship to a body other than that of a woman.

18. Based on Freud, Ivanise Fontes calls "tactile bipolarity" "the fact that I feel the object touching my skin at the same time as I feel my skin being touched by the object." (Fontes, 2006, p. 110. Own translation)

through touch is an organic and primitive relationship, as if there were no other way for the new individual to survive, and there is no better relational method with equal effectiveness. In carers and babies, in this first phase, a series of instincts from the primordial origin of humanity - the animal - are activated, such as: nudity and the encounter of naked bodies or the cleaning of the other's body. These instinctive but necessary actions and behaviours are lost as we grow up and transform into other actions that have less to do with the body. The explanation for this phenomenon has to do with the change in perception of touch that arises as we grow up, which comes from the social impositions that are incorporated.

At this early stage of life, the baby's body and actions are, in most cases, observed and analysed with great attention. Crying, for example, has a specific meaning in this period, different from what it will have in later stages of development. Freud even analysed the baby's cry, explaining that babies use this form of communication when they are faced with the absence of something that comforts them.

It is with these behaviours, screaming or crying, that the baby begins to understand its exteriority and thus the material reality that surrounds it, namely the need for the carer's body, such as the mother's breast¹⁹. Perhaps it is here, at this stage, that the learning of the real and of relational action begins, based on the absence revealed by the need for something that mediates and identifies the relationship between the "self" and the "others". In the analysis of these behaviours and actions that are established in the relationship between the baby and the caregivers, be it screaming, crying, being held, baths, among others, there is a phenomenon that needs to be highlighted in relation to these actions, which is that of tolerance and permission. All these gestures and actions have a different interpretation and understanding at other stages of life. This means that the perception of externality, of reality - of the world - changes according to the growth and impositions of society, and this transformation has an impact on the new being and their carers.

As Freud points out and as has been said before, «It cannot be said that the first phases of growth have somehow been preserved, but rather absorbed by the later phases to which they served as material.» (Freud, 2008, p. 18. Own translation). This reflection by Freud means that the first stages do not just become memories in someone's body, they are in fact absorbed by the following stages, namely by social impositions.

Growing up - Distance from the other body

The construction of the body, its exteriority and the relationship that is established between these two elements, changes as we grow up,

19. Undoubtedly, one of his strongest impressions is provided by the fact that some sources of arousal, later recognised as the organs of his own body, can transmit sensations to him at any moment, while others - among them the most desired: his mother's breast - escape him from time to time, only to be recovered after a cry for help. It is in this way that, for the first time, the ego is confronted with an 'object', with something that is 'outside' and whose presence manifests itself following a special action" (Freud, 2008, p. 12. Own Translation).

but the body continues to be “(...) what is first in the relationship” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 149. Own translation), in other words, despite the perceived changes that occur around it, it continues to be the central relational element.

It's possible to point to various causes for these changes in perception as we grow, but there are two that are considered to be prominent in this thesis: the acquisition of new skills as we grow and therefore become less dependent on others; and the materiality that overlaps with human relationships. The latter is a hypothesis that this thesis dares to put forward in this chapter, which serves as a framework for the problem.

These two causes, which are presented and elaborated below, are intended to explain that with growth, in a rather unconscious way, the distance between bodies arises, however this is where the animal primitivism of touch that we see in the early stages of life ends.

With the first cause presented, it is suggested that an individual goes through various stages of growth and that throughout these they lose dependence as they gain new skills, particularly in communication. As a baby, until a certain point, you do not talk, you do not walk, you do not run. At a later stage, the missing skills are acquired and the individual starts to talk, walk and run, and to be able to run away if necessary. These physical skills are accompanied by a social and cultural context and impositions. The second cause presented is a hypothesis put forward in this thesis, and refers to the artificial materiality that appears in the lives of individuals, from toys to other artifices that serve to distract, autonomise, learn and develop the being. This hypothesis arises from Steve Paxton's reflection²⁰ which states that: “As the child becomes more secure, many opportunities for a direct negotiation with gravity present themselves: trees, skates, playing ball, falls and scratches” (Paxton, 2022, p. 9. Own translation). In other words, the first contact that exists when a new being is born is the organised materiality of someone else's body (usually the mother's). However, as it grows up, its material map increases towards artificial materialities and therefore modifies the relationships of dependence with its parents and acquires new relationships (with artificiality) and new dependencies.

This artificiality shapes each individual's behaviour, imposing social standards that lead each person's actions towards individualisation, which is seen as autonomy and therefore something positive.

This research risks saying that gadgets, in the form of toys or other objects, are substitutes for people, they are entertainment for children and adults that promote people who are more capable of

20. Steve Paxton (1939–2024), dancer and choreographer from the United States of America.

being alone and consequently have less organised collective action.

These two causes contribute to the gradual bodily distance between individuals and push relational action towards a scenario with less presence of the body and touch and in which it acquires new connotations that come above all from the surrounding social and cultural context. Coimbra de Matos says that “A person does not exist alone, they exist with their environment. Me and my circumstances” (Varela and della Santa, 2020. Own translation). These connotations are usually embodied²¹, i.e. they become part of the individual’s behavioural map and actions and, as such, these behaviours have an impact on the way individuals relate to each other and to the collective.

There are many social experiences that take place so that distance is imposed to the detriment of closer bodies. Some of these have already been mentioned in point 1 of this chapter through Silvia Federicci’s reference, but others can be raised in order to understand how the cultural context, and its design at the service of installed power, shapes individual and collective behaviour towards actions of greater distance, such as the “centrality of work”. This is a theme that Christophe Dejours has explored in great depth²², in which he denounces the time that work takes up in people’s lives and, of course, the design of the work itself, the spaces and the labour logic, which causes people to spend time in solitude and as he says in the first person: “We are all alone in society” (Varela and della Santa, 2020. Own translation).

22. Christophe Dejours (1949), a specialist in occupational medicine and a French psychiatrist.

Other experiences exist to impose the distance that is being experienced, such as: “verbocentrism”²³ and the virtuality of things. Both factors are related to each other when the body loses its tangible materiality and relationships become a dematerialised scenario of words and conversation.

23. An expression used by Luís Fernandes to expose the centrality that words have gained and the withdrawal of the body from the social sphere. «We are not used to relating to the body in this way and people resist, they are socially programmed to verbalise.” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 80. Own translation)

Today, society is experiencing imposed distancing, where the body loses relevance in the encounter and words, through conversation in incorporeal places²⁴, take centre stage.

24. Topic covered in this chapter; The virtual imposition - the body without a body, p. 39.

Controlled Body

The trajectory of the body, from birth - when it is touched, cared for and socialised - to adulthood, is marked by a progressive process of sensory conditioning and social disciplining.

As David Le Breton notes²⁵, the contemporary body is thought of in scientific discourse as “an indifferent matter, a simple support for the person” (Breton, 2003, p. 15. Own translation). Breton’s conception goes back to the Cartesian mind-body dualism. This split, inaugurated by Descartes in the 17th century, consolidated the idea of the body

25. David Le Breton (1953), French sociologist.

as a biological machine, a mechanism separate from consciousness, subject to control and optimisation.

In the 16th century, in parallel with the rise of capitalism, the concept of the body-machine emerged²⁶, a body also defined by Silvia Federici as “a container of labour power, a means of production, the main working machine” (Federici, 2020, p. 207. Own translation). This paradigm not only reduced the body to an instrument of productivity, but also legitimised its exploitation under alienating labour regimes. Today, although the technological context has changed, the logic of the body-machine persists, now updated by more subtle control devices that are present in any context.

The sedentary body is part of the machine-body and the disciplined body. Le Breton identifies “technical prostheses” (Breton, 2023, p. 20. Own translation) - such as escalators, treadmills and lifts - as symbols of a society that replaces bodily mobility with automated convenience. Such seemingly benign technologies encapsulate a dynamic of passivity and surveillance. By adopting them, people are not only subject to basic movements, but are also inserted into systems of mutual observation and surveillance, where bodies are evaluated for their adherence to social norms of efficiency and adequacy.

Breton warns: “Never before in our Western societies have men made so little use of their bodies, their mobility and their endurance” (Breton, 2003, p. 20. Own translation).

This inertia is the result of a political project that favours productivity, turning the body into a static, monitored entity. The control to which the body is subject is an invisible built-in imposition. It seems a natural process to which individuals are exposed. As Breton says, “In contemporary scientific discourse, the body is thought of as an indifferent matter, a simple support for the person.” (Breton, 2003, p. 15. Own translation) it boils down to an image controlled by the requirements of the superficiality of the virtual universe²⁷ of what a healthy body represents. Perhaps it could be said that today the body, although real, is a representation of a series of requirements that consumer society has established and is establishing. But “*What kind of civilisation is this that is obsessed with showing off the body and simultaneously prolongs its taboo?*” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 53. Own translation)

27. The virtual universe is understood to mean social networks and their influence.

A possible answer to Luís Fernandes’ question can be found in the same author’s book: “Anatomopolitics of the body, Foucault called the techniques of normalisation that demand containment and training, that impose self-surveillance on the body.” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 59. Own translation)

Michel Foucault, in “Vigiar e Punir” (2010) - Discipline and Punish (2020)²⁸, describes anatomopolitics as a set of techniques that produce docile bodies - economically useful and politically obedient.

On the one hand, society is obsessed with showing off its body, but on the other hand it prolongs the taboo, and this is due to the disciplining to which the body is subject. This contradiction manifests itself in the coexistence of a culture that glorifies body exposure, now on platforms such as Instagram or TikTok, and imposes unattainable standards that generate anxiety and self-surveillance. The body thus becomes doubly controlled: as a labour machine and as an image to be consumed.

This civilisation imposes a disciplined, controlled body, which “(...) thus manufactures submissive and trained bodies, docile bodies. Discipline increases the body’s strength (in economic terms of usefulness) and decreases it (in political terms of obedience) (Foucault, 2010, p. 119. Own translation). In other words, the more disciplined the body is, the less capacity and availability for critical action it has in relation to itself and others. It becomes obedient to a system: whether it’s the centralism of work in people’s lives that inhibits them from having time for any critical action; the system of requirements governing the successful body projected by the virtual universe”; or the escalators that indicate the exact path and how the body should behave in order to be observed.

We live under a paradox: technologies promise proximity and ease, yet they reinforce mechanisms for controlling the body that desensitise and immobilise it. The body, disciplined by social imposition and reduced to a virtual image, becomes increasingly oblivious to its own materiality.

How can the body reconcile its exaltation with the repression of its sensible power?

Perhaps the answer lies in recognising the disciplining to which the body is subject in order to build or rebuild experiences where the body can once again move, feel and exist beyond machines and algorithms. Where the body can be “The relationship with the world” (Breton, 2003, p. 20. Own translation).

In the modern age, “The human body will be relegated to the level of a simple mechanism (...)” (Braunstein & Pépin, 2001, p. 90. Own translation) as Descartes advocated. It was here that the body came to the forefront of social policy, becoming “a beast unmotivated by the stimuli of labour” (Federici, 2020, p. 207. Own translation), a machine. During this phase, games were banned, taverns and public baths were closed as a way of disciplining the body²⁹. Similar to what happened at that time, today we are facing a new form of “training”³⁰ of the body through technology, which transforms the physical body into a virtual image, fundamentally altering our social interactions.

29. Theme commented intros chapter; The construction of the body, p. 31.

30. A word whose tone emphasises the act of training, of becoming an expert in a particular skill. In this case, it's the training of the body, as if it were wild and now domestic.

The virtual universe turns the physical body into an image, so that the body disappears as a means of interaction in the public space and the body migrates from the physical space to the virtual space. In other words, while the project of disciplining the body already has deep roots, virtuality has further accentuated this problem. This deepening has implications for relational action and the capacity for collective organisation, weakening and inhibiting it.

Traditional meeting places - squares, bars, discos, terraces - although they haven't disappeared, are now places of less interaction than they once were. The chat room, the virtual room, and messaging and image applications are now spaces of greater interaction where truth and lies act simultaneously and there is a total absence of the body and its non-verbal language inherent to its expression. Returning to Coimbra de Matos, in his text “Toque das Almas” (2010) - (Touch of Souls (Own translation)), it is possible to illustrate what this non-verbal language is that virtuality takes away from us, with the passage: “I feel that you feel that I feel. I do not know what, but I know that you feel that I feel.” He says that “This is the primary awareness - of realisation - of relational reality (...)” (Coimbra de Matos, 2016, p. 143. Own translation). Nonverbal language is a way of communicating, instinctive and animalistic, that we employ to relate to one another. The physical expression caused by the tension of bodies is part of human communication and relational action. This is currently under threat.

The virtualisation of relationships that we are witnessing means that “Cyberspace is the apotheosis of the society of the spectacle, of a world reduced to the gaze, to the mobility of the imaginary, but to the inspection of bodies that have become useless and annoying”. (Breton, 2003, p. 142. Own translation). In the virtual universe, there is no place for the body, there is only room for the image of the body and as such, in its absence, information about the other is lost, fragmented communication becomes normalised and a relational superficiality sets in. This virtual reality in which we live, adopted

without space for critical reflection, creates a new relational paradigm that echoes the concept of “docile bodies” that Foucault refers to (Foucault, 2010, p. 117. Own translation). Just as in the Modern Age (1453–1789) the body was controlled by restrictive principles, today it is moulded and subordinated by digital technologies, creating a new form of social control, perhaps less visible, but impactful. Although the virtual universe seems to be a free place, where we can all speak out without major restrictions, where we can show ourselves in the way we want, in reality these spaces incorporate an omniscient control that makes us behave in a sonorous way, and the dissonant are exceptions. As Foucault argued “(...) in any society, the body is trapped within very tight powers, which impose limitations, prohibitions or obligations on it.” (Foucault, 2010, p. 118. Own translation). In the virtual universe, or rather, in the virtuality that permeates contemporary society, the body also becomes a target, more constrained and limited than ever before.

Body-object and virtuality

The virtuality of the body in the digital age amplifies and accelerates trends already present in the history of body representation. The idea of the ideal body and its power over society is not a recent experience; it was already happening in Ancient Greece, with the body taking centre stage in artistic representations. During this period, proportions were sought that were seen as correct and harmonious, associated with health, athletic ability and fertility. From then until the Renaissance there was this preoccupation with achieving a representation of the perfect body, often going beyond reality. Male bodies were sketched with bulging muscles, as if all men were like that, or twisted bodies in apparently natural but staged poses. In other words, as well as depicting physical qualities, behavioural gestures such as poses were also indicated.

We can draw parallels between the images of the Renaissance - from painting to sculpture - and the manipulated images we have on social media today: both influence the way the body is perceived and the relationship we establish with our own bodies. Renaissance works moulded the ideals of beauty of the time, just as images on social media influence our perception of the body today.

Against the backdrop of some movements, especially feminist ones, the body today remains hostage to a stereotyped image from a physical and behavioural point of view, but also from a social point of view. The body “(...) is treated as a consumer good, it becomes a commodity.” (Braunstein & Pépin, 2001, p. 157. Own translation), it is an object of seduction governed by the speed of social media images that place it in relation to society. Bourdieu³¹ sees the body as a sociocultural product, in which the relationship with one’s

31. Pierre Bourdieu (1930–2002), French sociologist.

own body does not depend on the image that others have of it, but rather on the image of certain body models that are seen as legitimate “(...) which govern the evaluation of this image according to the subject’s position in the social structure.” (Maisonneuve & Bruchon-Schweitzer, 1981, p. 84. Own translation). So the body, as a mediator between the person and the world, is both a recipient of contemporary ideals and a transmitter of those same ideals.

With virtual networks and the ability of these media to spread, contemporary ideals quickly reach everywhere, leading to a possible standardisation of the perception of the body and its behaviour. This hypothetical standardisation is also a form of disciplining the body, which reduces it to a consumer object, conditions it to stereotyped standards and encloses it in a virtual place. By extracting the body from the physical realm, this process precipitates a consequent loss of agency and interaction.”

The virtuality of the body creates new “existential spaces”³², where the boundary between the physical and the digital is blurred, raising new challenges for human relationships in terms of the body and space, both individual and collective. Although these “existential spaces”, where the body is virtual, are permanently connected, the truth is that the superficiality of action established in these places has repercussions for relational action, weakening and diminishing it.

32. Existential spaces” are those places that are virtual but have a human existence.

The loss of corporeality - useless body / Incorporeal existential place

The relational action of the world is being challenged by virtual spaces where the place of the sensible is “(...) infinitely simplified and protected from bad surprises, while still providing the full feeling of the real.” (Le Breton, 2003, p. 145. Own translation).

The place of the body in the virtual universe is “incorporeal”³³ - an image - where there are no geographical or temporal obstacles, where relational action takes place between the truth, its alteration, and the imagination of the other. Badiou³⁴, in response to questions posed by Nicolas Truong in “Elogio do Amor” (2020) - In Praise of Love (2012)³⁵, talks about the experience of using social networks for dating, and explains the user’s access to prior information beyond the person’s image, such as their star sign, date of birth or where they live. This information is what the user will use to assess whether to continue looking for the “perfect” person, whether to choose the person they are currently seeing, or even whether to choose that person and continue looking for someone else. The availability of the person’s information, the communication of this information and the gesture of whether or not to accept the person who appears on the mobile phone screen, refers to the idea of a catalogue of objects

33. «(...) - the body in virtual reality is incorporeal.” (Le Breton, 2003, p. 150. Own translation)

34. Alain Badiou (1937), French philosopher.

35. English title: Truong, N., & Badiou, A. (2012). *In Praise Of Love*. Profile Books Ltd.

where, in this case, the person who best meets the user's criteria is chosen. Badiou, as a caricature of the state of relationships based on his analysis of virtual meeting spaces, even uses the expression "arranged marriage" (Badiou & Truong, 2020, p. 17. Own translation) to emphasise the idea that the social networks are a place where various previous interests are aligned, without giving space to the body and the experience of a real encounter. This "arrangement" is not "(...) in the name of family order (...)" as it once was, but "(...) in the name of personal security" (Badiou & Truong, 2020, p. 17. Own translation). In other words, social networking sites control the encounter and place it on an individual level, where confrontation, if it exists, is milder because the body gives way to a screen. These virtual meeting spaces, which remove the physical body and replace it with an image, are innocuous spaces that alter human relational and behavioural action, making the risk of disillusionment and suffering lower. The body loses relevance and there is a quest to transport it to the place of "well-being". Thus, the disciplining of the body that Foucault refers to continues by suggesting that it no longer be a body that is sensible to less desirable emotions. The body is stripped of its right to feel the relational experience to the full because it is considered to carry "useless risks"³⁶ (Badiou & Truong, 2020, p. 18. Own translation).

36. "(...) I think that the liberal and the libertarian converge on the idea that love is a useless risk." (Badiou & Truong, 2020, p. 18. Own translation)

In relational circumstances, the body gives way to a set of information outside of it that removes the immediate, prolongs the idea of mystery and suppresses discomfort and shyness. Virtual spaces encode affections to circumvent the visual or tactile absence³⁷, which means that despite the migration of the relationship, we still have a sensible body. Although the body is more absent from relational action and from the individual relationship itself, it continues to have basic, primordial, primary needs to feel and be felt because "In fact, all sensation depends on a bodily organ..." (Braunstein & Pépin, 2001, p. 28. Own translation). Therefore, even though the body is subject to a new spatial paradigm - that of an incorporeal existential place - in the order of the virtual universe, any sensation you want to have from it will always come from a material, physical place, the body.

37. "To circumvent the absence of visual or tactile contact, Internet users who exchange texts in chats resort to an affective code with repertoire signs: smileys. This makes it possible to code a smile, a wink, a kiss, a grimace, a shout, etc." (Le Breton, 2003, p. 144. Own translation)

Note: Chapter 1 of this research, dedicated to theoretical contextualisation and the exploration of disciplinary areas that underpin the design practice investigated here, has been written in the third person plural. This choice reflects a methodological option: by approaching fields outside the author's original training (such as philosophy and sociology), the third person gives a tone of analytical distance that facilitates the objective synthesis of concepts that are unfamiliar to the author. The choice also aims to demarcate the interdisciplinary nature of the research, emphasising that this chapter functions as a transversal theoretical body.

From chapter 2 onwards, the texts adopt the first person singular. This change is justified by the nature of the subsequent chapters, which reflect on the importance of design and experience, report on practical experiences, empirical observations and critical reflections directly linked to the authorship of this research.

Objects and the experience of the body

DESIGN AS A MEDIATION TOOL (BASED ON MOHOLY-NAGY'S REFERENCE)

Design, as an area of thought and practice, could be a tool for real transformation in society. As proposed by László Moholy-Nagy³⁸, and quoted by Alice Rawsthorn³⁹ in “El diseño como actitud” (2021) - *Design As An Attitude* (2018)⁴⁰, “Design is not a profession, but an attitude” (Rawsthorn, 2021, p. 8. Own translation). This perspective frees design from the shackles of industrial and market logic, repositioning it as a field of action that values the capacity for initiative based on observing and analysing everyday life⁴¹. This vision, which goes back to the Bauhaus, where Moholy-Nagy was one of the protagonists, suggests that design should not be subordinated exclusively to market demands, but should act as a tool for social, cultural and technological transformation.

By defining “Design as an Attitude”⁴², Moholy-Nagy paves the way for it to be understood as an autonomous practice, capable of proposing, questioning and anticipating future scenarios. This autonomy allows designers not to be mere executors of orders, but active agents in the construction of new realities and possibilities for the world. Design, in this sense, becomes a proposal tool based on critical observation, analysis and reflection, capable of generating knowledge and unleashing possibilities that go beyond utilitarian and material immediacy. It becomes a space for experimentation, where it is possible to explore and create a dialogue with other areas of knowledge, creating a relational discourse between disciplines as a way of broadening its impact on society.

This approach emphasises the potential of design as a propositional and visionary practice. Using the words that title Rawsthorn's book “Design as an attitude”, it is possible to state that design has the potential to anticipate⁴³ future challenges - such as current concerns relating to the impacts of artificial intelligence and quantum computing - by proposing solutions that harmonise technological innovation and ethical responsibility. In doing so, design not only responds to the needs of the present, but also shapes the future, acting as a bridge between the individual and the world. Design becomes an instrument of mediation, capable of leveraging significant social transformations and promoting critical dialogues about the direction of humanity.

In this context, “design as an attitude” reinforces the idea that its agents - designers, thinkers, educators - have the freedom and responsibility to think beyond conventions, to imagine unprecedented possibilities and to propose paths, starting from the present, that challenge the design of future society. This stance not only broadens the scope of design, but also places it as an essential field for building

38. László Moholy-Nagy (1895–1946, Hungary - Chicago), visual artist and professor at the Bauhaus.

39. Alice Rawsthorn (1958), English author and design critic.

40. Original title: Rawsthorn, A. (2022). *Design As An Attitude*. Jrp editions.

41. «Freeing design from the limitations of the professional role it had occupied since the industrial revolution, redefining it as a means of improvisation that is linked to instinct, ingenuity and ability, and that is open to the whole world (...)» (Rawsthorn, 2021, p. 9. Own translation)

42. «By defining design as «an attitude», Moholy Nagy recognised design's potential to become a more powerful social force as an effective and resourceful agent of change, free from commercial constraints.» (Rawsthorn, 2021, p. 12. Own translation)

43. “(...) it anticipates the effect that artificial intelligence, quantum computing, autonomous cars, digital manufacturing and other multiple advances that we know will affect the near future will have.” (Rawsthorn, 2021, p. 11. Own translation)

a more inclusive, sustainable and conscious future. By taking on this role, design ceases to be a mere tool at the service of industrial production and becomes a catalysing force for change, capable of interfering critically and actively in the development of society.

Therefore, by rescuing Moholy-Nagy's vision and updating it for contemporary challenges, design can be understood as a practice that unites action, ethics and the future. Design does not only solve problems, it also foresees them, questions them and transforms them into opportunities for innovation and human progress. From my perspective, this is the essence of design as an attitude: a stance that values autonomy, reflection and transformative action, capable of impacting not only the material world, but also the way we think, live and relate to each other.

Me – the object – the world

The materiality that surrounds us, proposed by design, mediates between the “I” and the world, whether through a glass that allows us to drink water (I - the glass - the water (the world)), or a public square (I - the square - the others (the world)). Design operates as a third entity that translates human needs into tangible forms, building bridges between the “I” and the world. Design is a mediation tool that puts us in relation, enables us to relate and controls our actions with the world.

Alice Rawsthorn, in her reflection on contemporary design, discusses technological interference and the path it has defined in society's habits “(...) not always for the good” (Rawsthorn, 2021, p. 11. Own translation). Our habits have been subject to change and our relational actions have come under attack, whether by migrating our relationships to other “existential spaces” - the virtual ones - or by creating objects that replace us in our actions with the world.

44. (Rawsthorn, 2021, p. 116–127)

In the chapter “Sin Control”⁴⁴ - (Control (english version)), Alice Rawsthorn lists various design interventions, together with other disciplinary areas, that alter and question the way we live and relate to each other, whether in a collective or individual sense. Among some of the projects that Rawsthorn mentions as tools for mediating society are the posters that Moholy-Nagy developed in 1937 to explain and at the same time reassure London Underground users about the use of objects such as escalators⁴⁵ considered a foreign object⁴⁶. These explanatory posters deconstructed the stairs using schematic illustrations, showing people that beyond what they saw there was a mechanical system that made the stairs move. This design intervention is an example of mediation between people and the world (“me” - the posters - the escalators (the world)). In this case, this apparently tenuous action means that design puts itself at the

45. Images of the Moholy-Nagy posters attached, Appendix I.

46. This object - escalators - is considered by Le Breton to be a technical prosthesis “aimed at further reducing the use of a body transformed into a vestige: escalators, treadmills, etc.” (Le Breton, 199, p. 20. Own translation)

service of society, helping it to adapt to “(...) the transformations of everyday habits by dispelling our fears.” (Rawsthorn, 2021, p. 116. Own translation).

Alongside this example, Alice Rawsthorn presents the “Snoo Smart Sleeper” project⁴⁷, designed in 2016 by designer Yves Behar and paediatrician Harvey Karp, a carrycot for cradling a baby with the aim of disturbing the parents less. This object is equipped with various technological elements, from sensors to microphones which, when they detect the baby crying or fussing, trigger automatisms so that the carrycot rocks and cradles the baby until it calms down and goes back to sleep. There’s no doubt that this object, when it’s working, can be a respite for parents, but it’s organic for a baby to cry, just as much as it is for him to be silenced by someone’s embrace or lap. It’s the comfort of one body that soothes and stabilises the other body⁴⁸. It’s like that in babies and it’s like that in adults. In this case, there is a kind of substitution of the “I”, of the individual, and the sequence of interaction is limited to the object and the world (object - baby (world)).

47. See Appendix II

48. Theme covered in Chapter 1 - The body and the relationship; The body - the first place, p. 33.

The “Telenoid R4”⁴⁹, designed in 2013 by Japanese engineer Hiroshi Ishiguro, is an object with an android system for transmitting messages and staging physical expressions that may be present in those messages. This telepresence robot was designed with a “humanised” appearance with no gender definition - it has a face, a body and limbs - and suggests that it is a human presence, unlike other objects with similar purposes, such as mobile phones. This piece of equipment, Telenoid R4, was preceded by other objects with the same objective, that of reducing distances using a substitute body, here the “I” is replaced by an object (object - world). The real body is omitted, leaving only the intention of what it wants to transmit to another, through an object that replaces it.

49. The first “Telenoid” model was launched in 2010 with the Japanese company A-Lab. see Appendix III.

The proposed use of this robot was: to keep elderly people company with the premise that family and friends would be closer through this object; to support people with social anxiety; in the health sector or in the business environment if someone couldn’t attend a meeting. You could imagine the scenario of the CEO of a company meeting with several “telenoids”. This object makes virtuality seem more present.

The conclusion is that the omission of the body for a digital two-dimensional image, as is the case with dating apps and other interaction systems, is not enough; the virtuality to which the body is subject is not enough, but there is also the intention to replace it with an object that cradles a baby or an artificial body, as is the case with the “Telenoid” project.

The ambivalence of the examples mentioned - between Moholy-Nagy's enlightening mediation and the replacement of human action by objects such as the "Snoo Smart Sleeper" or the "Telenoid R4" - may be intended to reveal a tension present in contemporary design: its capacity to be both a tool of emancipation and an instrument of control. This duality is not accidental; it mirrors the contradictions of a society that oscillates between fascination with technology and the loss of human capacity. While Moholy-Nagy used design to democratise access to an unknown object or piece of equipment (as in the posters that demystified escalators), projects like the "Telenoid R4" and virtual assistants like Siri or Alexa operate on the opposite logic: simulating humanity in order to naturalise the absence of the body and place human relational action on a level of devaluation. This dynamic not only reflects the desire for technological mastery, but also a paradoxical nostalgia - we want machines to remind us of a real body. On the one hand we omit the body, on the other we baptise systems with proper names so that we feel accompanied. Since ancient Greece, we can follow Aristotle's idea, reproduced by Coimbra de Matos, that we are "(...) eminently social animals (...)" (Coimbra de Matos, 2016, p. 189), which means that we need to feel humanity close to us and that is why, but not only, we "humanise" technology.

The assignment of names, voices and even personalities to artificial intelligence systems (such as Siri, Alexa, Bixby) is not innocent. By personifying algorithms with feminine or identifiable identities - soft voices, short and apparently affable names - the large economic groups transform abstract tools into perceptually tangible "entities", masking their essentially instrumental nature. In my opinion, this superficial humanisation serves two purposes: to normalise interaction with machines (avoiding the strangeness of talking to a device alone) and to affectively link the user to a commercial brand. As Judith Butler points out⁵⁰ in "Gender Trouble - Feminism and the Subversion of Identity" (2017), gender performance is crucial here: by associating virtual assistants with stereotypes of care and subservience (traits historically related to the female gender), social hierarchies are deepened while a convenience service is sold. The result is an illusion of intimacy that hides the exploitation of data and the standardisation of behaviour. The "Siri" assistant is not a being, but an Apple product; "Alexa" is not a companion, but an Amazon consumer channel.

In "Intimidades Congeladas - Las emociones en el capitalismo" (2012) - Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism (2007)⁵¹, Eva Illouz⁵² explores this idea of intimacy and the illusion of its existence, which leads to the normalisation of the "disembodiment"⁵³ of relationships.

50. Judith Butler (1956), philosopher and feminist from the United States.

51. English title: Illouz, E. (2007). Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism. Polity.

52. Eva Illouz (1961), Moroccan sociologist and teacher.

It is undeniable that these technologies have brought concrete benefits, especially for minorities. For example, people who are blind or have reduced mobility have gained autonomy by manipulating devices by voice. However, this inclusion is partial and conditional: it depends on adherence to systems that collect data, mould habits and often reinforce biases (such as algorithms that perpetuate racism or sexism).

The artificial intelligence and data analysis software COMPAS (Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions), used in the US criminal justice system to assess the risk of recidivism of people who have committed an offence or even prisoners, is an example of a system that perpetuates social exclusionary behaviour. In 2016, a study was released accusing this system of being “inaccurate and racist” (Rawsthorn, 2021, p. 122 and 123. Own translation), because it tends to classify black people as high risk more often than white people, even when the risk factors are similar.

The “humanisation” of technology, whether through artificial intelligence or other systems, can push human action into the background. In reality, these projects, with their flaws, only demonstrate the weaknesses in human relationships that tend to deepen with the “disembodiment”⁵⁴ of society.

Design, as a discipline that puts itself at the service of technology, whether in the development of new objects or services, has contributed to social distancing and the erosion of tactile human connections. Because much of what is designed to connect actually ends up fragmenting, excluding, controlling and with bleak consequences for the future.

The omission of the body in the digital age is not an accident, but a political and economic project. By replacing organic gestures and empathy with machine-mediated interactions, capitalism turns relationships into transactions and bodies into data. However, the body resists: it is the memory of what cannot be fully automated - the unpredictability of laughter, the vulnerability of crying, the complexity of touch. It is up to design, as a critical attitude, to remind us of this resistance. I'd say that if in the 20th century one of the premises of design was to be at the service of society's progress, in the 21st century it might be to preserve the human and its relational and empathetic action in the world. Perhaps in this way objects can stop being agents that participate in isolation and become mediators of relational action.

53. “Despite the disembodied aspects of the internet, beauty and the body are omnipresent, but now because they have been frozen, converted into images that freeze the body in the eternal present of photography, (...)” (Illouz, 2012, p. 174. Own translation). Eva Illouz uses the expression “disembodied” to define the absence of the physical body in virtual space.

54. The word “disembodiment” is used to emphasise the action of removing the body from the body itself. In this case, it is used to express the withdrawal of the physical, face-to-face body from an increasingly virtualised society.

The dialogue between design and aesthetic experience is central to understanding not only the evolution of the former, but also its relevance in shaping the human relationship with the material world.

The discipline of design has undergone several changes over time in terms of its definition. In the words of Gillo Dorfles⁵⁵ on industrial design, “after the advent of the industrial revolution - the production of objects (...) in addition to a practical-utilitarian function, an aesthetic function took place.” (Dorfles, 1978. p. 10. Own translation). However, the “aesthetic function” to which Dorfles refers is not limited to mere ornamentation or the superficial enhancement of objects. It is intrinsically related to the exercise of “influence - positive and negative - on our perceptive faculties” (Dorfles, 1978. p. 12. Own translation), on design’s ability to shape perceptions, emotions and behaviour. In other words, design, in its essence, is a practice that articulates materiality with sensibility, and transforms objects into vehicles of experience.

Although the word aesthetics is sometimes used without its original meaning, pushing design towards an exercise in superficial style, the truth is that the design project must have these concerns in the order of aesthetics, in the most original sense of the word, prior to the 18th century definition by Alexander Baumgarten⁵⁶, who describes it as the “science of the sensible”⁵⁷. Otherwise, the design project is incomplete, subject to the photogenic load that social networks demand.

Bruno Munari⁵⁸, in the article “Uno torna a casa satânico per aver lavorato tutto il giorno e trova una poltrona scomoda”⁵⁹ for the magazine DOMUS in 1944, exposes a historical contradiction in design: the superimposition of form over function. In the photographic series that Munari presents in this article as an illustration of the experience of sitting in different ways, some of them absurd, in an uncomfortable armchair, he ridicules the proliferation of objects that favour style over comfort. This idea of producing objects, reducing the object to an exercise in style and putting the reason for its existence on a secondary plane, is actually a project that has been going on for a long time and is being deepened by digital culture, where objects are designed to be seen (in Instagram feeds) rather than to be used. By prioritising visual seduction, design contributes to weakening the aesthetic experience and making it superficial and alienating. As Munari demonstrates, when design becomes an exercise in style, it no longer mediates the relationship between the body and the world, but becomes an instrument of detachment and alienation deprived of the aesthetic experience.

55. Gillo Dorfles (1910–2018), Italian critic, philosopher and artist.

56. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten (1714–1762) was a German philosopher and teacher who made aesthetics independent from philosophy.

57. Theme developed in Chapter 4 - Body tests; Essay 4: The weight and lightness of the whole body, p. 144.

58. Bruno Munari (1907–1998) Italian artist and designer.

59. Munari, B. (1944). «Uno torna a casa satânico per aver lavorato tutto il giorno e trova una poltrona scomoda». *Domus*, 202.

Perhaps this reflection leads to the question:

– *What is the priority: the aesthetic experience or functionality?*

I would say neither because both must be present, and if the reason for an object's existence is the result of a need, the aesthetic experience will be present because it is part of any solution. The solution, however, does not lie in opposing aesthetics to functionality, but in recognising their interdependence.

For example, in the book “The Hard Life”⁶⁰, Jasper Morrison⁶¹ documents vernacular objects whose forms are a direct result of necessity and the scarcity of resources. A scythe or a stool for cooking by the fire, for example, reveal a “maximum stylisation” that arises not from decorative decision, but from economy of means and clarity of purpose. In these objects, the aesthetic experience is not an addition, but the emergence of the function itself: their shape communicates utility, resistance and adaptation to the context. As Fátima Pombo notes⁶² in “Of beautiful and designed things”, beauty in design results from the “overall coherence of all the object's functions, including the aesthetic function” (Pombo, 2020, p. 71. Own translation). In other words, aesthetics is not a superficial layer, but the harmonious expression between necessity, materiality and meaning (**fig. 18**).

The question “*Which is the priority: aesthetic experience or functionality?*” becomes meaningless when we understand that both are inseparable dimensions of a project. The challenge for contemporary design is perhaps to resist the seduction of superficiality, be it the dictatorship of digital culture or sterile utility, and focus on its relevance as a mediator between humans and the world. This requires, as Pombo proposes, a “correlation of forces” that integrates functionality, materiality and subjectivity into an organic coherence.

60. Morrison, J. (2017). *The Hard Life*. Lars Muller.

61. Jasper Morrison (1959) English designer.

62. Fátima Pombo, Portuguese, design teacher and specialist in design phenomenology.

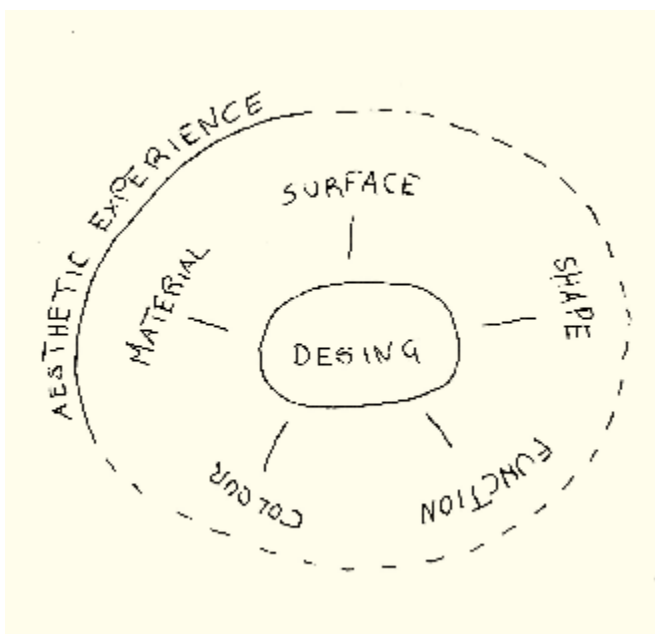


fig. 18. Map of elements that design can employ to craft an aesthetic experience.

The usefulness of the aesthetic experience

In this research, the aesthetic experience is related to the individual's right to feel the materiality that surrounds them and to relate to it.

As Fátima Pombo points out, this experience is rooted in the existential condition of the human being, who connects to the things of the world through the body "which is the correlate of the entire field of possible perceptions." (Pombo, 2020, p. 12. Own translation). In this sense, the usefulness of aesthetic experience lies in its ability to mediate consciousness, through subjective revelation from the objective, transforming materiality into a vehicle for self-knowledge.

Fátima Pombo calls this process the "de-objectification of the body and the phenomenologisation of consciousness", which leads the individual to self-knowledge through an experience, in order to reach a "corporeal consciousness" (Pombo, 2020, p. 12. Own translation). This means that the aesthetic experience makes it possible to become aware of what does not exist, through a sensible process of revelation in which the body ceases to be a functional instrument - "body-machine"⁶³ - and begins to have the right to feel - body-sensible.

63. Expression used in Chapter 1 - The body and the relationship; Controlled Body, p. 36.

This experience can have a universal meaning when it is intersubjective and I would add the word "shared" to Fátima Pombo's idea. An experience can become universal when there is a revelation made from an object that is common to the collective, as can any individual revelation from a sonata that is heard live, regardless of the conditions that led the individual to hear it. In other words, in this sonata, written by someone, which can be interpreted by someone else, there is an intersubjective power that serves to leverage some revelation.

This universality does not cancel out individual subjectivity - rather, it amplifies it, showing that the aesthetic experience is a common territory, a correlation of material and human forces, where the singular and the collective coexist.

In a world increasingly dominated by digital acceleration and superficiality, the usefulness of the aesthetic experience also becomes political. The gestures of observation, use and interaction with the material world, and what it can provoke in us, is a process that requires time. The sensible body requires time and this body can be difficult to manage. We can refer to Laing⁶⁴, who says that "When our personal worlds are rediscovered and authorised, we begin by discovering a carnage, half-dead bodies (...)" (Laing, 1972. p. 54. Own translation), in other words, we are not allowed to feel, perhaps because of the process to which we have been and are subject, called the body-machine.

64. Ronald David Laing (1927-1989), English psychiatrist and theorist.

The usefulness of the aesthetic experience is not measured by its efficiency, but by its capacity and power to reveal the body-sensible. Whether in the intimate revelation of the individual through an object, or in the construction of universal meanings provoked by materiality, aesthetic experience makes it clear that we are more than users of things - we are unconscious interpreters of the sensible.

Sensible elements for an experience: between conditioning and revelation

The objects that surround us are elements that participate in our experience of the world. And our experience converges in a set of behaviours that others always identify for us based on their experience. However, aesthetic experience, as an exercise in freedom, is conditioned from the outset by a set of lessons we learn from an early age.

From childhood, as Laing points out, we are subject to a regime of moralities that dictate not only behaviour, but also what we should feel or ignore (Laing, 1972. p. 59. Own translation). This conditioning leads us to the central concern in which we live, the imprisoned body, the docile body, the machine body and the lack of authorisation to access the sensible body.

Despite all the conditioning that our experience brings and that is visible through our behaviour, the aesthetic experience is a way of reaching the sensible body and the revelation of the individual, which can be a demanding moment.

Laing says that the elements of the psychotherapy experience are essentially “a practitioner, a patient, an appropriate time and place.” (Laing, 1972. p. 45. Own translation).

– *Can we make any connection between the therapeutic experience and the aesthetic experience, given that both are considered to participate in access to the sensible body?*

In what could be the aesthetic experience, the contextual material elements create a liminal zone where the everyday rules to which we are subject are suspended, allowing the sensible body to emerge. In the therapeutic experience, the listening space and the time dedicated to the patient, i.e. the contextual elements, function as a safe place for the sensible to emerge.

The combination of various material elements, which form a decontextualised context of the day, is at the origin of the aesthetic experience. This is where we realise that what is visible actually has “an invisible structure” (Pombo, 2020, p. 17. Own translation). “Visible” materiality has an invisible structure and so does the body. In this

sense, we can evoke Merleau Ponty, who understands the body as a “being with two faces”, in which in one it declares itself to be an element among “things” and in the other “that which sees and touches them (...)” (Merleau-Ponty, 1988, p. 180. Own translation) and therefore transcends and feels. This duality is crucial to understanding how sensible elements work. When we touch an unfamiliar object or one that is outside our daily context, for example, our body is both a tool for exploration (pressing, sliding, feeling) and a source of meaning (a subject that interprets, is moved, remembers, reveals itself). The aesthetic experience explores this ambiguity, inviting us to experience the tension between what we can be - observer and participant.

In the therapeutic experience, something similar occurs: the subject is both the body that narrates what occupies it and the consciousness that interprets, in a dialogue mediated by the therapist.

The structure we are given as children, which inhibits our access to feeling, creates a grammar of what we are and are not allowed to experience. The aesthetic experience can subvert this grammar, based on what Ponty defines as the encounter with the “wild” being, in other words, the encounter with experience that has not been determined by consciousness.

I still have doubts as to whether or not I should relate the aesthetic experience to the therapeutic experience, but I continue to find parallels between the two. If psychotherapy works through speaking and listening, aesthetic experience works through materiality. Both require precise elements - objects, contexts, bodies - to deactivate the automatisms of the “docile body” and find the “wild being”, the sensible body.

Designing the experience

Based on the empirical experience described in the preceding chapters - which explored the relationship between the body and the object in an unsystematic and unorganised way, revealing concerns in the interaction - and the theoretical foundations generated, in part, from it and discussed in the 1st and 2nd chapters - such as the “disciplining of the body” (Foucault, 2010), which exposes the domestication of gestures by social normativity; the “tactile bipolarity” (Fontes, 2006), which addresses the duality between the action of touching and being touched; and the “invisible structure” of materiality (Pombo, 2020), which reveals the symbolic and affective layers embedded in objects - this chapter opens a series of practical exercises, now conscious⁶⁵, aimed at the possibility of building access to the sensible body. It involves concrete actions, using objects as critical mediators to destabilise crystallised relational habits.

65. Previous practical experience had not consciously reflected on the absence of the sensible body, but rather more superficial issues related to the fragility of the encounter and the closeness of human relationships.

Relational actions were created that challenge the limits of intimacy through mediation objects designed for this purpose, calling on pairs with pre-existing bonds: two people who share a house, work colleagues and two sisters who meet regularly. The choice of these groups is based on the exploration of existing relationships, since consolidated relationships carry shared histories, implicit power dynamics and established habits that, paradoxically, can both facilitate and obstruct the action of proximity. By inserting mediating objects into these relationships, the aim is to reveal automated gestures and choreographies (**fig. 19**) - such as touching, hugging, talking or being face-to-face, being together - transforming them into conscious and interrogative acts.

By proposing in these short actions, through objects designed for the purpose, relational actions that evoke small gestures and choreographies to be performed between pairs, a reflection arises about objects that authorise. These actions are then authorisations for the pairs to touch, hug, talk, be face to face, together, through an object that provokes mediation.

These actions, which are also authorisations and tools for searching deeper layers of pre-existing relationships, highlight the consequences of automatisms and established relational habits, provoking various reactions that stem from conceptions of the past.

These provoked approaches, which can be considered sessions for rapprochement, through the invisible structure⁶⁶ of objects capable of disorganising what is visible - the body and the bonds established and shared between peers - uncover fissures, bring us closer to awareness of the “gap between people” (Laing, 1972, p. 49. Own translation), and open the way to self-perception. The body, in this

66. (Pombo, 2020, p. 17)

process, lets go of the “docile body” (Foucault, 2010), and becomes a body available to improvisation, where sensations, resistances and desires can emerge.

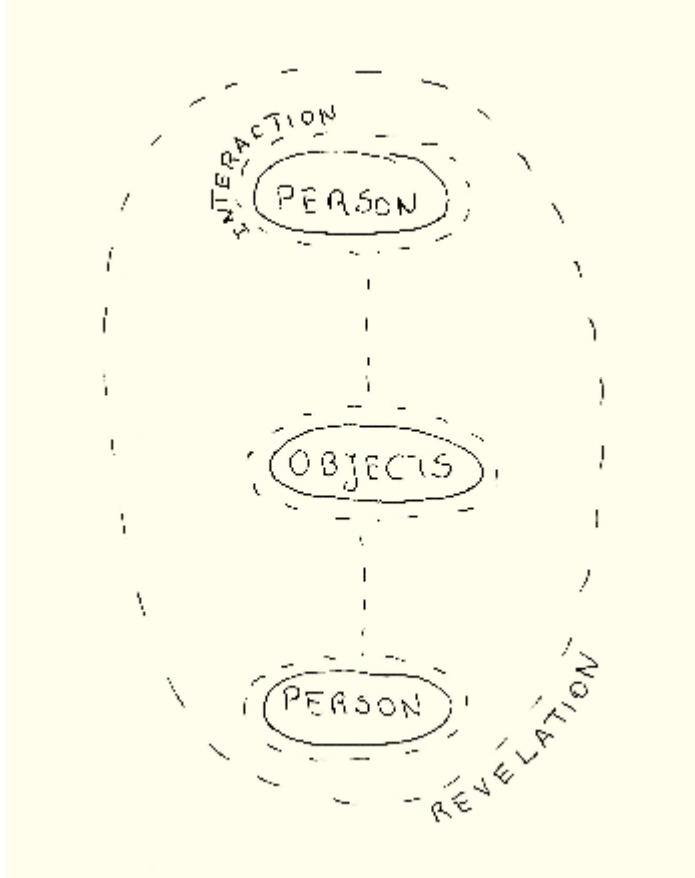


fig. 19. Explanatory map of the elements comprising subsequent actions, along with potential mediations, interactions, and revelations that may emerge.

Action sessions: For your mouth and ears (2022)

The “For your mouth and ears” action took place in two separate sessions: the first between two women who shared a house and the second between two work colleagues. I took part in both sessions, i.e. I was part of the proximity action with my housemate and a work colleague.

In previous experiences, I used “Concentration Objects for Pairs”⁶⁷ to record them, but without the intention of the photographic documentation time being seen as an action or a session dedicated to a relational action. Now, with some distance, I recognise that the time spent recording the objects was in fact a relational action session, due to the revelations it brought me about myself and the person in front of me. As the author of the objects, I only intended to bring people together without calculating the consequences of using them, but when I become the user of the objects I draw, I realise that they are an action and are the trigger for a series of bodily revelations that wouldn’t occur without their presence. I therefore conclude that objects are an action - an action that provokes, authorises and reveals.

67. Presented in Background, p. 19.

1st session:

The first session of the “For the mouth and ears” action took place outside the house, in a known and familiar environment, with the participation of a friend, with whom I shared a house, and the discreet presence of another friend, who was responsible for recording the session. As we prepared for the action, we talked about the object we were going to have between us, we silently experimented with multiple possible gestures of use and suggested speaking through it. The shape of the object imposes a choreography - it brings two bodies closer together and suggests a face-to-face proximity - under which we have to deal with the direct gaze of the other and perhaps the other’s breathing. Looking at another person head-on is uncomfortable; looking at another person head-on and being very close is even more uncomfortable; looking at another person head-on, being very close to them and in silence is practically unbearable. I couldn’t even imagine adding breathing into someone else’s ears to this last sequence.

My colleague and friend and I, both women who share a house and therefore routines and habits, did not verbalise the various situations of discomfort that the object evoked and the experiences of the three sequences were very brief and intuitive. We quickly suggested, without talking about the problem of discomfort, to say:

– Let’s talk about the object.

My friend said:

– I can teach you to speak Romanian...

fig. 20. Image sequence exposing details of reactions and interactions with the object 'For the Mouth and For the Ears'.



And so it was. The person I had lived with for two years had never taught me to speak Romanian until this session. I see this decision to speak through an object, of my friend wanting to teach me Romanian, as a diversion from the discomfort of being in front of the person with whom I had shared my domestic habits and other confidences, to look at her, to be very close and in silence for no set time. The idea is enough for the diversion to happen and suddenly what had never made sense to us - speaking Romanian - becomes paramount.

The friend who was there to record the session⁶⁸ recorded us speaking Romanian and filmed the laughter at the end of the video, so strange was it that we were speaking to each other in a language that wasn't common to us. **(fig. 20)**

68. See the Appendix IV

2nd session

Later, there was another session, this time between me and a work colleague. We do not see each other every day and we're not close. I do not know his habits and he does not know mine.

This session took place in my work space and the person who recorded it was a friend who only I knew. This time it was photographic. **(fig. 21)**

Without commenting to my colleague on what had happened in the first session, we went ahead with the tests of the possible choreographies to use and remained silent, looking at each other in shy seriousness, waiting for our friend to photograph us.

We approached the session as if it were just a photo shoot. This was the only possible diversion. There was the sequence of looking, face to face, very close and in silence. **(fig. 22)** There was also breathing, however it was contained.

The several times we moved the object between us, it was to emphasise our height difference and to accommodate ourselves. It was the possible deviation that the photographic record allowed.

At the end of the session, the colleague left the space and in the meantime we crossed paths several times, but he never came back in.

The session was disconcerting, **(fig. 23)** my colleague and I had never looked into each other's eyes, we had never been so close, and I had never seen his skin and the features of his face in such detail.

The object gave us time, space and authorised us to be close to each other and enjoy the tensions caused by proximity.

fig. 21. The object is supported by only one person.
fig. 22. Image illustrating the object's mediating role.
fig. 23. Record of consequential reaction to the interaction.



fig. 21



fig. 22



fig. 23

The object - the materiality and form for action

In this action “For the mouth and the ears”, the object, through its materiality and form, is an active agent that structures, amplifies and exposes the invisible dynamics inherent in human proximity. This glass object - whose design suggests the physical connection between one participant’s mouth and the other’s ears - acts as a critical mediator of an experience that gives access to the sensory space shared with another person. Its existence is only justified in the presence of two bodies, revealing from the outset that intimacy is a relational and interdependent phenomenon. This artefact not only facilitates interaction, but ritualises it, transforming everyday gestures of closeness into conscious acts.

The use of glass as the raw material for the materialisation of the mediating object was planned due to the characteristics of transparency and fragility that are inherent to this material.

Transparency allows the participants to see each other through the object, making it possible to observe the flow of air, the fogging up of the material by the circulation of breath, or even each other’s facial tension. At the same time, the fragility of glass introduces a layer of vulnerability, since any excessive pressure, any sudden movement, can break it. In addition to these characteristics, glass’s acoustic conductivity here operates as an amplification system, revealing the typically inaudible micro-sounds of respiration and unconscious bodily movements

By following the choreography suggested by the shape of the object - one end in the mouth, the other in the ears - the participants are authorised to use intimate spaces that might otherwise be taboo. The object acts as a conductor of inhibitions, creating a liminal zone where seeing the other person’s face, feeling their breathing up close or hearing them very close is not only permitted, but necessary for the action. This mediation shifts the focus from the “I” and the “other” to the in-between, sensory space.

The action exposes a fundamental contradiction: the closer the bodies, the more obvious the invisible barriers that separate them become. Just as silence, often filled with words in everyday interactions, is amplified here by the object. The participants, unable to speak simultaneously as the glass connects their mouths to each other’s ears, are forced to alternate between emission and reception, confronting the anxiety of the sound void. The discomfort of silence, and therefore the diversion into conversation or other gestures, is one of the object’s revelations.

It is through its shape, material and gesture of use that the object becomes a means of revealing the individual and exposing these revelations to the other participant in the action.

The object is then a means for action, an authorisation to the sensory universe, an instrument for the revelation of the body, an amplifier of revelations and an exhibitor of mutual discoveries.

Sessions for action: Objects for a relationship (2022)

“Objects for a Relationship” was presented in two different sessions, each moulded by specific spatial conditions and participatory dynamics. The first session was organised in an intentional and controlled way, with the participation of two women sisters, invited to interact in an empty space, devoid of elements that could distract attention from the proposed central gesture. The second session took place in an open and informal context, during the opening of my workspace to the public, where colleagues with whom I share the space and other invited people got involved in the action. In both situations, I exclusively took on the role of observer, distancing myself from direct participation in order to analyse the reactions and dynamics generated by the proposed gestures.

The first session was structured in a deliberately austere environment - a room with no furniture or other objects. The white walls and neutral floor made up a setting that eliminated visual or tactile distractions, focussing all attention on the proposed relational gesture: standing face to face and touching someone’s chest.

The second session took place in a diametrically opposite environment: a workspace full of objects - work tools, unfinished projects, scattered materials - on the tables and on the floor. In this chaotic setting, the same gestures (standing face to face and touching your chest) were proposed to those who frequent the space and those who visited that day. The objects present in the studio, although not an integral part of the action, acted as passive interferences, offering visual or tactile escapes to alleviate the intensity of physical proximity.

Whereas in the first session there was an assumed recording of the session. In other words, people knew they were being photographed and filmed while they took part in the action. In the second session there was also recording, but because the space was filled, it wasn’t perceived as being as present as in the first session.

1st session

The first meeting of the “Objects for a Relationship” session was attended by two sisters, both aged between 60 and 70, who maintain regular contact, but whose relationship is marked by a closeness that is more functional than affective - meetings for family lunches, conversations about health or looking after the house, gestures that, although frequent, rarely transcend the surface of everyday life. The

choice of an empty space made it possible to isolate the experience and transform the environment into a laboratory of intimacy, where the absence of external stimuli amplifies the perception of the body, touch and the presence of the other.

The bare walls, smooth floor and neutral lighting were the setting that isolated the experience, eliminating the possibility of distraction and forcing the participants to confront the gestures proposed by the objects.

The sisters, used to interacting in domestic or social contexts, were confronted with an empty space, inhibiting access to possible diversions. With no reason for distraction, the participants were exposed to their own vulnerability, like actors on a stage with no scenery. The emptiness, far from being passive, acted as an amplifier of gestures in which each one, however minimal, became a conscious, almost ceremonial act.

This action was mediated by two objects: one for two people to stand face to face (**fig. 24**), the other for one to lean their head on the other's chest (**fig. 25**).

First object:

When instructed to use the first object, the sisters initially remained silent. However, after a few seconds, one of them looked away, breaking direct eye contact. The laughter that followed acted as an escape valve, transforming tension into comicality (**fig. 26**). The object, which was supposed to mediate an intimate confrontation, became a pretext for technical conversations: they examined the technique used to make the object, counted the rows, among other comments. These apparently banal dialogues revealed an escape strategy - the need to fill the void with words, to replace the intimacy of gesture with the security of rational analysis.⁶⁹

Second object:

The second object, designed to indicate the place of the headrest on another person's chest, proved to be the most challenging. The sisters, accustomed to circumstantial touches, were faced with the demand for prolonged and unusual contact. The participant who received her sister's head kept her body rigid and her arms down. The other, on the other hand, repeatedly adjusted the position of her head, and never managed to contain her laughter (**fig. 27**).

Despite the resistance, there were fleeting moments when silence prevailed and there was a search for the meaning of these objects.

The participants had several questions about why these objects were made, or what their purpose was. These questions are evidence of their refusal to make the revelation of relational fragilities conscious.



fig. 24.



fig. 25. Experience-mediating objects – Objects for relational encounters.

69. See Appendix VI.



fig. 26. Sequence documenting interaction with the object and resulting reactions.



fig. 27. Sequence capturing interaction with the second object and experiential responses.

2nd session

The second session of this action took place in the opposite context to the first: an *open studio*⁷⁰ open to the public, with the space filled with objects, work tools and the constant movement of visitors. While in the first session the controlled and private environment allowed for brief instructions on how to use the objects, here they were laid out on a table, among other artefacts, without any indication of purpose or method of interaction. The absence of intentional guidelines transformed the action into a free experience of spontaneous interpretation, where participants could appropriate the objects according to what they communicated about their use or intention.

Among the people who interacted with the “Objects for a Relationship”, two stood out - a man and a woman aged between 40 and 45 - who were in a romantic relationship. When they “put on” the first object and came face to face, they laughed, kissed and brought their bodies closer together than the object suggested, using mediation to show affection in public (fig. 28).

Whereas in the first session the sisters resorted to laughter and technical analysis to avoid confronting intimacy, in this session the participants used the object as a stage to demonstrate their bond.

This behaviour contrasts not only with the sisters’ reserve in the previous session, but also with the interactions resulting from the “To the mouth and ears” sessions (p. 63), where the difficulty of silence, the discomfort of looking and proximity prevailed. The difference suggests that physical proximity is regulated by tacit social codes.

In this session, the objects became a means of finding out about behaviours already established and normalised by society. These findings achieved through these mediation actions reflect that “The body is (...) the fundamental analyst of our contemporary societies.” (Le Breton, 2003p. 26), about the way we behave and relate to others according to the bond we establish.

– *But wasn’t the kiss a diversion to look?*

The intention of objects

The transition that occurs between the mediation objects used in the previous action (p. 63) and those present in this new action is not just a material change, but a redefinition of the intention of the objects for mediation in the planned actions. The shape of the glass object in “For the mouth and ears” suggests a unique choreography, the physical connection between someone’s mouth and someone else’s ears. The new objects, made from knitted wool, operate under a different logic, since they are intended to increase the map of possibilities for action on them. Thus, the rigidity of the shape and



fig. 28. Sequence documenting the behavior elicited by the object-mediated interaction.



material give way to freer and more flexible material configurations. These objects, because of their intention to enable broader action, allow participants to negotiate at the moment of interaction: adjusting proximity, agreeing on touch, combining the movement of bodies. The objects, due to their shape and materiality, allow people to walk, sit, stand and other actions while they are in use.

The sessions on “Objects for a relationship” (p. 68) revealed that material mediators make the action less controlled and that there are unusual moments, not only in terms of the interaction that can take place, but also the individual and collective revelations that can arise after the action.

These objects, which are reminiscent of garments, both in terms of their materiality and their shape and size, do not impose direct connections, but rather envelop bodies, creating a mediation that can have tactile consequences, in addition to the proximity caused.⁷¹

71. The confinement of two bodies in a space caused by an object, or the permission given by one body to another to lean against it, are what is meant by “provoked proximity”.

The first object is defined as a long knitted band with two holes that indicate the entrance to the head. It rests on the shoulders and, given its materiality, it can be extended or contained, depending on the participants’ wishes, which could be an indicator of the ease with which they feel towards each other.

The second object conforms to the chest of one participant and serves as an authorised place for the head of another. Between the two people, the one holding the object and the one leaning their head against it, there is only one layer that distances them, that of the object.

The entire action begins with a generalized gesture orchestrated by the objects, positioning two individuals in proximity, and then expands into uncontrolled yet potential gestures emerging from the interaction: distancing, approaching, touching, walking, sitting, among other possible actions.

Post-session revelations then surface, concerning the individual body, the pre-existing relationship, and the newly established dynamic: shifts in bodily attention or amplifications of corporeal presence.

The objects, in this session, the previous one and the next ones, serve as tools for activating an action for the body.

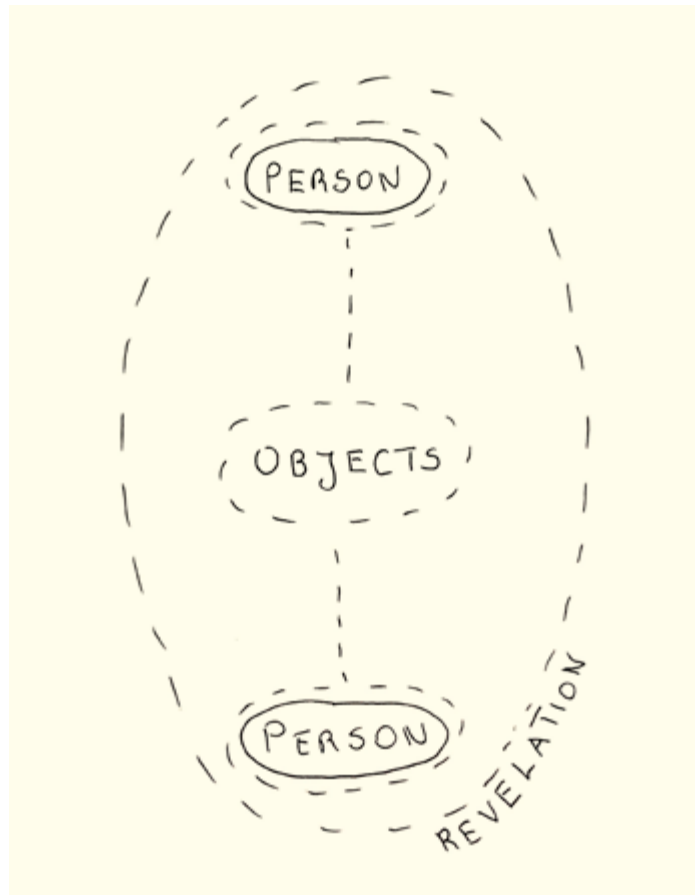


fig. 29. Map revealing interactions not controlled by the objects mediating these two presented actions. This map contrasts with fig. 19 (p. 62), which outlines the anticipated outcomes prior to these actions being executed.

72. Ligia Clark (1920–1988), Brazilian visual artist.

The exercises and practical experiences developed over the course of this research emerged as a response to observations of distancing behaviour in relation to the body - both individual and collective - in contemporary society. Although these practical interventions did not initially have a reference in Lygia Clark's work⁷², they revealed resonances with her approach during subsequent theoretical reflection. The belated connection between these works may stem from the traditional disciplinary divide between art and design, a separation that often relegates artists and designers to distinct spheres of thought, even when their practices are, at times, borderline.

73. Projects mentioned in Appendix VI.

Exploring projects such as the “relational objects” (1976), the “structuring of the self” (1976), “sensory objects” (1966–1967)⁷³ by Lygia Clark, gave way to evidence of the concern of others, at another time in history, regarding the absence of time and place for the sensible body.

In her work, this author refers to the term “phantasmatic” and values the process of getting to know the “marks, affections, memories (...) the preconceived notions that prevent you from relating to the sensible world” (Alves de Almeida, 2016, p. 674), putting the body in the background as a representation and highlighting what it presents. In her work, developed from 1966 onwards, Lygia became interested in the sensible side that objects produce and the people who interact with them, “the relationship that is produced between the participants and their non-objects.” (Alves de Almeida, 2016, p. 668. Own translation). In Lygia's work, objects “have no external function” (Alves de Almeida, 2016, p. 669. Own translation), they are mediators of a bodily sensory experience and only make sense when activated, i.e. when they are part of a specific physical interaction. And in these experiences, mediated by relational objects, what interests the author is exploring the “phantasmatism” of the body and not the body as a representation of someone. This means that Lygia is interested in bringing to the individual an awareness of self, of the body, of its limits, of the memories and concerns that arise from the revelations resulting from the experience of interaction and relationship with objects.

In the first material actions mentioned in this chapter, I talk about the revelations they bring to the participants, based on the mediating objects.

– *Will the result of these revelations be the “phantasmatism” of the body?*

In every practical experience drawn up for this thesis, I never saw the revelations as “phantasmatic”, however from the first moment I read this word used by Lygia, I realised that it also illustrated the

idea of the result of the revelations. It is in the sensible experience that it is possible to remove, visualise, feel, even if only episodically, what lies beyond the surface of the body (**fig. 30**).

Lygia wasn't interested in knowing individual revelations, but in finding a possible method, through the experiences she and the objects mediated, to arrive at the possible "structuring of the self" (Alves de Almeida, 2016, p. 1. Own translation) and the progressive knowledge of "self".

It is at this stage of Lygia's work that she moves away from art, "outside any art scheme" (Alves de Almeida, 2016, p. 673. Own translation) and puts her work, now more methodical, at the service of anyone who wants to participate and experience with very diverse audiences. When she defined her work as a service, she began to organise sensory sessions in her workspace and came closer to the idea of a therapeutic method.

I wonder if:

– *By distancing herself from the "scheme of art" and seeing her work as a service, could she be closer to design?*

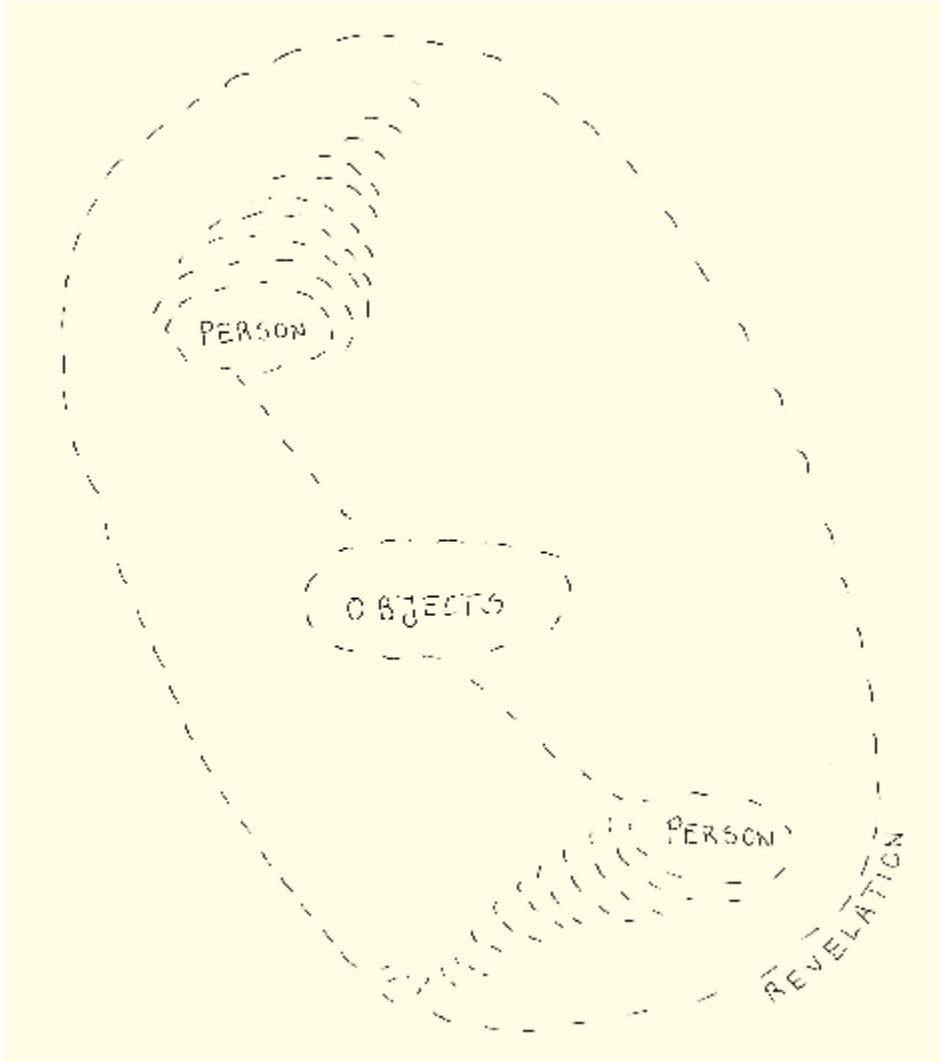
Her work operated as a mediation tool that wanted to generate results, centred on the individual as a participant or user. In this dialogue between Clark's work, the first experiences in this thesis and the projects that emerged afterwards, there are perhaps two distinctive aspects to present: Clark was looking for a methodical system for "structuring the self", and this research prioritises the singularity of experiences and the consequent revelations for a possible subsequent transformation of the individual, in an individual process.

The body is tacit

This research integrates practical and theoretical research in a continuous dialogue, guided by the premise that knowledge emerges from material and sensible experience, which feeds critical reflection and vice versa. The research process does not follow a linear hypothesis-test-conclusion model, but operates under the practical actions described throughout the document - such as the "For the mouth and ears" or "Objects for a relationship" sessions - which generate theoretical concerns which, in turn, give rise to the need for new experiences. This approach reflects a phenomenological epistemology, which prioritises lived experience as the primary source of knowledge.

This model of practical experimentation and disciplinary combination is the one that has proved most capable in the research operation that this document presents.

fig. 30. Map exposing the reverberation across individual and collective bodies, manifested through the displayed actions mediated by objects.



This research is based on concrete gestures: drawing objects, mediating meetings, observing bodies in interaction. It was only later, in the face of the tensions and revelations of these experiences, that theoretical reflection was formed. The aim of this research was not to achieve an end, but rather to find a means, or several means, to open up space for time and discussion about the body.

This movement - from matter to theory - is close to the vision of Luís Fernandes, for whom understanding the body requires “tacit knowledge”⁷⁴, which comes from sensible perception and physical presence. Fernandes speaks of understanding versus explanation, opting for the former rather than the latter, as he considers that “understanding is a form of knowledge of the real inscribed in a phenomenological rationality” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 169. Own translation), in other words, understanding gives access to layers of the real unreachable by measurable data.

74. “Tacit knowledge” is an expression used by Michael Polanyi (1891–1976, Hungarian polymath) to define the search for sensible materials and the understanding of the world beyond what can be explained.

The approaches to which Luís refers, based on his experience and professional practice, are the result of different methods of extracting empirical data, the first being qualitative and the second quantitative. According to Luís Fernandes, within the scientific world, it is common to “take explanation as the criterion for validating or rejecting the knowledge obtained through phenomenological understanding.” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 169. Own translation).

Since this research explores the revelations of the body from the design of a material experience, it operated under empirical methods that assume that the body, as tacit matter, can only be explored through equally tacit experiences. The mediating objects described in chapter 3 are not controlled variables, but provocateurs of ambiguity, agitating elements designed to question bodily routines and expose fissures between automated gestures and unconscious desires.

Michael Polanyi’s influence is central through the definition he developed for “tacit knowledge” - what we know but can’t explain, at least not in its entirety - which resonates in the way this research approaches the body, its social character and its limits: not as a problem to be explained, but as a field of possibilities to be explored and experienced.

This approach contradicts the validation, falsification and refutation schemes that Karl Popper wanted to be used as a method, which often stifle intuition and the space for subjectivity.

I ask myself the same question that Luís asked himself and those who read him: “*What do we have that is most immediate if not our corporeal presence in the world?*” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 173. Own translation).

Following on from and as a possible answer to Luís' question, I ask myself and you the following question:

– *If the body is matter, how can we not experience it and reflect on it through concrete material experiences?*

This was the question I used to answer Luís' question and my concerns and prejudices about scientific methods.

This thesis is not a means to an end, but an experimental means to an endless sensible space. Like the sessions described in this chapter, which do not seek to prove hypotheses, but rather to open up spaces for the new to emerge - be it a nervous laugh confronted with silence, an involuntary adjustment of posture or the unexpected discovery of a body memory.

I quote Luís Fernandes, who says that the vast majority of researchers won't uncover anything, but they do achieve "a number of things that are preparatory to what will appear to posterity as a discovery." (Fernandes, 2021, p. 189. Own translation).

If the body is tacit, perhaps the methods for exploiting its existence should be too.

This thesis does not provide definitive answers insofar as it does not pose objective problems either, however it does show that it is possible to build a space for knowledge using more open methods, where subjectivity and the inexplicable based on lived experience are elements to consider. By designing experiences that challenge the body to reveal itself and put it through questioning and processes of awareness of its limits, design is placed in collaboration with other areas of knowledge, to understand what we know but can't keep in mind or can't name.

Empirical body

The historical transformation of the body into a productive machine and its migration to an incorporeal space⁷⁵ – where it becomes an object, image, simulacrum or avatar - configure a contemporary paradox: the body is simultaneously hyper-observed and disembodied, celebrated as an object of desire and denied as a place of sensible experience.

– *Are we thus immersed in a process of asceticism of the body, in which its organic dimension is suppressed in favour of a functional and now also virtualised existence?*

In the 16th century, the prohibition of practices such as public bathing, games and nudity in England⁷⁶ was not just an act of moral control, but a political project of disciplining. By associating bodily pleasures with "malice" and subversion, the established

75. Concepts developed in Chapter 2 - Objects and the experience of the body, p. 45.

76. Developed in Chapter 1 - The body and the relationship, p. 29.

power neutralised the body as a space of resistance, turning it into a docile instrument, a machine. This process, analysed by Foucault in *Surveillance and Punishment*, reached its apex in the Industrial Revolution, when the body was reduced to labor power, stripped of its sensory potential to serve industrial logic. Today, we are still involved in the process of disciplining the body, and it has taken on new forms and places, namely virtualisation. As David Le Breton observes, it has become «the prosthetics of a self eternally in search of a provisional incarnation to guarantee a significant trace of itself» (Le Breton, 2003, p. 29. Own translation). The body, an object of desire, through an image ceases to be a place of the subject and is the result of a circumstantial construction of its environment. When games, leisure and meeting places, public baths and nudity were banned in the mid-16th century, it was a way of disciplining the body, but it was also a declaration that the pleasures of the body were a source of mischief and distraction, factors that interfered with established power. However, the body is already disciplined and obedient, and it migrates to a virtual space, where it becomes an image, “the prosthesis of a self eternally in search of a provisional incarnation to guarantee a significant trace of itself” (Le Breton, 2003, p. 29. Own translation). The body, an object of desire, masked through processes of digital artificialisation poured into an image, “ceases to be a place of the subject and is the result of a circumstantial construction of its environment” (Le Breton, 2003, p. 52. Own translation). The body has therefore been subject to various processes and methods that inhibit access to the sensible component, until it becomes the perfect labour force - body-machine - or an ideal image - body-object. Getting rid of the pleasures of the body, in order to give greater centrality to the virtuous image of the body, is in fact the path to the ascetic body.

Thus, we realise that contemporaneity operates a double capture of the body. Firstly, the machine body when it is subject to exhausting productivity routines, unregulated hours and other labour demands. The body is thus optimised to function flawlessly, like a machine. Secondly, as an object-body, to mask the former, where it is converted into an image and idealised according to unattainable standards (sculpted bodies, performative gestures and postures). This body, absent of its truth, becomes an object of consumption and comparison. This duality creates an existential problem: if on the one hand we are urged to show off our bodies, on the other we can't inhabit them⁷⁷ or live them.

Peter Sloterdijk⁷⁸, in “Muerte aparente en el pensar” (Apparent Death in Thinking. Own translation.), from the point of view of philosophy, criticises the processes that distance the body as an «empirical human being” from «observing local life” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p. 105 and p. 114. Own translation). This lack of contact with «exercising life” means that any reflection that may exist in the field of philosophy, but also

77. Lygia Clark's work, “A casa é o corpo” (1968), has several readings, starting with the body being the first place of contact with the world. However, this work can also be seen as an episode of decontextualising the body from the reality of the body-machine and body-object.

78. Peter Sloterdijk (1947), German philosopher.

in the production of knowledge in other areas of knowledge, is precarious due to the lack of elements from concrete life. Exercise, life as exercise, is among the oldest methods for achieving self-referential consistency, a practice where activity never loses its contemplative perspective, where thought remains inseparable from action.. The exercising life puts the individual «in shape, a subject capable of doing things” (Sloterdijk, 2013, p. 17. Own translation).

This reflection by Sloterdijk, based on his knowledge of philosophy and his study of various thinkers, such as Epicurus and Socrates, also serves to understand the conditions in which the body and its “phantasmatics” live today. Since we live in a controlled society that generates docile and apparent bodies, in reality, and according to Sloterdijk, Laing says that what exists is “a carnage, half-dead bodies (...)” (Laing, 1972. p. 54. Own translation)⁷⁹. Bodies that do not feel, bodies that are machines and bodies that are objects and consumer images.

79. Also mentioned in Chapter 2 - Objects and the experience of the body, p. 45

Faced with the generalised asceticism in which the body lives, in which it is inhibited from pleasures to ensure that the body-machine and the body-object function at full capacity, this thesis proposes episodic interventions that temporarily suspend the current logic in which the body lives. Such actions - like those described in the previous chapters - function as critical intervals to interrupt bodily routines and reveal the body’s sensible places. These actions are episodes that give the body time and decontextualise it from the body-machine to another materiality that is less known or even unknown. This materiality gives access to the sensible front of the body. These moments are episodic, since they are interruptions or suspensions of the body-machine. At the end of each one, we return to the tax, but perhaps more aware of our body’s power.

The asceticism of the body - the body-machine and the body-object - is episodically interrupted by various episodes described throughout this thesis, in which the body is put into practice. If historical disciplining has taught us to fear bodily pleasures, and virtualisation has alienated us from our flesh, the practical actions of this research suggest that reconnecting with the sensible involves practices of deceleration, giving the body time, allowing it experiences capable of decontextualising it.

Scenarios for the body

The spaces where the body inhabits and acts - from the physical to the digital - are not merely passive scenarios, but active structures that reconfigure its existence.

The migration of the tangible body to a virtual body means that virtual

environments, from chat rooms to dating apps, are moulding contemporary relationships under a paradoxical logic: at the same time as expanding the possibilities of connection, they are emptying the sensory experience. As previously discussed in Chapter 1 (p. 29), both the body and human relationships now endure the imposition of virtuality, challenging their physical existence and agency, while transitioning them into a new incorporeal space that is ‘bodiless, devoid of interiority, and purely superficial’ (Le Breton, 2003, p. 143).” (Le Breton, 2003, p. 143. Own translation). This change in context means that social patterns and behaviours change and relational fragility deepens. In an increasingly pronounced way, bodily action is now, not exclusively but significantly, confined to what Baudrillard called “sensory isolation boxes constituted by screens and networks” (Baudrillard, 1997, p. 65. Own translation). Throughout its history, the body has taken on various scenarios for its relational action. Many of these scenarios, some of which we have already mentioned, coincide with the removal of pleasure from the body in favour of putting it at the service of capitalist projects, where the body is a machine and an object. The latter is especially true of women, based on the standards of beauty defined by men or by the patriarchal project to which we women are subject.

The successive migrations that the body is subject to form armour “which are bodily defences against the anguish that is not consciously discharged” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 106. Own translation). These armour plates, an expression used by Luís Fernandes, translate into the body’s resilience and perhaps alienation from the scenarios in which it is placed. The disciplining to which it is subject means that its transience from space to space is accepted by it or that it is alienated from the context in which it is placed, in other words, it does not question itself. The armour of disciplining makes them alienated, resigned and resistant to their context and circumstances.

Baudrillard⁸⁰, from his reflection “Total Screen”, thinks about contemporaneity, relationships and the social being, and states that we live in a simulacrum⁸¹. The space to which our body has been transferred, into the virtual dimension, “eliminates all logical possibilities for apprehending real space” (Amaral & Jung Rocha, 2004, p. 1. Own translation). Consequently, we now inhabit a simulation of reality.

Based on Guy Debord’s reference⁸² and his critical tradition, Baudrillard says that today’s society is a society of spectacle, in which the real world is transformed into mere images, which become real and constitute efficient motivations for action. In other words, for Baudrillard, repeated images become contagious and this generates indifference and alienation in those who see them. He illustrates this thought with the images of war we see on television, where they seem like unreal, cinematic images. There is an alienation from reality, and the virtual is armoured. Another space where the body migrates is social networks, where

80. Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007), French sociologist and philosopher.

81. “you have to realise that the present moment is nothing more than a simulation, because reality has disappeared.” (Amaral & Jung Rocha, 2004, p. 1. Own translation)

82. Guy Debord (1931–1994), French Marxist writer and thinker.

our body is an image for someone, where we are part of an imaginary catalogue. This virtual and imaginary space is very populated.

When we join a social network, we are asked if we accept the terms and conditions of the application. The vast majority of us accept them, few of us read them and even fewer of us question these terms.

Even so, there are no direct questions, such as: “*Do you accept that your body is now an image?*” or “*Do you accept that your body is part of a catalogue?*”.

If you asked us, we’d probably say yes. How can we not accept a space where everyone meets when we have little time left to see people? How can we refuse an app where we can say practically anything we think? How can we doubt a place where communication flows more easily, where we can be sincere even at the risk of hurting others? We do not even see them.

We live in a relational desert, in a false space of freedom. Everything that reaches the media is transformed into an image - the “dictatorship of images” (Baudrillard, 1997) - and as such, a lot of information is lost, particularly body language and non-verbal communication. We will increasingly live in doubt between what is real and what is virtual.

Faced with the body’s new routines and the consequent loss of corporeality, the practical experiences in this thesis are episodes that promote other scenarios for the body, which decontextualise it. This method - decontextualising a situation in order to analyse it - is something that Eva Illouz observed, based on brief exercises used in psychology⁸³ as a means of measuring behaviour.

83. “If writing is the inscription of spoken language in a medium that allows us to “see” the language (instead of hearing it) and decontextualise it from the act of speaking, in the same way these exercises invite women to reflect on emotions and analyse them once they are disconnected from their original context of occurrence.” (Illouz, 2012, p. 79. Own translation)

Establishing safe and authorised spaces, spaces for the sensible, can be an invitation to reflect on the body and its common circumstances. The decontextualisation of the body, albeit episodic, bringing it into a tangible dimension, provokes an experience that suspends the “simulacrum” in which we live. This suspension, based on the decontextualisation of the body, placing it in other unprogrammed scenarios, since the body is disconnected from its context in which it acts on a daily basis, makes its sensible front available.

By allowing decontextualisation, in time and space, where the body escapes the servitude of machine and object, it is given back the right to feel, the pleasures and displeasures. Decontextualisation allows the body to become aware of itself, enabling a possible path towards some kind of transformation.

Reflecting on contemporary social relations, Patricia Soares

Martins⁸⁴ says that “it is necessary to create spaces of escape (...) that allow us to get out of this already said and already seen that encloses us so much.” (Soares Martins, 2024. Own translation). Underneath the armour there is still a body that breathes, capable of revealing itself, to raise awareness and transform, even if only episodically.

84. Patricia Soares Martins, Portuguese critic and literary researcher.

Three operations

Contemporary times are characterised by a paradoxical dichotomy regarding the relationship between the body and its contexts of existence. On the one hand, there is a hyperexposure of the body as an image, mediated by digital technologies that turn it into a simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1997); on the other, there is its progressive desensitisation, the result of historical processes of disciplining (Foucault, 1987) and an ascetic modernity (Sloterdijk, 2011) that deepens its place as a body-machine (Descartes, 1996) (Federici, 2020). This study proposes a critical analysis of this duality, articulating three methodological axes - understanding the body; giving it back its sensible front; and decontextualising it - as strategies to reactivate its tacit power.

Based on the reflection that comes from the experience accumulated through the various exercises and essays carried out throughout the process of developing this research, it is understood that it is through understanding the body as a tacit and empirical space, and decontextualising it, that it is possible to restore its sensible front.

Understanding the body as tacit matter is fundamental to breaking away from the sensible control to which we are subject and thus opening up space for the phenomenological aspects that can occur in each experience.

This research proposes a methodical symbiosis, integrating three interconnected operations:

Understanding the body, the first operation, serves to prepare the body for what might happen, as if it were being told: “Whatever you feel is valid, but feel it.”.

With reference to Michael Polanyi’s epistemology (1966), this operation recognises the body as a tacit space of knowledge, an experimental laboratory whose results are its behaviours. The body is a “vehicle for being in the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 1976, p. 97. Own translation) and it is through the body that society is organised, because “the way in which the relationship with the body is organised reflects the way in which the relationship with things and social relations are organised” (Baudrillard, 1976, p. 200. Own translation).

The *return of its sensible front*, the second operation, serves as an escape from the controlled and disciplined body that inhibits sensible action, as if it were being told: “Feel now, because it’s rare to feel”.

It is in this dimension that objects are called into experience, as a way of mediating an experience designed to activate the body’s empirical front. These experiences suggest putting the ascetic body on pause, making it available to its empirical dimension capable of feeling the “I” and the “world”⁸⁵. In this way, “the body lived by me and for me appears as an intermediary between the felt and the represented, between the world and me.” (Braunstein & Pépin, 2001, p. 138. Own translation)

85. See Chapter 2 - Objects and the experience of the body; Me - the object - the world, p. 48

The *decontextualisation of the body*, the third methodological operation, serves to spatially remove the body from places of control, almost as if it were being told: “In this place you are allowed to feel”.

Taking Eva Illouz’s (2007) reflection as a reference, this operation moves the body out of the spaces where it usually acts, bringing it to others dedicated to an experience, where common behavioural action can be suspended.

These three operations, (**fig. 31**) in symbiosis, work through designed sessions, which are understood to be fleeting episodes in people’s daily lives, but which give them little breaks, as if they were being told: *Pause to feel. You don’t know when you’ll next have this chance.*

The essays, which offer an experience that contemplates the body, the object and the space, which in some cases are defined by several sessions, served as a means of making the experiences public and participatory.

These designed experiences provide a collective space of authorisation to feel the individual body, placing it in relation to the other bodies present. It is the body in communication and interaction with other bodies, through objects and a space, that will reveal its sensible front, since “When two or more people are in relationship, the behaviour of each of them in relation to the other is modified by the behaviour of the other, just as the experience of each of them is modified by the behaviour of the other”. (Laing, 1972, p. 23. Own translation).

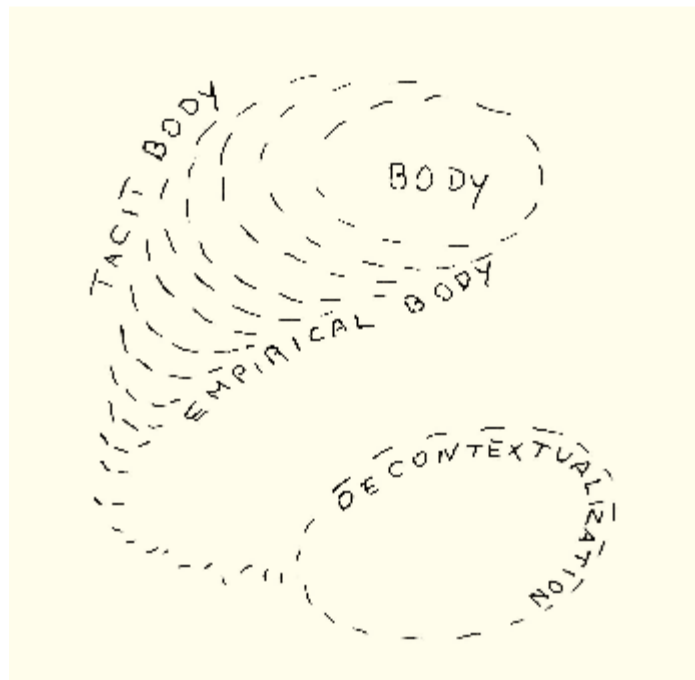


fig. 31. Map outlining the three operational frameworks employed as reference, requirement, strategy, and method to reactivate the sensible body. Thus, it becomes clear that the body—as a central element—must be understood as tacit matter (the tacit body), with needs for materiality and experience (the empirical body), and that its decontextualization may provide the path to rupture imposed disciplinary regimes and access its sensory potential.

Note: The following chapter of this research corresponds to the essays on the practical experiences developed. It is important to emphasize that their organization does not follow a chronological sequence of execution, but rather a narrative and analytical logic constructed a posteriori based on reflections generated by each experience. This methodological choice prioritizes theoretical and reflective coherence, arranging the essays according to established thematic, conceptual, and epistemological relationships rather than temporal sequence.

This structure allows each essay to dialogue organically with the previous ones, reinforcing the central axes of the research - even if, in practice, some essays were conducted at different times. This approach, common in practice-based research, seeks to establish a clear trajectory through the research narrative while ensuring progressive development.

Body tests

THE ENCOUNTER - RELATIONAL CHANCE

Today we are witnessing a paradoxical virtualisation of the body: what was once a territory of tangible presence and calculated risk has become, to a large extent, an incorporeal space⁸⁶, controlled and predictable. This space is a controlled place where the encounter that can take place in it is risk-free. It is therefore a space of controlled encounters. As Alain Badiou observes in his reflection on the virtualisation of relationships and love, today, from the incorporeal space in which we live domesticated by the idea of security, relationships are subject to a context that, although apparently free, operates under algorithms that filter out risks and contingencies. However, our body is reduced to an editable image inserted into platforms in the form of catalogues, where we can choose who we want to see us and who we want to see⁸⁷. Even with residual risks, the migration from face-to-face encounters to virtual spaces implies a radical reduction in sensible experience - and with it, the erosion of chance as a constitutive element of relationships.

Badiou proposes an urgency: "We need to reinvent risk and adventure, against security and comfort." (Badiou & Truong, 2020, p. 19. Own translation). In this reinvention that Badiou suggests, Patricia Soares Martins echoes the need for spaces of escape that make us decontextualise⁸⁸. Patricia's quote could be a response, a possible solution to the reinvention that Badiou proposes.

One question that emerges is:

- *Can today's physical meeting spaces be spaces of adventure or spaces of escape?*

The answer is to return to the diagnosis made in Chapter 1 - The body and the relationship (p. 29). Virtual spaces such as social networks are places that limit our relational action, in other words, they are spaces with a reduced sensory experience. These virtual places, where our body regularly acts in a controlled way but without realising it, are spaces where chance is impossible and the place for subjectivity is practically non-existent. This is because there is an absence of truth, there is an absence of the presence of the tacit body⁸⁹ and there is a fear of the risks that sensible experience entails, where chance and subjectivity are fundamental elements.

I return to Badiou through his own question:

"What is the world, analysed, practised and lived from the point of view of difference and not from the point of view of identity?" (Badiou & Truong, 2020, p. 29. Own translation).

86. Idea developed in Chapter 1 - The body and the relationship; The virtual imposition - the body without a body, p. 39.

87. "It's love insured against all risks: we'll have love, but we've calculated the relationship so well, we've chosen the partner so well beforehand through an internet search - we certainly have their photo, we know their tastes in detail; their date of birth, astrological sign, etc. - that, at the end of this immense combination, we can say: "That's how this is going to work without any risks!" (Badiou & Truong, 2020, p. 15. Own translation)

88. Mentioned in Chapter 3 - Designing the experience; Scenarios for the body, p.82.

89. Reflection on the tacit body, further developed in Chapter 3 - Designing the experience; The body is tacit, p. 77.

In the virtual space, on dating networks and social media, we try to meet and interact with people who fulfil our individual requirements. Basically, we're looking for someone similar to the principles we stand for, whether these attributes are physical, ideological or social. In this way, we're looking for someone who sees the world through the same prism as we do.

Behind Badiou's question lies a deeper concern: the potential richness that diversity brings to relational action, and how virtuality inhibits this.. In other words, diversity, rather than similarity, could be a factor that contributes to building something deeper, whether in the context of a close relationship between two or more people, or in terms of progress in the world.

At the moment, as Badiou points out, we are living in a period where there is neither chance nor encounters and, as a result, there are fewer diverse relationships, fewer unforeseen events and we are witnessing a "security threat" (Badiou & Truong, 2020, p. 17. Own translation).

90. Erving Goffman (1922–1982), Canadian anthropologist and sociologist.

For Goffman⁹⁰, the physical, face-to-face and non-virtual encounter involves two layers of information that we have in the context of relational interaction: that which we give and that which we transmit, the latter being what he considers to be the most important.

91. Mentioned in Chapter 1 - The body and the relationship; The virtual imposition - the body without a body, p. 39

In the same way that António Coimbra de Matos in "*Toque das Almas*" (Touch of Souls (Own translation))⁹¹ talks about the information that the body transmits in silence and the non-verbalised communication between bodies, Goffman favours the information transmitted over the information given voluntarily.

92. This sentence by António Coimbra de Matos follows on from the sentence quoted in Chapter 1 - The body and the relationship; The virtual imposition - the body without a body, p. 39: «I feel that you feel that I feel. I do not know what, but I know that you feel that I feel.» He says that "This is the primary consciousness - of realisation - of the reality that relates (...)" (Coimbra de Matos, 2016, p. 143).

Coimbra de Matos radicalizes this idea: in touch, in gaze, in proximity, there exists a pre-verbal communication that he synthesizes in the phrase 'I know that you know that you and I feel.'"⁹². Just as Goffman says that in a situation of physical presence, there is the feeling that "people are close enough to understand what is happening, including their experience and that of others, as well as close enough to realise that you understand." (Goffman, 1963, p. 17).

Coimbra de Matos and Goffman defend the same idea regarding the importance of the meeting of bodies for relational chance. The passage of this chance "in the form of a beginning" will enable "a construction as solid as if it had been necessary." (Badiou & Truong, 2020, p. 48).

I conclude by saying that the body in virtual space is an image; in real space, the body is an event, an action.

THE ENCOUNTER IN THE OBJECT

The virtualisation of relationships, as discussed above, has turned the body into an image and the meeting place into an incorporeal space. We are therefore witnessing the gradual dissolution of the body as a meeting place.

In this context, “Encounters for the body” - the first practical experience in this research - proposes a material counter-narrative, using two objects as relational mediation devices. Whereas in the virtual realm the body becomes a representation, in this investigation it is intentionally gestural—a presence that reveals itself through negotiated interactions with others, using objects as mediators.

This practical experience proposes forming encounters using two objects designed for this purpose, which are mediation devices that reinscribe risk and unpredictability into the relational dynamic.

During the development of each practical experience for this research, I accumulated questions that arose as the experiences progressed and as they were echoed. Many of the questions serve to localise the experiences and deepen the reflection on their relevance. Others serve to control the lack of control that can occur in experiences for the body based on interaction with others.

In the course of this essay, the following question arose:

–Isn't shaping an encounter also an action of control?

I give the following answer:

– Perhaps, but if control serves to disrupt the disciplined body, that hardly seems bad to me.

I continued my questions:

– But isn't designing objects to provoke a certain type of encounter too much of a desire to control uncontrollability?

I replied:

– The objects will peacefully mediate one of several possible choreographies for the meeting. There will be a lot going on beyond the objects that act as suggestions.

This tension between control and lack of control is fundamental. As Badiou observes, the virtual eliminates risk, while objects reintroduce it, not as chaos, but as structured improvisation.

These objects that become places materialize Badiou's proposition about reinventing adventure. They function as intermediaries between already-known or yet-to-be-known bodies, suspending incorporeal space in the process..

In this essay, the objects are material suggestions that allow physical closeness, interaction and communication between bodies. Two were

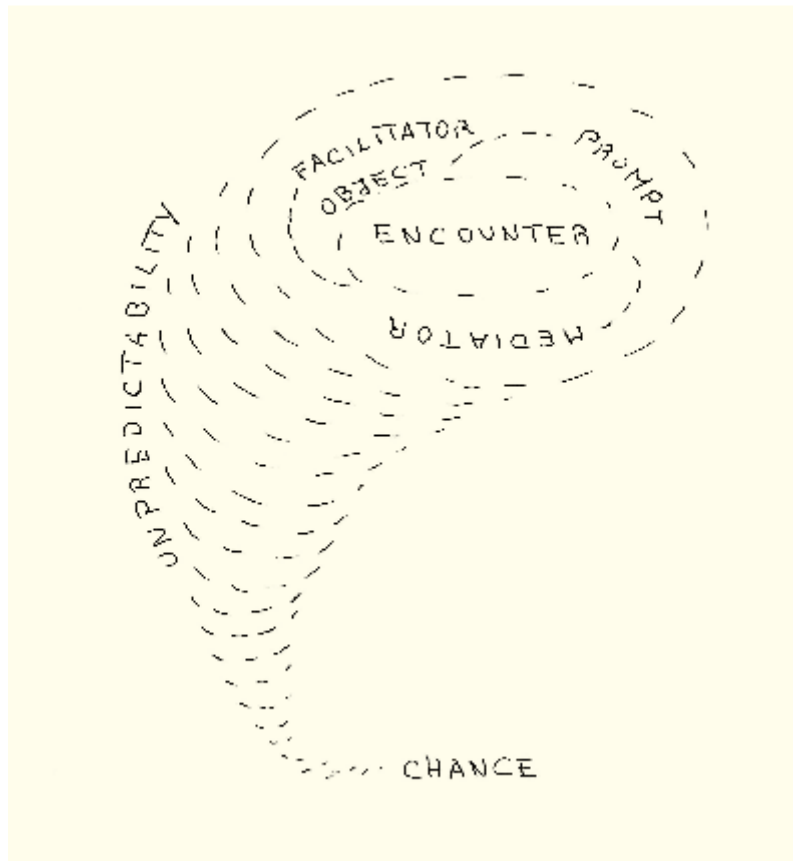


fig. 32. Explanatory map of this experience's proposed objects: they act as suggestive mediators, facilitators of unpredictability that may trigger serendipity.

developed: one for the head, close to the idea of a hat; another for the floor, close to the idea of a carpet; and both allow several people to meet. In other words, they are collective spaces - objects-places - and what surrounds them also becomes so.

Connecting these two objects is a sound piece that acts as an invisible connector. This is made up of a sound and a text that suggests a series of actions prior to the experience and other possible actions to take during it. As well as serving as an element that surrounds the objects and people, it also serves as an inducer to the experience and as a tranquilliser that mitigates possible anxiety, fear or refusal of the unknown.

These objects, arranged in a meaningful place, aim to gather and confine people based on a choreography that is predetermined by them. However, the behaviours of use, based on each person's experience, can alter the predetermined choreography and others emerge.

As Laing points out, experience and the action that comes from it - behaviour - "are produced in a social field of reciprocal influence and interaction." (Laing, 1972, pp. 22–23. Own translation). Objects that bring people together will facilitate communication and interaction between users.

Internal dialogue ensues:

– *Is the meeting an important action?*

The answer:

The face-to-face encounter is important for reading the tacit body, for putting it through the empirical exercise of confrontational practice with other people and because it is this interaction between several people that will “link my experience of another’s behaviour to another’s experience of my behaviour.” (Laing, 1972, p. 16. Own translation).

Individual and collective revelation, through what Laing defines as “social phenomenology”, is one of the results of face-to-face encounters. It is in this model of encounter that the chance that Badiou refers to can occur, and Laing says that it is in the relationship with others that the behaviour of each body in relation to the other is modified by the other body with which it interacts.

These objects, “while (...) things are or act in the world” (Laing, 1972, p. 62. Own translation), shape encounters between people who are the ones who “experience the world”⁹³. They therefore function as suggestive mediators and facilitators of a possible encounter where the unpredictability of chance will be present (**fig. 32**).

93. “People are distinguished from things because they experience the world, while things are or act in the world.” (Laing, 1972. p.62. Own translation)

FORMALISING THE MEETING

This essay was developed and conducted as part of the artistic residency at Oficina-Mundi⁹⁴ in the municipality of Avis, Alentejo, Portugal. Avis is a small town with around 3,802 inhabitants, where practically everyone knows each other. When I arrived in Avis, I was a stranger in the village, but part of the population already knew that I would be there for at least two weeks in the summer of 2024.

94. Villaverde, J. (2018). *Oficina Mundi*. Joana Villaverde. <https://www.joanavillaverde.com/oficina-mundi.html>

Oficina-Mundi is a space that everyone knows, but many of the people who live in Avis have never been there before. From this observation, I realised that the Workshop, like my project, could be a meeting place for many people who know each other and others who are about to meet.

I’ll divide the narrative sequence of this experience into several notes that are important for formalising the meeting that I hope will take place:

1st note:

Oficina-Mundi, the studio of resident artist Joana Villaverde⁹⁵, is based in the former Monastery of São Bento, which dates back to the 13th century. In other words, it’s an old building with large rooms, high ceilings and therefore a lot of sound echo. The workshop was surrounded by incredible scenery, with hardly any people in sight and the sky overflowed by many herons.

95. Joana Villaverde (1970) is a Portuguese artist.

Perhaps due to the landscape's vastness, the building's scale, and my solitary residency, nights in this place proved difficult to endure. In the first few days of my residency, even with Joana Villaverde's emotional support, I had several nights of very light sleep, afraid of the silence of the Alentejo or that someone would enter the monastery without my consent.

The lack of contact with people, day or night, made me doubt the place. The unknown, the silence and the size reawakened the social animal⁹⁶ that I am.

96. "Man is an eminently social animal" - referred to in Chapter 1 - The body and relationships; The construction of the body. p. 31

The morning after my second bad night's sleep, I decide to stand outside the workshop, waiting for someone to pass by. A few people did walk past, some walking animals, others walking themselves. Many of them were tourists. I was interested in meeting someone who had passed through here but lived in Avis. Then I encounter a person who seems to be from Avis, who greets me as if they knew who I was and asks if everything's alright. There, I find space to voice my unease. Deep down, I just needed another human to calm my body.

I explained that I was afraid to sleep in the monastery and the woman in front of me told me:

"Afraid of what? There's nothing and no one to harm you here. It's in city you should be scared."

The contrast between Avis and the city I live in is stark. She was right, I was afraid of the absence of everything I have every day. The decontextualisation of my place, of my routine, made me afraid of what does not exist. I needed to interact with someone who could simplify my fear and who said that it only makes sense to be afraid if there is someone. Of course, for that woman, all the people from Avis are known to her and because of the trust she has in her community, it was impossible for anything bad to happen to me.

This leads me to think about the risks and adventure that Badiou talks about. In an unknown virtual space there is no fear because the eminence of risk does not exist as it does in a physical space. The ability to fantasise from a physical space seems to me much greater than in a space of virtual interaction where any action is programmed.

2nd note:

The process of materialising the project was crucial to being able to approach and involve the people who live in Avis, starting with Amélia Miquelina, who helped with the manufacture of the objects described in point 2 – The encounter in the object of this chapter.

With the exception of two years working in Switzerland, Amélia has lived in Avis practically all her life, but she had never been to

Oficina-Mundi until she was asked to help me make the pieces. This dialogue between Amélia and me about the manufacture of the objects and their purpose, which diverged into other conversations about our personal lives, brought us closer together. In the two weeks that I lived in Avis, Amélia came to visit me after work several times on the pretext of helping me. This meant that Oficina-Mundi became a more familiar place for Amélia, and the objects I had developed, which were initially strange to this woman, became increasingly better understood by her.

She lent me her sewing machine, threads and other tools to help me construct the objects. Although I was the daughter of a seamstress and an upholsterer, I had never sewn before and had never threaded a machine. Amélia taught me the whole process and for me, the days at Avis were getting better and better.

I already knew three people in Avis, Joana, the lady who calmed me down, and Amélia.

I decided to meet more people. I went to the Café Jardim and to the square near the cafe. In the café, filled with men, several languages were spoken, but above all gestures were used to help the immigrant men communicate with those from Avis. Once again, the body plays a fundamental role in bringing these people together.

During the days I was in residence, I took several walks around town, to get to know it and for people to get to know me.

As for Amélia, who visited me regularly and told me a lot about her sister who also lives in Avis, I thought until the last moment that she wouldn't turn up for the public session that would close the residence.

3rd note:

In part, the project had been thought out in advance, at least in terms of its materiality. I took fabrics, twills from Porto, because I thought there might not be any in Avis. I anticipated some scenarios so that I could dedicate myself to the more tacit front of the project.

In the first few days, apart from sleeping badly, I drew a lot (**fig. 33 and 34**), possible interactions, possible objects, and in the meantime I used these drawings to communicate with Amélia. In fact, Amélia, with her sewing skills, also took part in designing the objects for the planned meeting.

From the various encounters I had with her, I realised that this woman had my back, she knew when I was going to the pool and



fig. 33 and 34. Study drawing of objects for the mediation of the experience.



fig. 35 and 36. Objects that constitute the encounter, arranged in the space.



fig. 37. Documentation of the moment preceding the encounter, mediated by the experience the objects provoke.

97. Luís Luz (1987), Portuguese visual artist and sound designer.

where I was walking, she saw me without me seeing her. Perhaps this is what it feels like to live in a small place where everyone knows everyone and where it's hard to hide anything. In virtual space, everything is the other way round.

Although Amélia accompanied me during this process of materialising the objects for the meeting, I did not know if she would attend the experience when it became public.

As I was in Avis in the summer, I basked in sunlight for countless hours, and from that very sun was born one of the objects I created in the Workshop. This object, which is close to the idea of a hat (fig.35), is an object that, in combination with others like it, creates a kind of hat square in which everyone who wears it has to negotiate whether to walk or stay. It's a kind of living merry-go-round, controlled by the discussion or coordination of bodies.

The other object, the one that comes close to the idea of a carpet or towel (fig. 36), marks the place to sit and where to put your feet, placing them in front of each other, in a kind of space for conversation or play.

4th note;

After nights of better sleep, conversations with Amélia, Joana's company and trips to the café Jardim, since Avis is nearby, I decided to invite friends from Lisbon to come to the public session that would close this residency process. The invitation to friends came about for two reasons: 1 - I wanted to observe the contrast in interaction between people who live in the city and a population that does not; 2 - because the social but frightened animal that I am, even though I'm calmer in the Alentejo, still needed my friends close by.

They came, they stayed in the monastery and, like me, they marvelled at the landscape that surrounded us.

Along with my friends, family members also turned up. Everyone was gathered in the houses of Avis for the meeting, which was called "Formal Encounters".

What was missing was an element that would sew the meeting together, and that's why the sound piece was created, which aims to reassure and suggest. So I persuaded Luís Luz⁹⁷ to write a text and add sound to it. I told Luís about all the events in Avis so far and explained that I wanted the objects to be moderators of an encounter, facilitators of a possible interaction and suggestive of future ones.

And the text that Luís wrote begins with the following words:

"Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water. Position

the headpiece at the top of your head with the wide end to your right and the narrow end to your left. The narrow end should align approximately with your ear level. Note that the reverse side begins facing outward. Only move the wide end.”⁹⁸

98. Full text Appendix VII

Luís begins the text with the object of the head in mind, but first he suggests washing hands, not in a literal sense, but to imply that people could become close. People’s bodies could become close enough to touch.

Then he says:

“Take two steps forwards or one step backwards. Avoid parading. Adopt a slower pace by pressing for a modest moment before returning to the resting position.”

The text begins to induce a rhythm, a possible movement, or some choreographed gestures.

This is where it seems to me that the experience is prepared, formalised, to be experienced.



THE MEETING - THE NARRATION

“Formal Encounters” is the name of this experience that took place at Oficina Mundi with around 30 people (**fig. 37**). This meeting evokes no other motive than the simple action of being and seeing people. There is no organised conversation, no scheduled concert, no food (only at the end), in other words, there are none of those common elements that generate or motivate encounters.

When people entered the Oficina Mundi space, they found the object for the head, close to the idea of a hat, hanging on the wall (**fig. 35**) and the object for the floor, close to the idea of a carpet, on the floor (**fig. 36**). In addition to the objects, there are phones available for anyone who wants to listen individually to the text that echoes through the workshop.

The experience consists of two objects, a sound piece with a text that instructs, suggests and provokes the imagination, and people. The experience begins when people gradually establish silence among themselves until the whole group can hear the sound (**fig. 38**). The sound piece acts as an organising element, with the words being read echoing through the space and stimulating the curiosity of those who hear them in order to capture their attention. Once silence is established and the sound piece is actively listened to, the experience progresses.

fig. 38. Sequence of the encounter's beginning: a moment of listening to the sound piece and induction into the experience.



fig. 39. Preliminary sketches of objects accompanying the final artifact. This relationship between drawing and object may establish usage guidelines and instructions.

“Keep going at this pace while you’re flowing. If your hand gets tired, try using the other. If both are tired, use your head.”

The text of the soundtrack mentions various parts of the body in order to activate them. The listener begins by identifying the parts of the body that the sound design evokes and these are introduced into the experience.

The encounter begins in the soundtrack, from its individual listening, to which all visitors, who will later become participants in the experience, have access.

“On the other hand, you’ll be able to thank us later for going barefoot in order to avoid friction. (...) Going barefoot often in small doses, even if briefly, will ease your adaptation. Do so whenever possible, and engage your imagination if needed.”

People are induced to activate various elements of themselves: the body, its movements and gestures, relaxation actions that can sequence others, the use of imagination if necessary, looking at others. The evocation of these elements refers to the three operations elaborated in the previous chapter.⁹⁹

99. Chapter 3 - Designing the experiment; Three operations, p.85.

And with regard to this last suggestion that the text makes - to look at others - through the expression “be an I that is also the other”, I quote António Coimbra de Matos famous phrase “Mind on the moon, feet on the road, and eyes on others” (Varela & della Santa, 2020, min. 46.25. Own translation). This phrase by Coimbra de Matos evokes three operations: imagination and creation; building the future; and the collective sense that the last two require. This phrase is fundamental to understanding what a collective experience might be that puts daily habits structured on a narcissistic model on hold.

The actions suggested in the text are compared to other actions in everyday life so that the participants realise that they are facing an opportunity, albeit an episodic one, to take a break from their daily lives, the decontextualisation that is of interest in the various essays carried out for this research.

“Be flexible and accept that you will do what you will do.”

Towards the end of the soundtrack, you can hear a phrase advocating flexibility and freedom to access the sensible body, it is at this moment that all the people who came to the meeting became participants, including Amélia Miquelina, who ends up coming and bringing her neighbours and sister.



fig. 40. Interaction sequence with objects between interior and exterior following sound listening.





fig. 41. Interaction sequence between a young girl and a child.



fig. 42. Interaction sequence between two children.

The sound piece serves as an element to stimulate and activate the body. This disinhibiting element is first listened to in its entirety and only when it returns to its beginning do the movements begin, still timid, for the interaction with objects. This organisation of the experience takes place at the discretion of the participants, i.e. no indication was given of the beginning or end of the action.

Several people move towards the same object, either because there is generalised discomfort because everyone feels pressured to be on the move, or because no one wants to leave the other alone in this discomfort. Therefore, all the people move towards the objects.

First they feel them, appreciate them, judge them. Then they start using the objects and making comments about the other person who is using the same object as them.

In the meantime, the silence. What they heard is still there.

The objects are arranged at level zero inside the Oficina Mundi accompanied by the initial drawings that gave rise to the pieces (**fig. 39**). The sound piece is played out loud in the room and also on everyone's mobile phones.

People start to leave with the pieces, especially the objects close to the idea of hats (**fig. 40**). These become a carousel, but a silent one. Those wearing them tie each object to the next, until they form a "square" of four.

Outside, they feel the wind and sense what each body speaks through its movement. Should I sit? Should I follow? Should I lie down? Should I turn? That's what the various bodies using this object seem to be saying.

Two children are sitting on the carpet, inside(**fig. 41**). They do not know each other, but they're about to. They take their shoes off and put their feet where the object tells them to, and they stay there until they get to know each other. First they talk about the object, one assesses its materialisation, the other mentions the colours. Two other people shyly watch what their conversation.

People take turns changing the objects they are using. The use of the first object has already determined interaction groups, and these groups move on to the second object to try out, with the exception of the child who approaches another child (**fig. 42**), and they both use the object that is close to the idea of a hat. The children are also shy with each other, they do not exchange words, only glances and smiles, and the objects cover almost their entire faces.

There's a smiling teenage girl using one of the objects on her own, not associating with anyone (fig. 43). Perhaps it's not because she refuses, but because her youthful shyness does not allow her to.

Amelia is still on the carpet, but now with a man lying next to her (fig. 44). She says: "I never thought I'd have a man lying next to me after all these years".

Many people had never been to the Oficina Mundi, but the meeting was urgent, so through the posters¹⁰⁰ they saw in the street calling for the meeting, plus Amelia's publicity to the neighbourhood, the house filled up and the experience was rich.

On that side, someone might ask:
And what did you do?

And I'll answer:
I observed, recorded and provoked an encounter, albeit brief, in Avis.

There were two other observers on the sofa, two elderly women who did not miss the meeting and a dog (fig. 43). Their participation was that of observers, as if they were watching a show. And what is a show if not a universal experience?¹⁰¹ The body encounter is, in fact, still a universal experience. You know what makes you comfortable as well as what makes you uncomfortable. Chance and subjectivity are two elements that are part of the assessment of comfort and discomfort.

From this experience, through the mediation it ensured, we can be sure that the need to meet is present and that we are a collective body. After hours of meeting, the neighbouring women began to say goodbye to return home because their domestic chores were waiting for them. This moment of meeting was nothing more than a pause that took them out of the linearity of their ordinary days.



fig. 43. Record of individual use by a teenage girl.

100. Available in Appendix VIII.

101. "Suppose you listen to a sonata. If I manage to detach everything personal from my experience and discover in that experience something independent of the conditions that led me to hear it, I arrive at something that is not singular, that is not contingent and that is the essence of that sonata, which can be communicated and universalised." (Pombo, 2020, p. 13. Own translation)



fig. 44. Interaction sequence among multiple individuals—both strangers and acquaintances

Essay 2: Touching the body in parts (2023)

A TOUCH THAT REVEALS

Based on the previous experiences (opening) that gave rise to this research, as well as confirmation in the first material actions (chapter 3, p. xx), the objects in these two contexts are authorisations for closeness. Within the framework of preliminary experiments, the ‘Public Devices for Therapy’ project (Background p. xx) features a single object that, beyond the proximity it creates, prompts a shared touch gesture between two people through the hand-overlapping movement the object suggests. This object, as well as being an authorisation for the proximity of bodies, is also an authorisation for touch. It is here, in this project, that an object dedicated to proximity through touch appears for the first time. The others promote proximity through encounter.

This object arose from the observation of the tension that arises when we touch the hand of someone unfamiliar, decontextualised from the gesture of greeting¹⁰². Touching someone’s hand in the greeting ritual, despite being a gesture “of connection, a touch of skin to skin, known or unknown, one unarmed palm on another unarmed palm.” (Carvalho, 2020. Own translation), it is also a gesture that exists in both the public and private spheres, i.e. we shake hands with whoever we should, known or unknown, in a social situation. In this “gesture of interaction” (Le Breton, 1991, p. 138. Own translation) “the individual and the social are inextricably mixed in them; despite this, we are sensible to them and react as if we were following a code (...) nowhere written (...) understood by all.” (Winkin, 2000, p. 64. Own translation).

In this context, this sharing of touch through the ritual of the greeting is a normalised gesture, in other words, it is conscious as an action of respect and care for the other, but it is not seen as a carnal action, of “flesh against flesh” (Carvalho, 2020. Own translation), as Catarina Carvalho says¹⁰³ on the shaking of this greeting during a pandemic. It is a socially accepted, instituted and normative gesture, and as such, in this context, we do not realise that this gesture is a bond and that it is a carnal touch.

However, when this is decontextualised from the normativity of the greeting, it can reveal itself in various ways, and can be an intimate and tense gesture.

The observation regarding the tension that exists when touching someone’s hand, decontextualised from the action of greeting, comes from a personal experience that awakened me to the level of intimacy that can exist when two people’s hands touch.

102. “Now the handshake, existing between these two worlds, the intimate, private, and the social, public, defines, in a way, our social place, ties us to a web of relationships. The fact that we can’t exercise it makes us looser, and definitely more alone.” (Carvalho, 2020. Own translation)

103. Catarina Carvalho, Portuguese journalist.

I'll tell you about the brief episode that provoked this observation:

In the first year I taught (2018), I touched a student's hand with the intention of reassuring him about his concerns regarding a piece of work he was doing. A gesture that I thought would calm him down resulted in a very tense reaction for the student in which his body froze. The student's body was frozen in a state of discomfort that I can't quite explain to this day.

I've thought a lot about this gesture and its several possible readings, and there could be a connection between all of them: the power dynamic that exists between teacher and student, the interpretation of the gesture that could be different between different people, even if they are westernised, the degree of intimacy that is associated with touching someone's hand.

We can further emphasise this action by thinking that touching someone's hand can be associated with a gesture of greeting, but we can also think of weddings between two people where rings are exchanged and the hand is the part of the body that exposes this commitment to intimacy.

Therefore the hand, and the touch associated with it, is a part of the body that takes on various symbolisms and even rituals. And rituals have very specific objectives: "to produce meaning" (Custódio Gonçalves, 1999. Own translation).

There's another episode that's worth mentioning as an observation for understanding the touch on the hands:

Luís Fernandes, in his body therapies, in which he uses massage as a means of emotional revelation, in other words, touch on the body, tells a story about a patient of his, in which whenever he touched her hands during the massage, she cried. For her, this touch was inexplicable, it was tacit, it made her react in a way that reminded her of a gesture of care, but she did not know why it made her cry.¹⁰⁴

104. This episode was told during a meeting between myself and psychologist Luís Fernandes to discuss some issues related to this research.

In this sense, these two episodes can refer to the concept of tactile bipolarity¹⁰⁵, the double sensation of feeling touched, the object touching the skin and the skin being touched by the object. In this case, and in the first person, replacing Ivanise Fontes' "object" with "hand", to better understand this concept: feeling another hand touching my hand (my skin) and at the same time feeling my hand (my skin) being touched by the other hand.

105. Concept explained in Chapter 1 – The body and the relationship; The body – the first place. p. 33.

It is in this tactile bipolarity that the body and gesture are revealed, and that some of the "phantasmatics"¹⁰⁶ of the body that Lygia Clark spoke of becomes conscious.

106. Concept explained in Chapter 3 – Designing the experience; Dialogue between objects: revelation and phantasms, p. 76.

TOUCHING WHERE WE DO NOT TOUCH - REDEFINING AND REHABILITATING

This practical experience, carried out in 2023 and called “Touching the Common Place”, is based on the reflection mentioned in the previous text - on touch from the encounter of common parts of more than one body in interaction. This action is constituted as an experience in touching parts of the body that are common to most individuals - areas that were once touched a lot or that now, when touched, are usually done so in normative contexts or casual gestures, making such interactions unconscious and devoid of intentionality.

As has been progressively explained throughout this investigation, the body follows a sequence of indoctrination and disciplining in terms of its use and presence in the world, where its sensible front is taken away or diminished. In the previous chapter, the encounter as a relational space of physical presence was presented as the first means of episodically decontextualising the body from the offensive in which it lives - a project of disciplining deepened by the imposed virtuality. In the current essay, as a second means of exploring the sensible front of the body, touch is proposed through objects that bring together common parts of the body, as happens in “Public Devices for Therapy”¹⁰⁷ with the object that allows two people to touch hands (**fig. 8**).

107. This project was explained in Background, p. 19.

As a way of exploring this idea, I'll start by taking up the reflection that Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley present in their book “Are We Human? Notes on an Archeology of Design” (2016) in which they argue that design not only serves humans, but constantly redefines them. By “redefining” touch and gestures - gestures we do not know, gestures we make unconsciously and ones we are conscious of - their resignification and rehabilitation is possible.

To do this, I suggest that, through objects, there is a relocation of bodies to our primitive conditions and needs - that of being touched in order to access the sensible world like the one we have at birth - a kind of return to a place where we once were. By this I mean that this experience starts from the lack with which we are born, from the idea of commonality¹⁰⁸ and integration into the world that is intrinsic to the original condition of most individuals. Observing this primary state¹⁰⁹ to which we are entitled when we are born, the physical dependence on others as a survival factor are relational aspects to consider for this essay. Our whole body, at that stage, is touched and appreciated in detail, whether it's the contrast in size between a baby's body and an adult's, the design, the accumulation of flesh on the various limbs. At some point, at the beginning of our existence, we were all the object of appreciation and our bodies were all touched, whether it was because the other needed to recognise us as a new body, or because we needed to be soothed or caressed.

108. Among many thoughts on common sense, Alain Badiou writes: «What is contained in the term <communism> has no immediate relation to love. However, this term also confers new conditions of possibility on love» (Badiou & Truong, 2020, p. 70. Own translation).

109. Reflection in Chapter 1 – The body and the relationship; The construction of the body, p. 31.

In fact, when we are born, we are in need of others and others become in need of us and this is not an artificial relational state, but the affirmation of the social being that we are even in a primal state.

In the book I published with the account of this practical experience¹¹⁰ through the objects drawn, where I also reflected on the bodily memory of the primordial touch, the one we experience as babies or children, I asked myself two questions in the form of disquiet:

“Do they solve anything in the world? Certainly nothing, but they momentarily place us in a scenario alienated from the frenetic reality in which we live every day.” (Gomes Teixeira, 2023, p. 26.)

The objects and the experience around them take the body to a different place from the places we live in every day (**fig. 45**). In this experience, we are not on someone’s lap or in their embrace as we are when we are a smaller body in childhood, but we are in a context of an exposed and vulnerable body, and therefore receptive. This place of discomfort, of a *“scenario alienated from reality”*, is what makes us alert to the experience in which we are involved.

I kept asking myself:

– *Is that my goal? [alienation from reality]*
“It’s not either, but in reality (...), I’m just trying to counter and resist some disciplinary issues that design doctrines insist on expressing. Bruno Munari already did that. Nothing new!”
(Gomes Teixeira, 2023, p. 26, Own translation)

At this point, with the reflection still under construction, I was looking for an alternative scenario to the frenetic reality. I tried to do this through objects, which, like those in the previous essay, are also places, micro-spaces, agents that authorise touch. It is they who - through gesture - define the encounter and the place in the body where two or more individuals touch (**fig. 46**).

To my answer to the last question, I would now add that as well as trying to “counter and resist” the conservatism of design, I also try to do so in relation to the offensive to which the body is subject.

The intention of these objects is to localise pieces of skin on our bodies, and on the bodies of others, that are no longer touched with the consciousness of yesteryear, the consciousness we had when we were born. These places on the body are touched by the same places on someone else’s, they are encounters between two equal parts with different proportions, which can therefore require some choreography and slight efforts in their interaction. These objects, which pronounce programmed gestures, must be experimented with, experienced and repeated.

110. Gomes Teixeira, S. (2023). *Playing the Common Place*. Go Come.

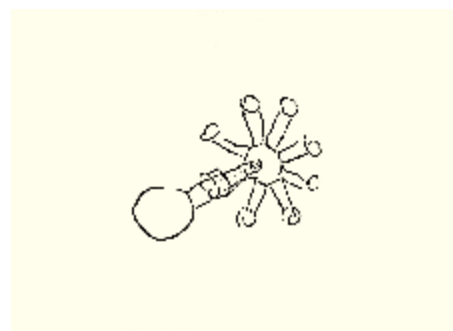


fig. 45. Sketch drawing of one of the experiential objects.”

fig. 46. “Exploratory sketch of an experiential object evoking the concept of a shared tactile space for two people

I ask myself:

– *Aren't programmed objects controlling objects?*

I give myself the same answer I gave in the previous essay¹¹¹ :

– *Maybe, but if the control is to get the disciplined body out of control, I do not think it's a bad thing.*

Badiou explores this idea of repetition in relation to love, but I would venture to say that we could replace this word “love” with “relational action” to say that this “requires care, repetitions. (...) repeated rehearsals.” (Badiou, 2020, p. 80. Own translation).

As for this trial, this repetition took place in various ways: several sessions were dedicated to repeating and exposing this experience; within each session the individuals repeated the experience of using the objects several times; and the book reached at least a hundred people who may not experience the objects but can imagine, from their narrative, the effect of the objects on others.



fig. 47. Record of all objects in this experience.

Through objects that redesign mediation - micro-meeting spaces for touching common parts of the body - this experience proposes a re-signification and episodic rehabilitation of the body, gesture and touch, decontextualising it from the scenarios of contemporary disciplining and relocating it, even for a moment, in a place of primary condition: the one that inhabits us at birth, when touch was less of a norm and more of a discovery, less of control and more of mutual recognition.

OBJECTS THAT AUTHORISE

The objects in this essay are micro-spaces of authorisation (**fig. 47**) that take the body back to its primordial state - that of being touched with a touch of curiosity and care. They allow for body-to-body touch, creating a “tactile bipolarity”¹¹². Those who touch are also touched, they feel the other when they touch them and through this touch, they feel themselves. A duality is established between touching and being touched and between touch as an intimate act and as a gesture mediated by objects that reconfigure its intentionality.

These objects are placed on the extremities or protrusions of the body, and from their central element, they direct the extremity or protrusion to the similar pair it finds on another body. From the toe to the tip of the nose, these objects allow you to touch various protrusions on the body. They allow the tip of the toe to touch the tip of someone else's toe; the heel to touch another heel; the knee, another knee; the index finger, another or another index finger; the elbow, another elbow; the ear, another ear and the tip of the nose, another nose (**fig. 48**). These touches are light and tenuous, but they bring out other

112. Concept addressed in Chapter 1 – The body and the relationship; The body – the first place p. 33 and in the current chapter; pp. 105; 125; 181



fig. 48. Record of the experiential object sequence: toe, heel, knee, index finger, elbow, ear, nose, many fingers.

senses, since the bodies are in an unusual place of proximity, whether they are used between people who know each other or strangers. Here are some of the questions I asked myself given the disquiet evoked by the gestures:

– *Who do we touch on the tip of our nose with our nose?*

This question could lead to reflections on cultural experiences relocated from the Western context, but for now this essay has been proposed to be experienced between Portugal and Spain, and the answer I can give to my own question is:

– *If I can't touch the tip of someone else's nose with my own nose, I won't touch it.*

I keep asking myself:

– *But why would we want to touch someone's nose with our own?*

I reply:

– *As this is an unknown gesture, I do not know if there's any way of knowing if we want to touch it, but I do know that if we touch it, it will delay a series of reactions that might be interesting to explore or simply to have.*

This experience, through objects, allows us to find a common place in the other person's body. This encounter - of two similar parts of the body such as the tips of the fingers or toes - allows us to expand our map of knowledge of touch, even if it's just one episode.

Internal dialogue ensues:

– *Is it important to expand this map?*

I reply:

– *Yes. Perhaps certain gestures, certain touches, can make us aware of information that is so inscribed that we do not realise it. Expanding this map will bring more information to the body.*

Today, based on the experience of all this research, I'm replacing the word "maybe" with "for sure".

In other words:

Yes, it's certainly important to expand our touch map. Our bodies need to be touched with care and without pre-judgement.

The need to have a closer society, with more touch and for it to be less taboo, brings us back to the body approaches that Luís Fernandes defends, because they "rescue the body from the oblivion to which it has been consigned: by taboo, by modesty, by the supremacy of thought, by its reduction to a body-object" (Fernandes, 2021, p. 17. Own translation).

This experience, through its objects that authorise touch, suggests an interaction that questions common gestures and actions and the search for new sensible places in the body. The body, in this experience, is defined as "a meeting place, a point of permanent interaction between the cultural and the social" (Braunstein & Pépin,

2001, p. 140. Own translation), in which there is a conflict between what is normative and what may be strange.

This feeling of strangeness will be present throughout this essay: both because of the design of the objects, which distances them from common typologies (they are not furniture or lighting, among other categories); and because of the gesture or action they mobilise - touching one end of a body to a similar end on someone else's body.

Among other questions I've asked myself, I'll end this text with these:

- *Aren't we the ones who have to authorise the other person's touch on us?*

I answer today:

- *Objects are the mediation of this touch, by using them we are authorising touch, we are wanting to be touched, we are wanting to enter a place of unknown touch. Objects serve as agents of disinhibition and trigger new discourses on limits.*
- *What limits?*
- *The limits of the body, of individual space.*

This experience, through its objects, authorises the exploration and exposure of the boundaries between the intimate and the public, and deliberately blurs them, transforming the personal body into a space for collective negotiation. By taking the body back to its primordial state, where touch was a gesture of discovery and not the norm, she turns it into a place of detailed exploration, where the edges and protrusions of bodies are meeting points. An encounter that is authorised but strained by the active inheritance of the disciplined body.

Material connections

In 2023, when this experience was designed - from the intention, to the objects, to their public experimentation - I called the objects «Tripas» ("Guts"), due to their design and other formal characteristics. Guts are the entrails and viscera of the human or animal body, the stomach or intestines. These organs connect the inside of the body to the outside, which is why the objects in this essay relate to this idea of guts.

These objects, which enable episodes of authorised touch, are connections between two people like a gut, but in this case with the reverse circuit, connecting from the outside to the inside. The objects provoke a gesture and the consequence of that action follows, which can be discomfort or unease, identified or not, externalised or not.

As well as guts, I also said that these objects referred to a universe of training or play. They are objects made from elastic covered with

a fabric that wrinkles because the memory of the elastic forces it to. Since these objects, due to their material characteristics, are close to the idea of game or training objects, they lead me to think about their repeated use.

Several questions now arise:

– *Are these objects for body and touch training?*

I'm getting ready:

– *They are not. They are objects for exploring the body and touch, based on the encounter*

I ask myself again:

– *But then we lose the idea of repetition, or does it remain?*

And I answer:

– *I'm sticking with that idea, but I always leave it up to the person who uses them. These objects are not for domestic use, they are for contextualised use, or rather, decontextualised from the day-to-day. So the objects do not exist in isolation, they exist in a designed experience.*

Repetition can be interesting, but it can also be too demanding for some people.

The experience of using these objects can reflect some concerns in the wearer's body that, in a way, call into question their relationship with their own body and with the body of others. These revelations may prevent the experience from being repeated, or on the contrary, they may provoke more. But it is precisely because there is not just the possibility of one effect, but several, that this experience cannot be taken as a training session to achieve some result. It is, however, guaranteed to be an episodic experience that removes us from the "rules", "codes" and "systems" (Piaget, 1968, p. 5. Own translation) of the structuralism in which we live. By breaking with the "rules" and "codes" of structuralism, these objects do not train bodies, but deprogramme them - like an anti-training. Structuralism, which "contests the identity of the subject, dissipates it and makes it move from one place to another, a subject that is always nomadic, made up of individuations, but impersonal, or of singularities, but pre-individual."¹¹³

113. Mentioned in: Braunstein, F., & Pépin, J.-F. (2001). *The Place of the Body in Western Culture*. Instituto Piaget. p. 146.

When I was preparing this experiment, I asked myself this question about the objects that establish connections, as if they were reverse-circuit guts:

– *Who am I going to use these objects with?*

And I replied:

– *With anyone, because even with someone close, worrying situations will arise.*

I asked myself again:

– *What would it be like to try them with someone more distant or totally unknown?!*

In response to this question, I recalled the experience I had when I first used the Objects of Concentration for Pairs (2018)¹¹⁴ with a friend, from which I have several uncomfortable memories: feeling the breath and temperature of the other person's breathing too close; the reduced field of vision that meant that we could only look at the person we were with in the experience; and the effort my neck made to stay firm and as vertical as possible to keep me away from the person in front of me.

Despite knowing the person in front of me, it was difficult to use objects that determine actions as concrete as staying inside an object that determined an extremely short distance between two people.

It is because of this memory of this past experience that the objects in this essay are made with elastic, so that we can rest from the discomfort they cause when we use them. The elastic is intended to relieve discomfort as well as the tension of the proximity that objects cause us.

I raised another question:

– *But do we design to cause discomfort?*

I replied:

– *No, we do not design objects with these characteristics to cause discomfort, but rather to discern constructions from other realities.*

These objects, inserted in an experience that connects the exterior to the interior through the meeting of two bodies, are intended to participate in the construction or simply to imagine another reality for the body and, consequently, for its subjects.

Sofia Gonçalves, in the text “Terrenos Baldios e Territórios Intransponíveis” (2021) (Wastelands and Impassable Territories. (Own translation)), explores “wastelands or lands abandoned by other crises, to foresee how other possibilities for design can be built on them.” (Baltazar & Saldanha Quadros, 2021, p. 29. Own translation). Just as Sofia Gonçalves proposes occupying wastelands with new possibilities, these objects occupy the body - a territory colonised by norms of productivity and virtuality - in order to sow insurgent gestures in it. The body is a possibility for design and design is a possibility for the body. The objects and experiences that design can propose for the body's revelation position design within an ‘abandoned terrain’, or perhaps one already occupied by other interests, those of discipline. This terrain, which is that of this research, allows design to bring new discourses to the body and to its own discipline. In this essay, by proposing that certain extremities of the bodies touch - fingers, noses, heels - in addition to bringing the bodies closer together, the distance between them is revealed.

114. Presented in Background, p. 19.



fig. 49. Sequence of the object in use during the experiment's first session. Two women discover and rediscover their fingers, along with the potential interactions emerging between them within the constrained action space the object permits.

The objects in this experience - those that look like guts - were put to use and, through the imagination and experience of those who used them, they achieved other forms of utilisation.

In order to understand the different interactions that this experience - Touching the Common Place - can give rise to, it was presented in three different sessions with different groups of people. The sessions were photographed, recorded and commented on, and gave rise to conversations between the participants. The revelations that come from the experience are the central concerns that are commented on and now carried in the body.

115. Gonalo M. Tavares (1970), Portuguese writer.

Gonalo M. Tavares¹¹⁵ states that “In every movement the body says: I am no longer the body I was. Movement, any movement, is the escape from a position, from the body’s previous position,” (M. Tavares, 2013, p. 243. Own translation). In this experience, each gesture made from handling the objects, taking into account the revelation they provoke, the body, as M. Tavares says, will no longer be the same afterwards. The reactions generated by the experience lead the body to know more about itself than it did before. There is a body before and a body after, as happens when we are children and acquire a new skill, we no longer return to the body we were.

I ask myself:

– *Are these objects tools to inform the body?*

I answer:

– *These objects serve an experience that informs the body, which makes it more competent in terms of knowing itself and others.*

116. Projects mentioned in Chapter 3 – Designing the experience; Dialogue between objects: revelation and the phantasmatic, p. 76 and see Appendix VI.

117. See Appendix VI – fig. 6 and 7.

The objects in this essay, by their format but above all by their intention, are close to Lygia Clark’s “Sensory Objects” (1966–1967)¹¹⁶, especially “Dialogue of Hands” (1966) or “Dialogue of Glasses” (1966)¹¹⁷. It wasn’t intentional, nor was Lygia Clark’s work a reference for this essay, but there is a clear similarity in terms of the intention that Lygia puts into the objects she proposes and the ones I’m presenting. Both are about feeling the body, about interacting with one’s own body and that of others.

In the case of “Dialogue of Hands” (1966), Ligia has a mediating object for this dialogue, a kind of bracelet for two hands of two different people, and the object I’m presenting is for two fingers of two different people. Both Lygia’s image of handling the object and the image of exploring the object for the fingers are similar in terms of the intention of exploration that lies behind the object and is perceptible in the images (fig. 49 and Appendix I - fig. 6).

In this essay, the objects serve to bring closer and make the body felt through its parts—they exist to authorize touch. Some touches are premeditated through the objects' design, while others emerge from the action's progression, shaped by each individual's bodily experience. In the experimentation sessions, the interaction proved to be dance-like. Through the actions that the objects promote, the experience launches unusual choreographies provoked by the restlessness that is revealed during the interaction, by the discomfort or tension that arises.

Initially, three sessions were planned for trialling this experiment, but later there was the possibility of a fourth session.

In contrast to the meeting session in the previous chapter, in the sessions of this trial, with the exception of the fourth, the audience was controlled. People with certain specific characteristics - gender and degree of intimacy with each other - were chosen to take part in the three planned sessions. The fourth session was open to the public present at the event in which it took place.

The first three sessions had a suggested sequence for using the objects, which I passed on as a note introducing the experience. The programme of use starts with the knee, the elbow, the finger, the toe, the heel and finally the nose and ear. According to my individual perspective determined by my experience, the aforementioned sequence starts from the object whose use interaction is least invasive to the one with the greatest physical proximity.

This programme only serves as an indication for the initial round, as a kind of warm-up for those taking part in the experience.

1st session - April 2023:

Two people who know each other were invited to this session: two women who are friends and share a house. The meeting took place in a house and the experience took place outside.

Although these two women had been living together for about three years, apart from the common gesture of greeting, they had never touched certain parts of each other's bodies. Naturally, they hadn't because touching someone's fingertips isn't as common as touching a baby's fingertips, for example, given the formal and dimensional curiosity that we establish with the body of a newborn, where everything can be cared for.

The objects mediated the touch between these two women. Without fear of closeness, they followed the suggested sequence of use and repeated it more than once, especially some of the objects they were most interested in.

Given the uninhibited approach to the experience and the free spirit of these two women, they explored the objects in silence, concentrating on the action of touching and being touched. These women began by helping themselves to stick the objects into their bodies, without question they took off their shoes to use the object for their heel and toe, observed in detail the fingers of their hand meeting and stretched the object to realise its limit.

As expected, the object that says touch your nose to the other's nose was the most uncomfortable. The photographic records show one's gaze averted and the other's eyes clenched; there wasn't a moment when they looked directly at each other (**fig. 50**).

2nd session - April 2023:

For this session, two people who know each other were invited: two men, friends who meet regularly. The meeting took place in the same house as the previous session and the experience was carried out outside.

Although these two men had known each other for several years, apart from the common greeting gesture, they had never touched certain parts of each other's bodies. Naturally they hadn't, for the same reason as the women in the previous session.

In contrast to the first session, in which the women, from the moment the first object was used, remained permanently focused on the experience, in an introspective and expectant atmosphere, the two men remained in a state of tension that led them to divert their concentration from the action to other imaginary scenarios. The objects that authorise touch also make it possible to find escapes from this programmed action and this was the path that this session took. The men touched each other in a subtle way, but always trying to find a parallel path for that touch, whether it was the dance-like imagery that leaning elbows arouse, or affectionate jokes while touching ears and consequently faces, or the sexualisation of the gesture to the meeting of fingertips. Like the women, they also helped each other to insert the objects into the corresponding parts of their bodies.

As for the meeting of noses, it took place but, as in the previous session, the gaze was also averted. One of the participants looked away and the other squinted. Not for a moment did they look at each other's eyes (**fig. 51**).

3rd session – April 2023:

Eight people took part in this session, some of whom knew each other, others vaguely and others unknown: five women and three men. The meeting took place in the same house as the previous session and the experience was carried out inside.



fig. 50. Sequence from the first session documenting the experience and interaction with all objects except the index finger one.

fig. 51. Sequence from the second session documenting the experience and interaction with all objects, participated in by two men.

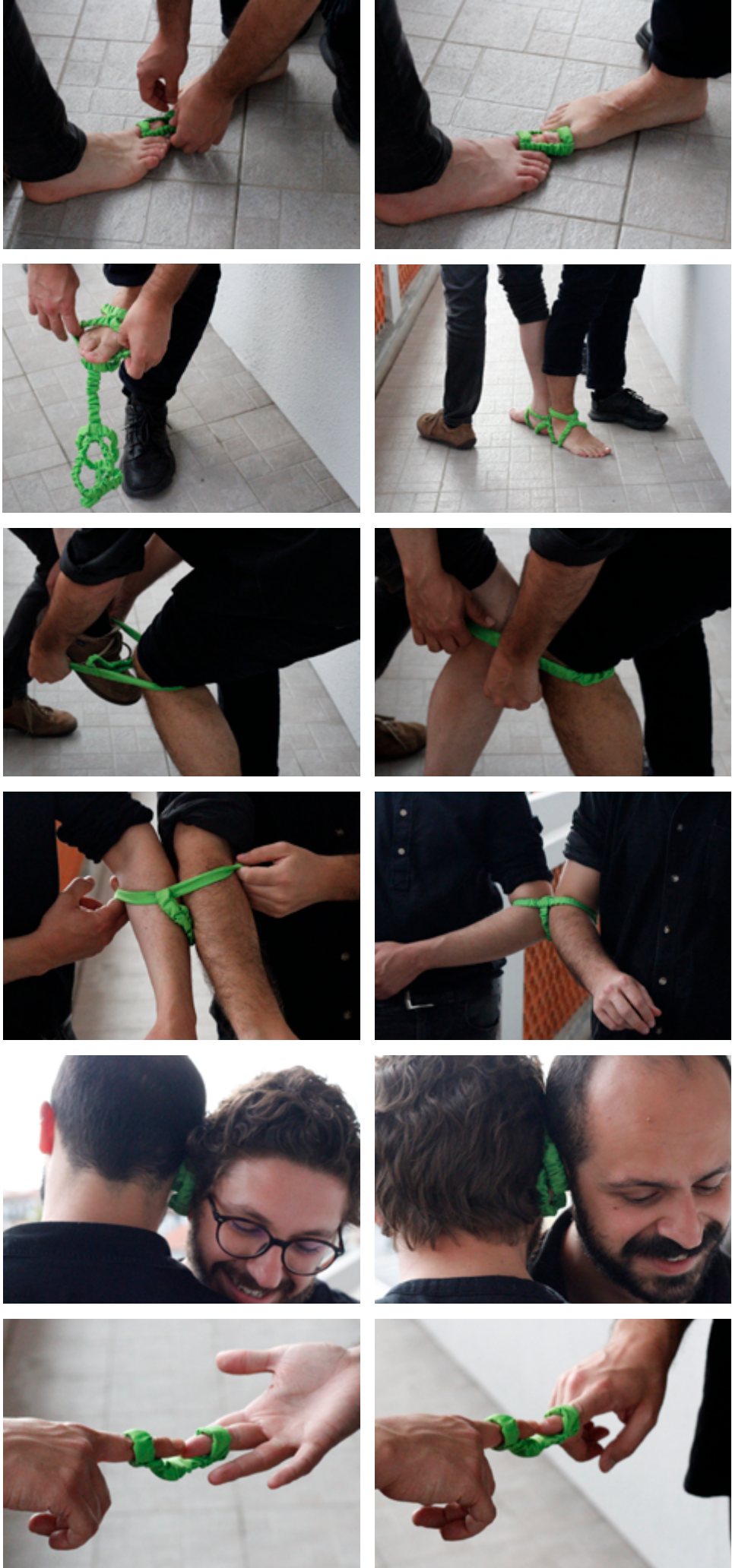




fig. 52. Sequence from the third session documenting the experience and interaction with the most collective object in the collection.

These people met on this day to celebrate one of their birthdays and this session takes place during the birthday party.

In the first and second sessions, seven objects were used in pairs. This session was dedicated to the use of the eighth object, a collective meeting object to receive the fingertips of eight people.

This object provoked a meeting of known and unknown fingertips (**fig. 52**). The fingers seemed to be an organism apart from the body and the only subject that was discussed while using the object was the encounter it caused and the shapes of each person's fingers.

No one questioned this meeting, despite the strangeness it might have aroused on hearing the initial indication:

- *This experience consists of using this object to bring fingertips together.*

There were no externalised questions about this indication. If in the previous sessions the participants explored the objects in a static way, immersed in contained gestures, in this session the body gained mobility: connected by their fingertips - like a web of tactile connections - the participants moved around the space, transforming the individual interaction into an organic choreography.

4th session - February 2024:

Several people took part in this session, some of whom knew each other, others vaguely and others unknown: several women, several men, several non-binary people.



fig. 53. Objects displayed on a surface ready for use.

The meeting took place at the EINA - Centre Universitari de Disseny i Art de Barcelona, as part of the GEARAD doctoral conference, inside the building.

Due to the unpredictability of the audience, the objects in the experience were displayed on a table (fig. 53), with two images accompanying each object (fig. 54): an image of the object that determined its place on the table and an image of the object in use from the records made from the previous sessions. The latter image serves as an instruction for its possible use.

In this session, no initial indication was given as to the order in which the objects should be used, so the participants had complete freedom.

This session became collective on several levels as the objects were used simultaneously by several people. A string of people was thus formed, linked by the various body encounters that the objects determined (fig. 55). A single individual might position their foot and ear in simultaneous encounters, their body engaging not with just one other body, but multiple¹¹⁸. As in the previous session, the participants moved around the space in criss-cross movements, intertwining bodies in an involuntary choreography.

118. See the video in Appendix IX



fig. 54. An object accompanied by two images: one that establishes its position on the table, and another showing usage guidance recorded from previous sessions.

The fourth session of this trial revealed that the collective dynamic radically alters the experience of touch mediated by objects: while in the initial sessions (with pairs) individual tension generated a concentration on the details of the encounter, in the last two sessions with the presence of multiple participants it diluted the relational pressure, replacing it with an emerging disinhibition. This phenomenon suggests that, in group contexts, the individual body temporarily merges with a collective body, where personal concerns dissipate into more fluid but less introspective exchanges. While in the first two sessions touch was close to an intimate act, in the third and fourth sessions it became a socialised gesture - less about revelation and more about negotiation.

This essay thus proposes a reconfiguration of the physical encounter: by fragmenting the body into specific parts (knees, elbows, fingers, heels, noses) and mediating its touch with objects, it deconstructs the notion of bodily interaction as a totality. Touching an “unknown part” of the other - whether in intimate relationships or between strangers - does not necessarily expand knowledge about the body, but it does expand tacit awareness of its materiality. As observed, the participants did not leave the sessions knowing more about the body, but rather through it: the repetition of atypical gestures (such as touching elbows, noses and the other parts mentioned) transformed the skin into a map of possibilities, rejecting fixed meanings.

Here, design operates as a technology of provocation, not resolution.

This experience can be, using Badiou's words, the fixation of the «chance of the encounter in the form of a beginning» (Badiou & Truong, 2020, p. 48. Own translation). Each touch mediated by these objects consolidates the chance of the encounter as a starting point.

In the initial sessions, discomfort brought out contained and individualised bodies, while in the last two sessions - with a greater number of participants - unpredictable collective interactions emerged. These dynamics demonstrate that design, in this context, is not a final product, but a tool for expanding the limits of what is possible: in this case, a means for questioning body norms and renegotiating physical proximity in diverse contexts.

Therefore, the experience transcends the sessions held: the revelations in the individual and collective bodies allow access to the sensible body, where touch - free from pre-established norms - becomes a tool for dialogue and constant renegotiation of physical proximity.



fig. 55. Sequence of records from session 4, where the participants' interaction is clearly visible, showing how this session fostered more collective and less individualized action.

Essay 3: The whole body (2024)

THE BODY TO BE TOUCHED

This essay reflects on touch as a form of recognition and awareness of one's own body and that of others. As in the previous ones, the experience of this essay materialises in sessions, where the participants are invited to interact through unconventional touch protocols mediated by a programmed experience that includes: an object, a space and instructions. These sessions, by suspending everyday functionality, aim to understand the body in order to reactivate its sensible front through its decontextualisation¹¹⁹ - not as a theoretical abstraction, but as a corporeal practice.

This essay, through the sessions that comprise it, once again places the body in an alternative scenario to the one in which it usually operates and therefore puts its disciplinary burden and objectualisation to which it is subject on hold.

Isabel Capeloa Gil¹²⁰, in her preface to the book “Imagem no Post-Millennium” (2021) (Image in the Post-Millennium (Own translation)), entitled “From image to touch in pandemic times” (Own translation)¹²¹ says that “The image replaces touch, sensation, presenting itself as a simulacrum of a bodily materiality in danger and peril.” (Baltazar & Saldanha Quadros, 2021, p. 7. Own translation). The word “simulacrum” that Isabel uses to refer to the replacement of concrete reality by the image in relation to the pandemic circumstance we are experiencing - covid'19 - is the same word that Baudrillard applies to the phenomenon of the virtualisation of relationships and social being.

By transforming touch into a threat, the pandemic has accelerated the replacement of bodily materiality with its digital double - a process that Baudrillard already foresaw when he described the simulacrum as the final stage of reality, where the symbol supplants the concrete. This idea of living in a simulacrum space is transversal to contemporaneity, where materiality has been reduced to a representation of the real.

Isabel goes on to quote Derrida from Jean Luc-Nancy's work “Le toucher”, with the question: “What happens when our eyes touch?”. In his analysis, the philosopher problematises the boundary between seeing and looking, pointing out that the field of the visible gains tangibility precisely when the eyes meet, and passive vision becomes an act of mutual recognition. This idea of the gaze as an act of recognition is also defended by Coimbra de Matos and Goffman with regard to the encounter and the need to record it in person, physically.¹²²

A little further on in Derrida's reflections, there is one of several answers to this question that he proposes, such as: “one must touch

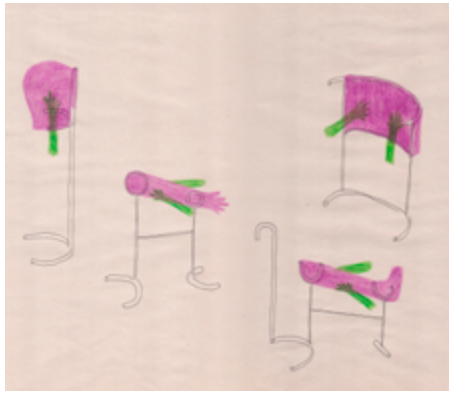


fig. 56.

119. These are the three methodological operations developed in Chapter 3 – Designing the experiment, p.59.



fig. 57.

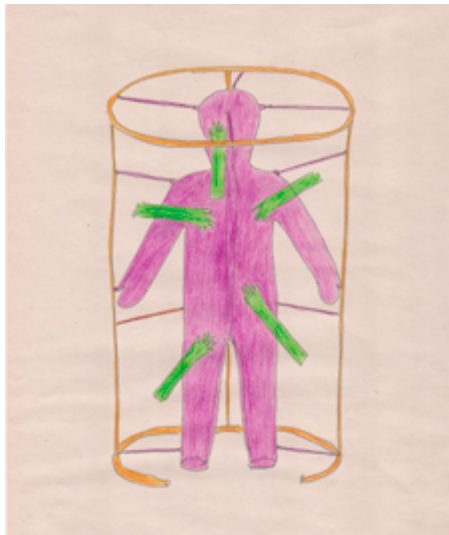


fig. 58.

122. Idea developed in Chapter 4 Essays on the body, Essay 1: Encounters for the body (2024); The encounter – relational chance, p. 91.



fig. 59.



fig. 60.

without touching”¹²³ (Derrida, 2011, p. 105. Own translation). This quote contains the idea of a tacit body, of something implied, implicit that is neither necessary nor possible to translate into words. In fact, this quote takes us back to the communication of bodies based on their experiences and their expression, which results in the recognition of oneself and the other that only takes place in the physical encounter and not in the simulacra that virtuality gives access to.

According to Le Breton, today we are experiencing ‘a transformation of the world’s flesh or the content of things into information’ (Le Breton, 2003, p. 150. Own translation). This means there is no longer any boundary between worlds, objects, and humans. The real and the virtual, or the “simulacrum” that Baudrillard and Isabel Gil talk about, dissolve into one another, and the body, which is the most real thing we have, loses competence with regard to what defines it as a subject. In other words, the body gains distance from itself and loses its capacity for subjective experience, understanding and assimilation of itself and the other. This enumeration means that the body loses tangibility and the ability to distinguish between the sensible body and the machine body.

To support the idea of the reality of the body, I quote Luís Fernandes who says: “The body is every day - the corporeal body, that of the skin, the muscles, the shapes and volumes. As everyday as eating, speaking, breathing - things that we do with our bodies.” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 48. Own translation). When this body is deprived of care by inhibiting its sensible action, it is necessary to remember what this body is, and as Luís Fernandes says, it is the everyday body.

This essay, which calls for touch as a way of understanding and recognising one’s own body and that of others, is not a nostalgic evocation of the body in relation to the time before virtuality, but rather the need to keep the body present so that the capacity to analyse and experience reality is not lost. If the body and its experience has

123. «hay que tocar sin tocar.» p. 105, quote taken from the Spanish version of the book “El Tocar, Jean-Luc Nancy” (2011).

- fig. 56. Drawing of the machine’s first version, shown in separate parts.
- fig. 57. Drawing of the second version of the machine with all parts from the first version compacted into a single object.
- fig. 58. Drawing of the third and final version of the touch machine.
- fig. 59. Touch Machine object.
- fig. 60. Detail of the touch machine object: access path to the body contained within the machine.

existed in a regime of disciplining and objectification for a long time, and if in contemporary times it is transformed into a simulacrum, it also means that there has been a material loss regarding the social relationship of the individual and collective body.

A MACHINE FOR THE BODY

The practical experience of this trial took place in November 2024 and included three scheduled activation sessions and two weeks open to anyone who wanted to get to know and try out the central object of this experiment, which also gave its name to the whole action - Touch Machine.

124. The full text is available in Appendix X.

For the sessions I prepared a text¹²⁴ that I used as a tool to clarify the reasons that led me to make the Touch Machine. This text was printed in large format to be displayed on one of the walls near the place where the machine was located, and in a transportable document so that those who took part could take it with them and re-read it later.

This text began by saying:

“27th October

Sitting in my father’s workshop, from which I say goodbye, and while my parents sew part of the machine, I think about why I make a “Touch Machine”.”

I remember that when I wrote the text, in the heat of materialising the object, I still wasn’t sure why I was doing it and I looked for answers in Laing’s writings and in the conversations I’d had with António Guerreiro¹²⁵ about the next essay.

125. António Guerreiro, Portuguese literary critic and professor.

And I asked:

“Why touch someone without them knowing who touched them?”

The machine (**fig. 56, 57 and 58**) authorises touch, it is a means of authorising touch. Whoever enters the machine is touched and can imagine who is doing it if they come across other participants before entering the machine, or they may not know at all who the people touching them are. Those standing outside the machine, ready to touch those inside, depending on when they start participating in the session, may know who they are touching or they may not know.

This machine is made up of an orange metal structure that suspends a lilac twill suit with green gloves. The participant who is willing to be touched gets into the suit, while the other participants who are going to touch the person who has entered the machine use the

gloves that give access to the inside of the suit, to the body of the person who is going to be touched.

The suit covers the entire body, from the head to the hands and feet, which is why there is an omission between those who touch and those who are being touched. This omission that exists through the suit that makes up the machine, between who touches and is touched, allows for a broader experience of using the object.

The machine operates through a pre-defined tactile cartography: each green glove corresponds to a specific body region (head, chest, back, arm, legs), allowing participants to explore touch gestures in areas generally restricted by social norms (fig. 59). This segmentation not only structures the interaction, but also exposes cultural hierarchies implicit in access to another's body. The touch distributed throughout the suit by the green gloves (fig. 60) is located: on the head, which gives access to the face; on the chest, which gives access to the chest and abdomen; on the buttocks, which gives access to the back and upper back of the legs; on the arm, which gives access to the forearm and shoulder; on the knee, which gives access to the leg and thigh.

In response to the question I asked myself in the text that accompanied the sessions, I wrote:

"It's a place, an object that allows us to feel the dormant and living parts of the body. It's a machine because it allows for a repetition of what is done by various hands on various bodies."

When I spoke to António Guerreiro about another project¹²⁶ that was taking place at the same time, he told me that those objects were an aesthetic experience in the most original sense of the word. So is this machine. It's an experience of the sensory order, it's about feeling your own body and the bodies of others, it's about assessing whether you want to be touched, whether you need to be touched. It's to understand if we want to touch and if we need to touch. It's to feel what the touch of others tells us about our body and to feel what our body feels when it's touched. Once again, through this machine, we enter the "tactile bipolarity" - being touched and feeling touched - for the possible revelation of the body. The machine shifts the tactile relationship from the individual to the collective plane: those who touch do not see, those who are touched do not identify, thus creating a dialectic between action and reception that questions normative proximity.¹²⁷

I asked again:

"But why touch someone without them knowing who touched them?"

126. The last practical test of this research, p. 144, took place at the same time as the current chapter.

127. By "normative proximity" we mean the relational action of collective proximity accepted and incorporated by society. Touching certain areas of the other person's body, unless in a moment of intimacy, is not part of the established relational agreements.

And I replied again, but with another argument:

It's an action that may provoke unease, but aims to place an object in 'the gulf between people' (Laing, 1972, p. 49) to reveal: a known yet unspoken behavior, and an unknown, thus hidden, behavior. Like what I wrote in Chapter 3 - Designing the experience on the Brief material actions for the sensible body (p. 61), in which I also quote precisely this phrase from Laing, I couldn't fail to do so in this text on the Touch Machine, since this machine is located and acts in this "gap".

The machine stands between the participants and mediates between those who touch and are touched through its materiality. This mediation that the machine performs is nothing more than the occupation of a "gap" in terms of knowledge of one's own body and the body of another, using touch as a tool for exploration and closeness.

The revelations that this machine determines, based on the concentrated use of interaction on the body of one person - the one who is touched - but also on the other participants - those who touch - exposes our own and each other's collective fragilities.

The questions followed:

"Is it a machine of disclosure?"

And I respond to my own concern, doubt and provocation with a quote from Laing:

"When our personal worlds are rediscovered and authorised, we begin by discovering carnage, half-dead bodies" (Laing, 1972, p. 54. Own translation). Perhaps this experience, and others that allow touch, will rescue us from the restricted collection of gestures and behaviours that we are taught to experience with at the age of two."

The first time I quoted Laing was in the text I wrote for this experiment, but I've already used this quote twice more during this research¹²⁸, because it is indeed powerful and describes precisely what happens when there is a designed experience that gives us time to feel ourselves and others. Accessing the "personal worlds" that Laing evokes, through this machine, brings revelations that make us realise the restriction of access to the sensible body that we are subject to. These revelations are discoveries that can participate, albeit not immediately, in a transformative process for the body. Just as Laing describes bodies as "half-dead" due to the sensible restriction to which they are subject, the machine exposes the sensory lethargy imposed by society, reviving the body through semi-anonymous touch.¹²⁹

128. See p. 54 and p. 82

129. The term "semi-anonymous" is used because the body being touched and the subjects touching it may or may not know who they are being touched by and who they are touching. Even if they do know who is touching them, the fact that they can neither see nor be seen makes the touch partially anonymous.

Regarding the previous practical experience¹³⁰, in the book I authored about it, I wrote:

130. Chapter 4 – Body tests; Essay 2: Touching the body in parts (2023), p. 104.

“There are no solutions here, no suggestions for resolutions, no interest in closing this subject in a fixed and certain way. Rather, there is the affirmation of the ignorance of our body in relation to the body of the other, whether in mutual actions in a situation of provoked proximity or in the distance unconscious to which our bodies are subject.” (Gomes Teixeira, 2023, p. 91)

The machine is, above all, a critical device that reveals problems (it does not solve them), mediating bodies to expose contradictions. Thus, this machine is not intended to leverage a material solution to the problem, but rather, like all the experiences presented in this research, to be a proposal to reveal a problem through the mediation it makes between the participants. Just as in “Touching the Common Place” (2023), where the “Tripas” were the objects of mediation, the aim was not to achieve any concrete solution, this project through its “machine” is also not understood as a solution but as a means of making a problem conscious.

This machine, which dedicates its pertinence to the body, is a tool for mediating subjects, but it is also a way of escaping the body-machine.

Today I ask myself:

- *A machine for the body, which in turn is a body-machine?*

And I answer:

- *Although this machine resembles a “body-machine” due to its functional structure, it subverts the very logic that gives it its name: by mechanising touch, it reveals the desensitisation imposed by the everyday objectification of the body. The repetition of its use does not result in mass production, but rather an invitation for the machine-body to episodically become a subject-body, capable of feeling beyond the social standards that discipline it, making it docile and obedient. Thus, the machine does not solve the “gap” that Laing reveals, but it makes it conscious by denouncing the invisible mechanisation that we operate on each other, and by showing that one answer, among others, to the discovery of the “carnage of half-dead bodies” lies in daring to touch and be touched.*

THE BODY’S EXPERIENCE OF THE MACHINE

The machine was placed in an empty room of an organisation that hosts research projects and explores disciplinary crossings - INSTITUTO, in Porto. This room was properly designed to receive the machine, it was isolated from natural light, the artificial light was lowered to create a more intimate atmosphere, and an orange carpet was placed under and around the machine.

When the participants entered the room, they found a poster with 3 instructions on how to interact with the machine (**fig. 61**):

*“The experience may be being filmed (not every day).
Take your shoes off to use the machine.
Use the machine in silence.”*

The back of the machine faced the entrance to the room (**fig. 62**), so when participants entered the room they couldn't see it fully, and through the shape of the carpet, participants were encouraged to go round the object to see it in its entirety, as well as to watch the interaction that might be taking place.

The experience with the machine took place over two weeks with three scheduled sessions one morning and two afternoons, but with free access. On the other days, the machine was open to the general public without a scheduled session.

The existence of scheduled sessions means that, at these times within a publicised timetable, the experience was observed and filmed, to later serve as material for collecting and recording it.

In the support document made available at the entrance or exit of the sessions, in the same one that contained a text written by me on the relevance of this machine, there is also a text by Margarida Antunes¹³¹ in which she describes the machine as being “designed to suggest interaction with a specific area of the body - the head, torso, arm and leg”¹³² as a means of looking for behavioural revelations that could be a translation of the relational action between “two bodies”.

Margarida goes on to say that “these authorised gestures” do not just provide a new approach to relational action, but are rather an exercise in reflection on the normative proximity that we incorporate under the influence of “social, human and cultural values (...) at the same time as exposing the complexity and nuances of human relationships.”

The relevance of this text being written by someone else lies in the possibility of establishing a dialogue between what I, as the author, project and the gaze of a disciplinary peer with a different distance from the object and its experience.

These transcriptions from Margarida's text are important because they validate someone else's perception of the machine and communicate intentions to the participants. While the text I wrote, available on one of the walls near the machine, reflects on the concerns related to the existence of a machine with these material and intentional characteristics; Margarida's text, also available on a wall near the machine (**fig. 63**), exposes a set of objective intentions associated

131. Margarida Antunes (1992), co-editor of *vai vem* editora and Portuguese designer.

132. The full text is available in Appendix XI

with the use of the machine and expresses the intervention that design can have in this matter. For Margarida, the machine has the “intention of mediating research approaches in design, playing an important role in the construction and expansion of knowledge about the individual”.

Just as Colomina expresses that design is the basis of social life (Taylor-Foster, 2016), Margarida also says that “design is a fundamental part of the way we interact and organise ourselves socially”, which means that design should be a tool available in the search for alternative proposals to today’s reality. This machine is also an object that interferes in our social action, since it constitutes a de-automation protocol that subverts the normativity of touch as a social act. This machine is not defined as a solution, but as a moment of pause in the context in which we live.

In view of the prior indications that the people taking part found - the instruction poster and the texts on display - they were given an introduction as well as an induction to the experience.

1st session – 7 November 2024:

This session was scheduled for 6pm, since for many people this time coincides with their non-working hours. This session was attended by more than 30 people, around 20/25 participated as people who are touched, others who touch and others who simply observe.

The participants began by reading the instructions/recommendations given at the entrance to the session, some read the texts posted on the wall, then went to the machine where the experience was taking place and watched.

I was the first to enter the machine, not to exemplify, but as a way of breaking down any possible doubts about participation. According to the experience of this and other experiences carried out previously and during this research, where the mediator is the object, it can always be confused as an untouchable object if it lives in an environment of exhibition and contemplation. This phenomenon occurs because the objects are uncommitted to the common categories of the common design narrative, i.e. the Touch Machine, as well as the objects from the previous experiments, are not devices that fall into more traditional typologies of the design discipline, such as furniture, lighting, among others.

In this way, although care is taken to make indications, recommendations and small instructions available to participants (**fig. 61 and 63**), there is also an inhibition on participation, especially at the beginning of the actions.



fig. 61. Instruction poster for the experience.
fig. 62. Object viewed from the perspective of someone entering the space.
fig. 63. Supporting texts for the experience.



Fig. 64 A



Fig. 64 B



Fig. 64 C

I had already entered the machine while it was being manufactured¹³³, however I hadn't yet been subject to the experience of being touched. I did this in all three sessions, but for different reasons, which I'll go into in the description of each one.

When I enter the machine, after a few seconds I feel people approaching to touch me. At first there is a disciplined touch, with fear, a kind of "touch and run". Those outside seem to be testing the machine and not the body of the person inside. The participants touch for a moment and escape. I stayed inside until someone touched me with more vigour. Lo and behold, they arrived. They began to touch me without fear and at no time did I feel any discomfort. The initial touch - disciplined and fearful - reflects the incorporation of social norms that reduce the body to a controllable artefact. The vigorous touch, on the other hand, which emerges later from the confidence revealed by the experience, suggests a re-appropriation of corporeality - an episodic break with the logic of the body-machine.

While I was being touched, I couldn't discern who was doing it. Although before entering the machine I saw everyone in the room, many of whom I knew, at the moment of being touched, I did not know who touched me. I was left to imagine who it was or who I wanted it to be and this brings us to Laing who says that «(...) imagination is a mode of experience (...)» (Laing, 1972, p. 25. Own translation), in this case, imagining what is happening outside the machine is a way of enjoying the experience of the machine. As for imagination, there is no programmed object that controls what each subject will imagine, but it is the object that activates it.

When I came out of the machine, I realised that there were more people in the room than I had seen before.

I then realised that there is no way of controlling or knowing who we are touched by. Our body - the docile, disciplined, machine body - is then subject to its primordial vulnerability from when we were born. When the subject enters the machine, they are surrendered to the trust of others and the body is the laboratory that will explore this sensation.

On the outside, I also touched other people, sometimes I did not know who I was touching, and from this interaction, I'd like to highlight an episode in which the person inside the machine decided to bite my hand when my hand brushed across her cheek. I do not know why she did it, but I do know that she laughed a lot while the rest of the participants were touching her.

Other people entered the machine, others touched those who entered the machine (fig. 64). The people who had been touched

fig. 64. Session 1 experience documentation sequence.



Fig. 64 D



Fig. 64 C



could then touch after leaving the machine. There was a circulation around the machine, in other words, whoever is touched will also be touching afterwards and the next experience will already be informed by the previous one. This means that the moment we are inside the machine will inform the next moment, when we are outside the machine touching those inside, and vice versa.

From outside the room where the machine was, and after a few people had undergone the experience, some reports came in. I collected a few straight away and have transcribed them:

“I feel like I’ve just come out of a massage”; “at a certain point I let my body hang suspended”; “I only stayed outside, I couldn’t go in. I was scared.”; “I think it is stranger to touch someone than to be touched”; “to leave work and come to be touched, it’s almost therapeutic”.

It was important to complete a case-by-case enquiry at the time to understand the pause that this experience gave to the day of the people who turned up to touch each other.

In the e-mail I wrote to some friends as an invitation, I said:

“I’m not sure what’s going to happen once we touch!”

We spent more than three hours playing and being played with. There were no age or gender restrictions. We could all touch each other.

Also in the first session, an episode occurred that illustrates the activation that the machine can bring: a child aged around 2–3 was near the machine but did not get into it. She was probably afraid. However, when her mum got into the machine, she was so excited that she called more people to come and touch her. After the mother got out of the machine and the child moved around freely, I noticed, through her parents, that she was touching everyone, almost as if she was trying to get to know or recognise others through touch. Even though the child did not enter the machine and even inhibited herself from touching anyone inside, since she refused to put her hand in the gloves that give access to the body inside the machine, the machine still activated her tactile sense and made her feel free to touch other people’s bodies. The child’s reaction - who, even without entering the machine, began to touch others freely - illustrates Laing’s thesis that behaviour is the result of experience: even though she assumed herself to be an observer, the child’s spontaneous gesture reveals how the experience activated the child’s tactile sense and led to behavioural action.

After all this time feeling the touch and making others feel it, I realised that the machine’s protocol, its choreography, had already been surpassed. People started to touch each other beyond the place dedicated

to touch, in other words, they started to touch their whole bodies outside the suit, in the form of a palpable massage (fig. 65 and 66).

By the end of the session, the machine was already a normalised object within the context we were in: the participants, initially restrained by inexperience, began to touch each other freely, transforming the room into a field of tactile experimentation. If at the beginning of the session they were afraid to touch the person inside the machine, by the end they were touching the whole body, as if every body needed a massage. This relational action that is established through the machine only occurs because there is this mediating object that authorises free but limited interaction. The object determines where the experience begins and ends, and can be open to other approaches, such as the whole body being massaged while ignoring the gloves with holes for touch (fig. 67). However, the object also limits the subject being touched and the other participants to a safe and trusting action, since this object and its surroundings determine a programmed experience.

2nd session - 13 November 2024:

This session took place over the course of a full morning and was attended by two classes of higher education students accompanied by a lecturer. Almost all of these students were or had been students in classes that I taught or teach, meaning that almost all of the students knew me and I them. Amongst themselves, they all knew each other from their daily interaction in the academic context.

This session is taking place as part of a field trip and so, as this is a group of students, I have prepared a brief oral introduction in which I set out my position on the possible intervention and participation of design in relation to other areas of study, as well as explaining what triggered the development of a Touch Machine.

Beyond its relevance, the Touch Machine also reflects its own stance and a provocation about what can also be a design attitude. To quote László Moholy-Nagy again, his famous phrase: “Design is not a profession, but an attitude” (Moholy-Nagy, 1947, p. 42)¹³⁴. I use this phrase from Nagy to emphasise that the relevance of the Touch Machine lies precisely in the attitude it represents as a proposal aimed at questioning relational action and, consequently, human relationships. Like the other practical experiences in this research, and since it challenges taboos related to touch, the machine also constitutes an attitude and materialises design as a critical gesture rather than a utilitarian one.

Alice Rawsthorn refers to Moholy Nagy as an optimistic person who believed that design could contribute to a better world (Rawsthorn, 2021, p. 8). This idea that design can be a catalyst for progress in the world determines how they design, for whom and with what

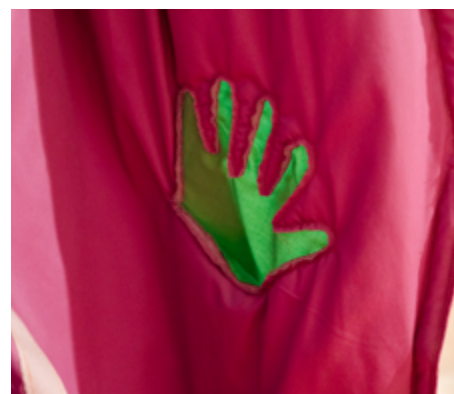


fig. 65 and 66. Participant touching another person's body without using gloves.

fig. 67. Detail of the glove's interior section that provides direct access to the body inside the machine.

¹³⁴. Also mentioned in Chapter 2 – Objects and the experience of the body; Design as a mediation tool, p. 47.

intention. This Touch Machine has a simple attitude and intention: to suspend the days, to create a space of revelation through the body and interaction with others.

After this brief reflection, the students were invited to enter the machine. Some took their shoes off, approached, but did not enter the object. As this was a group of students who knew me as a teacher, I decided to be the first to enter the machine, symbolically breaking the hierarchical barrier that could inhibit them.

I felt my body being gently touched, only with my fingertips, and the toucher's hands did not go much further than the hole in the machine. As in the previous session, I waited for the touch to transform, I thought it was only a matter of time, but the soft, frightened touch with fingertips remained.

When I got out of the machine, I realised that there was a general shyness.

Other students moved into the machine and the interaction between them took on a different dynamic and the touch was made with a different load.

When I was inside the machine there was a relationship of power that was wielded, my position as a teacher created an asymmetry of power that the machine sought to destabilise, but which was maintained through the hesitant touch of the students - a symptom of the internalisation of hierarchical codes.

They did not want to touch me, and not only did they not want to touch me, but the way they touched me meant that they were afraid to do so. Which means that if the machine did not exist, those students would probably never have touched me.

What was happening through the machine was the episodic dismantling of hierarchy and established codes - the teacher and the student do not touch. However, the automation of this code is so effective that experience is always limited by the reaction to what we have instilled in us. Thus, the students couldn't go beyond a touch with their fingertips and I couldn't feel anything beyond their fear. The machine created a liminal zone where the teacher-student relationship was temporarily suspended. However, the code of touch proved to be stronger: the students' hesitant touch exposed the effectiveness of the unwritten code that regulates bodies in hierarchies of power. Derrida, in discussing the "law of touch" (Derrida, 2011, p. 105. Own translation) in Nancy, refers to the contradiction inherent in touch: it is simultaneously a gesture of connection and a violation of boundaries. The Touch Machine suspends this law and exposes

the tension between desire and prohibition that structures our interactions.

The “law of the law”, where “when you touch, you are forbidden to touch” (Derrida, 2011, p. 105. Own translation), is something we know without discussing, something that has been organically organised under the processes of disciplining to which we are subject. This law is a kind of universalisation of a hierarchical way of operating in which we all know where power is located and how far we can go.

Unlike the first session, where strangers explored touch with increasing freedom, here the familiarity between those present inhibited the experience, the fear of transgressing the hierarchy overcame tactile curiosity.

The students touched each other unabashedly and even broke one of the guidelines of the experience - silence (fig. 68). They chose, I do not know if democratically, to reveal which part of their bodies they were touching, what they were feeling and what they were discovering as they explored each other's bodies. This absence of silence means that the person being touched can almost entirely identify who is touching them. Laughter, stories and comments replaced silence, revealing that the machine, far from being neutral, reconfigured the language of interaction.

As happened in the previous session, the participants, who already knew each other, also got to know each other's bodies up close and personal, reducing the distance between perception and concrete knowledge. I'd like to highlight two of the entries I made: “I did not realise your legs were so stiff”; “your head is very round”.

These are small physical discoveries, similar to those that occur in the phenomenological process that takes place when our body is appreciated as a baby. Returning to the register of the naive body, as if our body were new, is not a regression, but a rediscovery of pre-reflexive perception: a state where the body feels before interpreting, free from the layers of disciplining that make it mechanical.

I ask myself:

– *Has our body become a naive body again?*

I reply:

– *I would say that our body never stops being a naive body. There is always something to be discovered, but because it is subject to various processes that make it a mechanical body, there are many areas in it that are yet to be revealed, both physical and sensory.*



fig. 68. Recording sequence of the second student interaction session with the piece.

3rd Session - 17 November 2024:

This session took place over a full afternoon and was part of the Porto Municipal Gallery's "Circuitos'24" programme¹³⁵, which aims to give visibility to artistic projects carried out in the city of Porto.

As this session was publicised on the most diverse channels in the municipality, the audience was very diverse.

Once again, in line with the two previous sessions, I opened the machine. I entered the object and waited for them to come and touch me. In this session, nobody knew that I was the author of the object, so I think there was some doubt as to whether I was a participant or a performer, which is why it took a while for someone to come up to the machine and touch me.

The first hands come to my body and I feel the strangeness of not knowing who they are, a completely unknown touch. From the touch I received, I do not think there was any fear in the tactile action, but all the interventions were very cautious. There was a kind of prior approach to the body, as if it were unknown territory and there was a need to first recognise this place.

As in the previous sessions, in this one I also allowed time for a second round of touches, and in silence I was touched with more certainty, perhaps by someone who had touched me minutes ago. I got out of the machine and headed out of the space. I watched the experience from the installed cameras. People went in and out of the machine, some who had already been in the machine went back in.

It was a free interaction, without collecting case-by-case reports, but observed from the image and sound collection devices that were scattered around the space (**fig. 69**).

The participants got to know each other through the experience, invited each other into the machine, others got together to touch the person inside the machine. They spent some time touching each other, but most left to follow the route of the "Circuitos'24" programme. Since this session was part of this event, some people who entered the INSTITUTO space did not want to try out the machine, but to see it, as if it were just an exhibition object. Although this is not the purpose of this object, it also shows how our bodies are unable to perceive or even risk going beyond what is the operative mode in an exhibition context. That is to say, although the machine is designed for activation through use, the ambiguity persists between it being an object of utility versus an object of contemplation. Visitors to the machine may choose to risk using it—or not. Yet, precisely because this doubt exists, they ultimately decide against it. This decision is not in vain, and is probably not even thought through, it is an automated decision.



fig. 69. Documentation sequence from the 3rd session included in the "Circuitos'24" program.

This behaviour can lead to several possibilities: the object may lack greater definition in terms of how it is used; the body, once it has become a body-machine, is unable to discern beyond its automatisms; there is no habit of actions that place us in different scenarios that disrupt routines.

It is a fact, as mentioned above, that the object does not fit into the common typologies and can raise doubts about its usefulness and mode of use. It can also raise questions as to whether it can be understood as a functional object or an artistic object. The ambiguity of the object raises a question, perhaps a fundamental one:

- *Can an object be functional if its utility does not fall within common typologies (such as revealing the body)?*

There may be several answers to this question, since there is no exact definition for the discipline of design. Gille Dorflès presents one relating to industrial design and mass production, while other authors, such as Bruno Munari or Dieter Rams¹³⁶, present other possible definitions, with the latter daring to list the “10 principles of good design”¹³⁷.

136. Dieter Rams (1932), German industrial designer.

137. de Jong, C. (2021). Dieter Rams: Ten Principles for Good Design. Prestel.

I dare to give my own answer, which comes from my experience and my observation of it:

- *If an object has a purpose, whether it's to hold flowers in the living room or to reveal the body of a group of people, then yes, it's a useful and therefore functional object.*

This answer leads me to another question:

- *Isn't this preoccupation with utility and functionalism a thing of the past? Ancient? From another time?*

And I answer:

- *I agree with that, but I realise that a designer must be concerned with providing a service to someone or something, ultimately to the world. Does that make sense? Perhaps not in its entirety, but design education has led us here. Perhaps these questions raise larger issues about education and construction that have no place here.*

The body, in its process of mechanisation that turns it into a body-machine, leads us to incorporate a series of information that makes us act under the automatisms we have acquired. This is to say that if the Touch Machine is part of a programme where most of the events taking place are exhibitions or performances, the body will assume that the machine is also one of these events. The public's familiarity with traditional exhibition formats may have led them to interpret the machine as a contemplative, non-interactive object.

Of all the possibilities I have for the doubt that arises and for the reaction of this session's diverse audience to the interaction with the machine, the one that seems closest to the truth is the lack of spaces to escape the days. Although this "Circuitos'24" programme may seem like an escape plan, it isn't, because it's a timed programme. The structure of the event, with multiple simultaneous activities, may have limited the time for spontaneous interaction with the machine.

This session, unlike the previous ones which were not part of a broad programme like "Circuitos'24", showed how difficult it is to de-automatise the body and make it light¹³⁸ and free from the mechanics of everyday life. The decision to integrate the machine into the programme of events mentioned above was made with the purpose of expanding the experience to a wider audience. However, interaction with the object depends on the time of the various participants, who are the driving force behind the full activation of the experience.

138. The intention of making the body light led to the development of the last practical test of this research, which is shown in this Chapter in Essay 4: The weight and lightness of the whole body (2024), p. 144.

THE BODY AFTER THE MACHINE

The three sessions were different, both in terms of the way they interacted and their results.

In the first session, the participants were mixed between acquaintances and strangers, which led to a hybrid experience in terms of the possibility of people touching or being touched by someone known or unknown. However, from my point of view, this was the experience that was most effective in terms of its results, due to the interactions and revelations it caused. The diversity of conclusions that this session led to is due to the time and availability that the participants devoted to it. In turn, this availability was due to the day and time the session was scheduled for, as it took place on a working day during after-work hours. This means that people saw this session as a break from their routine.

The second session involved a group of higher education students who knew each other, which led to a more comfortable experience as they all felt in a safe space. Although in a comfortable environment and with less tension than in the first session, it did bring up some interesting revelations, from both an individual and a collective point of view, such as one participant crying after leaving the machine.

The third session was the most difficult to activate, as it was part of the "Circuitos'24" event programme, which meant that people were only visitors to the Touch Machine object without moving on to the participant side. Occasionally there was some activation, but it was always timid and short-lived.

All the sessions had a predetermined time, but participants could leave permanently or take breaks whenever they wanted. At the beginning or at the end of the session, each participant was asked for their e-mail address so that they could be contacted to collect some data about the experience.

The subject of the email contained a question:
“Touch Machine” - What happened?

The e-mail was outlined within the framework of this research, and in order to inform them I asked them to write a short or long sentence about the experience. I suggested they think about the moment before and after entering the machine: what they felt, what it provoked, the sensations in their bodies - comfort or discomfort - the surprise, what it revealed. And I added: *“These are all suggestions, say whatever you like.”*

The email was sent on 16 January, almost two months after the whole experience had taken place. The decision to collect testimonies two months after the experiment, rather than immediately, allowed the participants to process complex emotions, since “especially when there is little or no time for reflection, feelings are in fact constituted by the perception of a certain state of the body” (Damásio, 2003, p. 108. Own translation). António Damásio¹³⁹ refers to time as an important element for the constitution of a considered and more real reflection on any given circumstance. In this case, the experience with the Touch Machine is the circumstance, and the testimony two months after the experience is a considered reflection of the circumstance.

139. António Damásio (1944) Portuguese neurologist and neuroscientist.

Age was the only identifying data used, thus excluding personal data or data identifying gender or class, so as not to weaken the experience that was expected to transcend any categorisation. The omission of gender and class is intended to emphasise the universality of the body as a territory of experience, as the participant says in statement (S8), when he wonders if these categories wouldn't be eliminated by the invisibility that the machine allows, treating all bodies equally. This collection focused only on the testimony on the empirical experience in order to strengthen the argument as to its relevance, thus removing the importance of turning this data into standardised information. This experience favoured the individual body and its revelations from collective contact.

The testimonies refer to the experience that took place during the various sessions and the days without a scheduled session.

One of the first to reach me, a 63-year-old man, says that his testimony is drawn from the observation record he made on the day

itself, since the moment after the experience he couldn't think of anything other than what he had just felt.

The testimonies are divided between the perception of entering the machine or touching someone, the actual interaction and the revelations it brings (SEE TABLE 1).

There was a fear of exposing the body (S3) (S4), a feeling of strangeness (S4)(S8)(S10)(S11), comfort and discomfort that were felt simultaneously (S2)(S3)(S9), and perceived consent and spontaneity (S3)(S7)(S8)(S9).

Some of these fears and sensations were dispelled in the interaction with the machine, seen as the turning inside out the clothes of every day" (S2), a protective second skin (S3)(S4)(S8)(S9), an invitation to touch (S7), a "suit of consent" (S11). The fear of exposure (S4) dissipated when the "second skin" proved to be a space for negotiation, not judgement. The Touch Machine, among the many concerns it evokes, led the participants to reflect on relational trust (S1)(S9), personal limits (S3)(S4), awareness of themselves and the other (S6)(S7)(S8).

Exposure to the experience led the participants to wonder about the world, about what it would be like if we lived differently, without gender or class issues attached, in other words, in a more equal society. The experience highlighted a contradiction: we want connection, but we reproduce distancing tactics (S8).

As a result, it is understood that among the reflections and concerns that have already been raised and listed, there is also the realisation that we live under the control of a body-machine that includes limits, perhaps personal ones (S3) and hence the need for experiences like this to break down and question the "clothes of every day" (S2). This experience also shows that we live under the distrust of others, and that's why we have doubts before touching or being touched (S3)(S7)(S8), inhibitions about touching (S3) (S4) or flee while being touched (S10). From the discomfort and between the uncertainty and strangeness, there is also the sensation of the transformation of the "body into a homogeneous mass" (S5), the idea of greater closeness and connection with someone (S1) (S6), and the idea of a light body (S7) (S11). When participant 5 describes his body as a "homogeneous mass", he reveals the episodic process of disconnection of the body-machine, which only recovers its singularity through the intentional touch of the other. The experience of the Touch Machine, through the three sessions and the testimonies collected, proved to be a critical mirror of the contemporary body: fragmented by social automatisms, but paradoxically eager for reconnection. The contextual differences between the sessions (intimate, academic, institutional) showed

140. Back to Chapter 1 – The body and the relationship, p. 29.

how the environment moulds the willingness to take relational risks. In the first session, the after-work schedule allowed for a temporary suspension of routines, facilitating deeper interactions. The third session, on the other hand, was part of a programmed artistic circuit and, due to a lack of time to reflect on the central object of the experience, exposed the difficulty of subverting deep-rooted expectations, reinforcing the criticism of the social automatisms to which we are subject¹⁴⁰. The testimonies, in turn, draw a map of tensions: the machine functioned as a “second skin”(S3)(S10) that protects and consequently subverts notions of privacy, limits, consent and social distance.

The recurrence of terms like “strangeness”, “discomfort” and “vulnerability” in the reports does not point to a failure of the object, but to its success as a tool for de-automatisation. By forcing participants to negotiate touches in unlikely areas (such as the touch on the anonymous “*cucuruto*” (top of the head) that turns out to be special (S11)) or to confront fears of exposure, the machine has episodically denaturalised everyday practices of distancing - whether through digital interfaces or class or gender hierarchies. As participant 8 pointed out, the experience raised uncomfortable questions: «*Would we touch or massage the head of a poor person, a homeless person, (...) if they weren't 'invisible' inside a suit?*”. This concern says that the body is subject to various impositions: technological with the virtualisation of the body, but also political and social that fragment society. These are the barriers that the Touch Machine briefly tried to break down. Thus, the machine does not offer answers, but rather suggests revelations in the form of concerns or questions.

The testimonies confirm that the Touch Machine operated as a device for decompressing the body, even if only temporarily. From observing the interaction of the participants, this experience suggested the next one, The weight of the parts and the whole body.- Taking time and space for risk are fundamental elements to include in the experience, rare elements in societies governed by efficiency and control.

Table 1: Excerpts from the Touch Machine testimonies

	Age	Testimonies
S1	63	We both feel that the experience has brought us closer together. I feel closer to R., I feel that the level of relational trust that we both already had has risen.
S2	57	Putting on availability, without judgement or <i>a priori</i> , in the satiny comfort of the “Touch Machine”, was like turning the clothes we wear every day inside out

S3	41	I decided not to wear the proposed clothing or interact directly (...). This experience invited me to think about personal boundaries, the exposure of the body and the complexity of interpersonal relationships mediated by touch . The symbolism of the garment as a second skin - an element that protects but also limits - brought up questions about vulnerability and consent (...) how touch became a vehicle for exploring personal limits, (...).
S4	29	I do not know why, but I did not have the courage to go into the machine (...) I felt exposed (...). Maybe if I was inside - being touched - I'd feel less exposed (...)
S5	29	To enter the machine was to transform my body into a homogeneous mass, (...)
S6	37	It was a unique sensory experience (...) Touch Machine promotes extreme awareness of the external and the other (...) An effective counter-culture object.
S7	35	(...) the experience proved to be extremely calming, like an invitation to drop our defences and let ourselves be embraced by the other in a detached way . As an observer (and player), you feel a closeness to the anonymous in a tender, light and even amusing way.
S8	36	The strangeness of being touched - (...) made me think about how we have become a society that increasingly uses interfaces/ artefacts/ distancing tactics to socialise and show affection . I also thought, as a woman, about the difficult balance between consent and the spontaneity of touch / the desire to be touched without having my space and body harassed . I also thought about what touch would be like in a society without class markers - would we touch or massage the head of a poor person, a homeless person, a person who does not dress like us if they weren't "invisible" inside a suit?
S9	32	Before entering, I imagined this machine as a second layer, a second skin where I would feel added protection. (...) The touch, between tickles and cuddles, first brought a feeling of comfort, but discomfort quickly arose because of the uncertainty of who was touching me.
S10	50	(...) The touch was strange, less invasive than I thought (...). I was immobile and apprehensive and immediately wanted to leave, but I did not. When I touched there was restraint, fear of feeling parts of the other body (...). Perhaps the experience of touching was conditioned by the experience of being touched.
S11	32	First I touched it. I touched a stranger's top of the head. It was strange to have touched it, but even stranger to realise that touching it is special. Monday I was touched (with consent! The suit of consent!?) and by several unknown people at the same time!!! «Ahhh, so this is what dogs feel when several humans pet them at the same time.»

Essay 4: The weight and lightness of the whole body (2024)

THE NEED TO FEEL THE BODY

This essay, based on the design of a tactile action, reflects on the individual need to feel the body by understanding and becoming aware of its size and weight. As with the previous essays, this one also takes place over two scheduled sessions, where the participants, through the objects drawn, interact on two different planes: receiver and facilitator - the one who receives the objects and the one who brings the objects to the other's body.

Therefore, this is also an action of care and generosity towards the other.

Once again, as in the previous essays, this one also materialises the decontextualisation of the body with the premise of rediscovering its material dimension and thus re-establishing, albeit episodically, a closer relationship with its volume, density and weight in the world.

The decontextualisation of the body proposed here and in the previous essays is not an end, but a means: by isolating it from its utilitarian functions, we seek to rediscover, even if only briefly, its sensible evidence.

The body is in fact “what connects us to the world” (Braunstein & Pépin, 2001, p. 137. Own translation), an intermediary, an access that can connect us to “things”¹⁴¹. However, due to its constant presence, it “only becomes present if we look at it strangely.” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 10. Own translation). This statement by Luís Fernandes suggests to me that we need to take some action to realise its existence and presence so that we can experience it through our senses.

If Luís Fernandes alerts us to the need to perceive the body from the point of view of its strangeness, Paul Valéry¹⁴² goes further to say that the body is not just an intermediary, but an entity that dominates us - “the body possesses me more than I truly possess it” (Braunstein & Pépin, 2001, p. 138. Own translation). From this statement we can understand Luís Fernandes' words about the omnipresence of the body, its existence all the time even if we are not aware of it. This means that it holds us back more than our awareness of it, since it is always present even if we do not realise it. All this lack of awareness is accentuated by the circumstances to which the body is subject - *Body-machine*, *Body-object* - by the discipline in which we are imbued.

As Alain Supiot says¹⁴³, today a “cybernetic imaginary” prevails¹⁴⁴, where our body is thought of as a “bipedal computer, which can be programmed to fulfil its objectives in the same way as a computer is programmed.” (Varela & della Santa, 2024, 13:45 [movie]. Own

141. “To define, to talk about human reality, you have to talk about the body and the flesh, make it a thing and an access to things. But unlike other objects or things, my body is imperfectly objectified, because it is first and foremost affective.” (Braunstein & Pépin, 2001, p. 138. Own translation)

142. Paul Valéry (1871–1945), French philosopher, writer and poet.

143. Alain Supiot (1949), French jurist.

144. (Varela & della Santa, 2024, 13:54)

translation). Today, the definition of the body-machine extends beyond that of yesteryear - the brute labour power referred to by Silvia Federici. Today, the body is still subject to its place as a commodity and therefore to its objectification, but now technology and the virtuality it brings are imposed. Thus, while the body in terms of its sensible consciousness has been consigned to a plane of oblivion, pushing it into the dimension of a labour machine, today we find the body omitted or disguised by an image. The gears of the machine that have been instilled in the body are now oiled, as Eva Illouz says about virtual encounters, by a “set of attributes” that translate into a “product for public display” (Illouz, 2012, p. 171. Own translation). In other words, the body-machine, although it does not appear to be one, continues to be one, it remains on the level of merchandise and consumption, but now disguised by the scenography of an image that transforms it into a multiple artifice that is “more flexible and open” (Illouz, 2012, p. 172), capable of “metamorphosing” to any circumstance that suits the subject, either provisionally or over a long period of time.¹⁴⁵

All these impositions bring the body into two realities in which one overlaps the other: that of its existence and that of the disciplining of its existence. In other words, the body is subject to the numbing of its sensible body so that it can be disciplined and thus turned into a body-machine. Thus, we as subjects, as Le Breton says about cybernetic imposition, lose the evidence of our body since our access to it is circumstantial, that is, we only use it “partially” (Le Breton, 2003, p. 121). The evidence Breton refers to is bodily matter, i.e. the physicality of the body. Once the body is sent into virtual space, there is an enormous amount of meaning that lies dormant in the individual body, and in the relational dimension of the collective body, doubt and mistrust are installed.¹⁴⁶

Since the body has lost its obviousness as it inhabits and acts in an incorporeal space, its ability to transcend itself is also lost as self-consciousness is in partial use. All these losses are related to the isolation to which the body is subject, to the fact that it is virtualised, dragging this reality into its relational action as well. If the body is isolated, it can't have a material, i.e. corporeal, relational action. In turn, if its relational action is limited by virtuality, the body won't be able to access its evidence since it will only be able to do so through contact with the body of the other. *But what is this contact?*

“With the revelation of another's gaze, I have the revelation of my being-object, that is to say of my transcendence as transcended.” (Sartre, 2021, p. 315. Own translation). This quote from Jean-Paul Sartre¹⁴⁷ makes it clear that it is only in relation to others that we become aware of our own self.

145. «(...) the individual frees himself from the coercions of identity, metamorphoses temporarily or permanently into what he wants without fearing the denial of the real, disappears bodily to transform himself according to a possible profusion of masks, (...) (...) is free of any responsibility.” (Le Breton, 2003, p. 145. Own translation)

146. Theme of encounter and relational action, dealt with in Chapter 4 – Essays on the body, Essay 1: Encounters for the body (2024); The encounter - relational chance, p. 91.

147. Jean-Paul Sartre (1905–1980), French philosopher, writer and critic.

– And where does the body come into the equation?

When Sartre says that it is through the “gaze of another” that the transcendence of oneself takes place, he is saying that it is through this gesture, in other words, this physical communication that our body reacts.

It is in the relationship with others that we access our body, that we realise its limits, size and space in the world. As António Coimbra de Matos says, the individual “only develops, realises and transcends - creates - in relation to other humans.” (Coimbra de Matos, 2016, p. 5. Own translation).

Thus, this essay proposes the re-appropriation of the sensible body through a tactile action that subverts the logic of the incorporeal space in which the body acts today, restoring the body to its material evidence.

FEELING THE WEIGHT OF THE BODY

The objects developed for this practical essay are based on an experience I underwent as a form of research into actions to feel the materiality of the body and become aware of it. I’m referring to a method called Autogenic Training¹⁴⁸, created by psychiatrist Johannes Heinrich Schultz¹⁴⁹ at the beginning of the 20th century. It is used by various therapists in psychology and psychiatry and establishes a facilitator and a receiver, i.e. the therapist and the person undergoing the experience. The fundamental aim of this practice is to become aware of the body from its parts, as a way of distracting or diverting the body from the concerns that occupy it. The diversion that this experience allows is also a way of decontextualising the body, since it removes it from the circumstances in which it is immersed. Autogenic training reduces

148. Hipólito, J. (2001). Person-Centred Therapy and the Relaxation approach to the body. The Person as Centre - Journal of Rogerian Studies, 8, pp. 57–63.

149. Johannes Heinrich Schultz (1884 – 1970), German psychiatrist and psychotherapist.

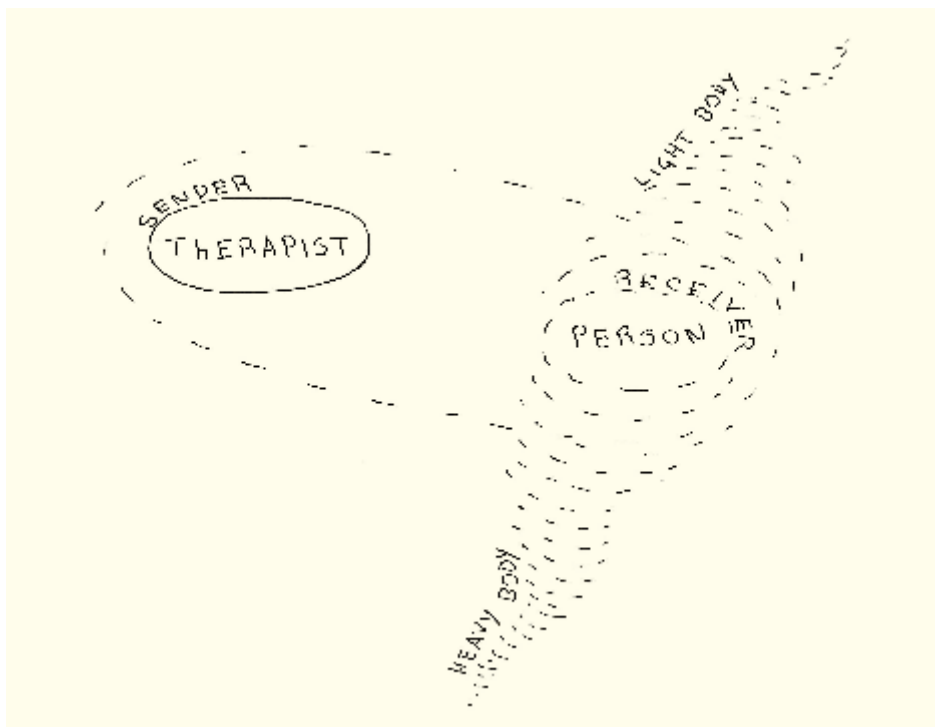


fig. 70. Explanatory map of the “Autogenic Training” bodily experience involving two bodies - the emitter and the receiver - interacting to induce sensations of weight that reveal the body’s lightness.

exteroceptive stimulation, i.e. stimuli external to the body, and causes proprioceptive stimulation, i.e. stimuli originating in the muscles, tendons and other internal organs. This method, which reduces the externality of the body, suggests gradual concentration, starting with a narration by the therapist who goes through the body, identifying its parts and sometimes touching them, in order to allow the person receiving the training to concentrate on their internal sensations.

The Autogenous Training narrative has a common basis for all therapists, but this can be altered according to the facilitator's experience.

In my experience, each training session is divided into two moments: a round in which the emitter travels around the body and induces the sensation of heaviness; and another round, which reflects on the light body.

There are several accounts of the training session, but I'm using Luís Fernandes' as a basis¹⁵⁰ to illustrate the two moments of the training session:

*"I feel my shoulder getting heavy, my shoulder is heavy...
I feel my shoulder getting light, my shoulder is light..."*

150. This version of the "Autogenous Training" narration is used by psychologist Luís Fernandes, who generously made it available to be used as a basis for reflection for this essay. Narration available in full in Appendix XIII.

The induction to the body in the first round, through words that identify the part of the body and sometimes a light touch indicating the part referred to, evokes the weight of the body. In the second round, using the same system of words and superficial touch, the sensation of lightness is promoted. Each round concludes with the sensation of the whole body being heavy or light. **(fig. 70)**
"My whole body is getting heavy, my body is heavy..."

During the session, the therapist has a choreography that involves positioning themselves on the side of the body they are travelling over. If the facilitator is travelling through the body segments located on the right side, they position themselves on the right side of the receiver, if they are travelling through those on the left, they position themselves on the same side. When the facilitator reaches the whole body, they are located at the top of the person.

All this training is carried out with the help of a supportive object for lying down or sitting on, such as a couch or chair.

After several training sessions assisted by a therapist and on his recommendation, I started practising at home. At home, i.e. in my daily context and without the therapist's monotone voice, the training became too demanding, which was reflected in its results. At home, the training wasn't as effective, since the feeling of heaviness and lightness did not appear, or they showed up very timidly.

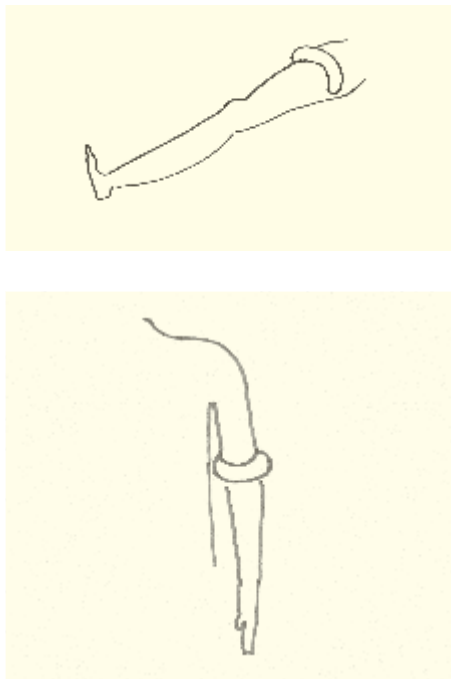


fig. 71. Study drawings of stone objects designed for placement on the body.

After realising the difficulties of carrying out the training autonomously, I questioned myself and the therapist about the relational aspects of this practice. The absence of the therapist - the presence that embodies care and relational mediation - suggests that the effectiveness of the method depends not only on the technique, but on the presence of the other as a catalyst for sensible experience. The presence of the therapist in the figure of the narrator is a kind of carer, in other words, our body is in someone's care, it is receiving care, is being cared for. Through another person - the facilitator who cares - the person undergoing the training - the recipient in care - receives the attention of the other. It's as if the recipient's body became the centre of attention. The therapist's narration expresses precisely the care that is to be lavished on the other person's body, both by the way in which the facilitator is positioned in relation to the receiver, and by the tone of voice adopted by the therapist - according to Luís Fernandes, a monotone tone should be used - and by the care taken in the choice of words.

It is understood that this experience - Autogenous Training - is not only an action of interiority and awareness of one's own body, but is also a relational action. It is determined that a complete experience can only be achieved through the relationship, generosity and care that one gives to the other - from the therapist to the person being cared for. The conclusion is that the effectiveness of Autogenic Training lies not only in the technique, but in the caring relationship that transforms the body into a territory of encounter - a principle that guided the design of the objects and the entire experience of this practical trial. The choice of this method as a reference for this essay is justified by its ability to divert the body from everyday automatisms, in line with the essay's objective of restoring awareness of bodily materiality for its possible transcendence.

WEIGHTS FOR A LIGHT BODY

The practical component of this trial took place over two months in the summer of 2024, in residence at the Pó de Vir a Ser¹⁵¹ association in Évora, Portugal.

After assimilating the body's ability to deviate from imposed automatisms, as well as the empowering characteristics of Autogenic Training that promote body awareness, it was important to understand how this method related to the work I was doing in the residency.

Pó de Vir a Ser is an association set up in an old municipal slaughterhouse, which has workshop and reflection spaces for working with stone, especially marble from the Alentejo region mentioned above. At the end of the first week of the residency, after the process of

151. Pó de Vir a Ser. (2017). <https://podeviraser.pt/>

appropriating and assimilating the space and observing and analysing the material to be worked on - stone - I realised that beyond the space of the slaughterhouse, stone would be the right material to use in a tactile action to assimilate the body from its dimension. Based on the characteristics of the stone - texture, weight, temperature - I began to draw some objects to be distributed among the different elements of the body (**fig. 71**), thinking of those that were evoked in the training sessions I underwent: forearm, elbow, arm, wrist, hand; thigh, knee, leg, ankle, the whole body.

At the same time, I placed small stones, light and dark, around the space of the residence: in the sun, in the shade, in damp places. Other stones were immersed to serve as a soothing object on hot days.

Still others, because of their textures, stayed with me for a while so that I could observe, feel and touch them.

Through these experiences and the company the stones gave me, I learnt about some of the reactions they have: stones in the sun became very hot, especially the darker ones; those in the shade became even colder than they usually are when they are in an intermediate space with sun and shade; those arranged in damp places or immersed became wet and retained some moisture when apparently dry; those that accompanied me served as small weights for my body.

The stones then became tactile objects with the promise of making the body feel light. Ten stone objects were handmade (**fig. 72**) from stones with different textures, colours and weights.

At the same time as drawing and materialising the objects with the support of the sculptor Pedro Fazenda¹⁵², the critic and curator António Guerreiro accompanied the entire process of material and reflective development of this essay. Of the various conversations we had, regarding the explanation I gave António regarding the work I was developing, I would like to highlight the one that determined that this essay would be an experience in the order of aesthetics, and as António wrote in the text used for the soundtrack that makes up this experience: *“The word “aesthetics”, from the Greek “aesthesis”, is used here with the meaning that the word had before it was completely annexed, (...) by the philosophy of art”*¹⁵³. In this experience, certain senses are evoked for a tactile experience that involves a space, objects and a group of people. The main aim of the experience is to feel without concerns about perception, beauty or meaning, without secondary appreciations, judgements or considerations. However, this goal, which seems so simple, is actually very difficult to materialise, since our bodies are subject to processes of disciplining, to quote Foucault, where “the body is trapped within very tight powers, which impose limitations, prohibitions or obligations on it.” (Foucault, 2010, p. 118).



fig. 72. Objects to be materialized in the space of the former slaughterhouse with technical support from Pedro Fazenda.

152. Pedro Fazenda (1957), Portuguese stone sculptor.

153. The full text is available in Appendix XV, and is further commented on in the following text about the 2nd session.

The stones (stone objects), in this essay, are the mediators between the individual and the “world”. They have to go unnoticed because the most important thing in the experience is to feel the “I” and the “world”¹⁵⁴.

About the stones, materialised in objects with weight to feel the body, António wrote: “The stones are mute, silent”. These characteristics that António reveals about the stones are what make them participate in the experience, but they are also what make them disguised, that is, without any pretense of protagonism. The “muteness” of the stones, as António Guerreiro emphasised, is not a deficit, but rather a power: their discretion allows the body to be the protagonist of the experience.

154. Reflection about “me-object-world” in Chapter 2 - Objects and experience of the body; Me - the object - the world, p. 48.

Thus, the objects, the weights for the body, participate in the body’s action of deviation from the disciplining and automatisms of the day. If Foucault denounces the imprisoned and limited body, the stones act as tools of disobedience that challenge the logic of control, inviting the body to reclaim its sensible existence cancelled out by the circumstance of discipline and “submission”¹⁵⁵ to which we are subject.

155. “Discipline thus manufactures submissive and exercised bodies, “docile” bodies.” (Foucault, 2010, p. 119. Own translation)

THE BODY’S EXPERIENCE WITH STONES

The objects that resulted from the stones were also the result of learning about matter and work. At Pó de Vir a Ser, as well as designing objects to be materialised in stone, we work the stone until we reach the objects we want, in other words, we sculpt and, if necessary, learn to sculpt, until we reach the object. This experience, of making objects from my hands, was important because beyond the surface and the visible nature of the stones, I got to know them from the inside, until I reached the desired shape for the body. These objects underwent changes: from blocks to slices, from large weights to subtle weights, and the rough surfaces began to coexist with the soft, satiny texture that we can get from the stones. This search for a shape, weight, size and texture for the stones was essential in order to achieve the objects, as mentioned in the previous text, which are concealed and do not pretend to be protagonists (**fig. 73–77**).

After collecting ten stone objects to feel the body, they were made available to be experienced. Two sessions were organised to experience the body with the stone objects, both in the space of the Pó de Vir a Ser slaughterhouse. Between sessions, the experience underwent considerable adjustments, taking into account the contributions made by the participants in the first session.



- fig. 73. Stone object for the forearm.
- fig. 74. Stone object for the thigh.
- fig. 75. Stone objects for knee, hand, and elbow.
- fig. 76. Stone objects for ankle and wrist.
- fig. 77. Stone blanket for the entire body.

1st session – 18 October 2024

While it was still hot in Évora for a whole afternoon in a room at Pó, the first experience with the stone objects took place, with more stones than just the objects, and a simple text was used with narration indications to induce the experience¹⁵⁶.

156. Full text available in Appendix XIV.

This session was attended by a group of 14 people and took place on the same day as the regular sessions of the Nós¹⁵⁷ group in order to take advantage of people's presence. The diverse characteristics of this meeting group are considered of little relevance to the session, since it's the body that matters, regardless of the pathology it may carry.

157. The group *Nós: first person plural* is an action of participatory encounters and emancipatory artistic activities between people diagnosed with mental illness and people without a diagnosis, promoted by the pó de vir a ser association in Évora. It reminds me of the principle of La Borde (1953, France), in which all users and the technical health teams participated equally in the management and organisation of the establishment.

In addition to these people who know each other, other people who frequent the association came along to take part in the experiment. This diverse group of participants was brought together organically, through direct contact with the regular participants in the Nós sessions, members or close friends of the association, accompanied by a short explanation of the experience planned. A sparsely populated session was anticipated, but this prediction turned out to be wrong.

The session involved a script with four practical actions, the stones, a surface and the bodies. Outside the room where the experience took place, all the participants met, including me, for a brief explanation of what was to be experienced. This explanation was in the session script and was made available in printed form to everyone. I began by putting all the participants at ease, explaining that no results were expected from this experience and that it was intended to be an act of generosity towards each other's bodies and my own. I explained as well that the whole plan is based on the reference of Autogenic Training with the intention of diverting everyday anxieties as a way of getting closer to what will be closest to all of us, the body. As Luís Fernandes says, "we walk away from what is at such a short distance that only the skin covers it" (Fernandes, 2021, p. 65. Own translation), the body. So this action aims to put us at a shorter distance with our bodies, through the ceiling that comes from the will of the others, that is, the other participants. Still outside, since the ten stone objects were not enough for the number of people present at the session and taking into account the way the session was organised, the participants were invited to pick up stones from the space surrounding the residence - a space populated by various stones. The stones to be picked up had to have certain characteristics that indicated that they could adapt to the body. This was the first action in the script, which also served as a disinhibition action through individual wandering around the space, but with a common goal - to find the stones that best suited our bodies. As we looked for stones, we commented on the characteristics of the ones we found in order to debate their suitability for the context.

Once the stones had been selected and collected, we met inside the room where the experience was to take place and carried out the 2nd action in the script: identifying the stones in order to expose the part of the body for which they were intended (**fig. 78**).

All the limbs and parts of the body that the participants felt were important to cover, have weight or feel in some other way were assigned a stone. This is where the stones become objects and join the objects designed on purpose for this experience.

Once the stones have been identified, the 3rd action suggests dividing the group of participants into narrators, transmitters and receivers. The narrator will conduct the experience, the transmitters will take the stones to the bodies of the receivers.

The receiving participants lie on the floor, four bodies lying on a rubberised mat that is already in the room (**fig. 79**).

The 4th action serves as the motto for the start of the experiment. While the receiving participants lie down, the others stand around the carpet waiting for the narrator's instructions, who walks around the room with the text in his hand. The receivers begin by listening to a description of the room they are in in a calm voice:

"We're in a quiet space, with a chessboard floor. We're surrounded by books and stones."

Since I had already undergone an induction practice such as Autogenous Training, and since the current project had been thought up, designed and materialised by me, the first time we collectively underwent the experience, I was the one who took on the task of narration.

After the description of the space, the body is called upon to participate and the arm was the first part to be evoked.

*"My arm is getting heavy.
(put the object on your arm)
My arm is heavy"*

Between "it's getting heavy" and "it's heavy", a stone is taken to the evoked limb.

From the available stone objects and their identification, the facilitators pick the object to take to the part of the body mentioned by the narrator. However, despite the stones being labelled with the part of the body they were intended for, the facilitators preferred to ignore the identifying label and use the objects according to the suggestion given by their shapes. This suggestion proved to be variable between the different facilitators, i.e. while some objects, particularly those

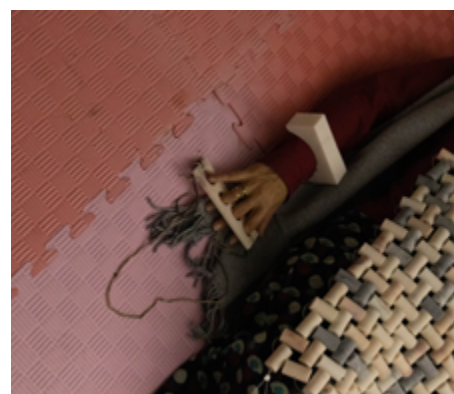


fig. 78. Identification of stones collected outdoors.
fig. 79. Receptors lying on the mat in the experience space.
fig. 80. larger stone used on a broader body area.
fig. 81. smaller stones adapted to more confined body parts.



with larger dimensions, were always used to occupy larger areas of the body (**fig. 80**) like the back, chest or abdomen. –Some stone objects with smaller dimensions could be adapted to various parts of the body with similar dimensions (**fig. 81**), such as the arm or forearm.

Having travelled round the body (**fig. 82**), which is now full of stones, a sound is heard from one of the receivers. They have fallen asleep! Falling asleep is not a failure of the body, but a surrender to its sensible front. We pause briefly in silence to feel the weight of the objects, perhaps to feel the weight of the body.



We continue with the experiment. In the room you can only hear the footsteps of the transmitters and my voice narrating.

We enter the light body round and I start with the same body part I used in the first round:

*“My arm is getting light
(remove object)
My arm is light”*

In this round, the facilitators remove the stones according to the instructions in the narration (**fig. 83**).

Once the arm, elbow, forearm, wrist, hand, thigh, knee, leg and ankle have been traversed, the whole body is reached and listened to:

*“My body is getting lighter,
My body is light”*



When you remove the last object, the one that takes up the most space on the body, located on the back, chest or abdomen, you hear:

*“Breathe, stand up and feel the ground,
Now we’re light”*

The people who, by choice, closed their eyes from the beginning of the experience until the end, i.e. without the suggestion of narration, now open their eyes and stand up. They remain silent until the second part of the session begins, where the positions are reversed: receivers become facilitators, facilitators become receivers and the narrator is replaced.

In this part, the narrator, now a male voice, decides not to follow the sequence suggested in the script, and alternates the parts of the body he evokes, meaning that the recipients do not know which part of the body they will feel after the last one.

*“Your hand is getting heavy.
Your hand is heavy.
Your forehead is getting heavy.
Your forehead is heavy.”*



fig. 82. Fig. 82: all receptors with their bodies covered by stones.

fig. 83. Fig. 83: stone removal sequence.

As well as changing the sequence, he introduces other parts of the body that the script does not include. I dare say that both the alternation of the sequence and the introduction of other parts of the body occur because we are already enjoying the experience, we already feel involved and more uninhibited, and the objects have this ability to adapt and conform to other parts of the body beyond those that are identified.

This time there were no recipients falling asleep, but there was a little moment of shy laughter, later revealed to be the result of the tickling that the participant felt as soon as the objects were placed on their body.

The objects were removed one by one and there is a phenomenon that reveals itself: the objects retain the body's temperature and the facilitators realise that the objects are no longer as cold as they were in the first round.

As soon as you hear "*breathe...*" the participants know that the experience is nearing its end.

In this part, I took on a role that wasn't in the script, that of an observer, and so I decided to start a conversation about the experience I had just finished.

From this conversation and the notes I've collected, the need for time to process what had just happened stands out. One of the participants said that she couldn't give any opinion or comment on the moment she had just experienced, because she felt so light that she did not feel able to talk. This "state of the body" is reminiscent of António Damásio, who emphasises the importance of time and the need for it to exist in order for there to be a more complete elaboration of feelings¹⁵⁸, where perception is involved with "a certain way of thinking" (Damasio, 2003, p. 108). Otherwise, what is felt immediately is just a momentary perception, not very evolved or reflected upon.

When the participant says that she can't say anything about what she has just experienced because she still feels too close to the experience, she is demonstrating how true Damasio's statement is.

Another participant asked why we should talk about an experience where you want to feel the body and suggested that there was a contradiction.

At this point I recalled Luís Fernandes' reflection on "verbocentric societies" (Fernandes, 2021, p. 17), where people are programmed to verbalise and where experiences to feel the body are

158. It's important to emphasise that the meaning of the word feelings is: Act or effect of feeling, aptitude for receiving impressions, intimate awareness.

159. Reflection also covered in Chapter 1 - The body and the relationship; Growing up - The distance from the other body, p. 34 and in Essay 3 : The whole body; The body after the machine, about the time distance for collecting data on the participants' experience with the Touch Machine, p. 39.

160. Mentioned in Chapter 1 - The body and the relationship; Growing up - The distance from the other body, p. 34.

not commonplace. This leads us to develop resistance and consequently addictions to the way we relate to the body.¹⁵⁹

There is in fact an identified contradiction, since the experience is designed to feel the body, where silence is favoured for a more attentive listening to its revelations, rather than an experience where the word is present as an element of interaction.

The attempt to strike up a conversation after this experience reveals the automatisms of society, such as verbocentrism¹⁶⁰, as well as other concerns related to academic research and the collection of concrete data to prove and explain certain facts.

That said, I wonder:

- *If this research aims to bring revelations to the individual and collective body from experiences that decontextualise it in order to make these revelations conscious, does this method of collecting data through testimonies that qualify the experience make sense? Does it make sense to use such a common method for an unusual experience? Does it make sense to interrupt the now conscious revelation with a conversation?*

These questions are the result of the comments made by the participants. The group needed more time to reflect on the experience, but more than time, they needed to experience the revelation of the body that had just emerged. This revelation could not be interrupted by a conversation or a questionnaire. So the conversation continued, however not about the experience or its revelations. The conversation served to realise what was missing from the experience. Of all the notes, I emphasise time, space and sound.

Some participants suggested that the experience should be longer and that the end should be free to choose, i.e. being able to leave and enter the experience whenever they wanted. They also suggested that the space should be less constrained and that there should be sound alongside the narration.

These elements - time, space and sound - were taken to the 2nd session of this experiment.

2nd session – 7 November 2024

Now that it was cold in Évora, the second session of this experience entitled “Lightweight” was held. This session was open, announced to the general public and therefore publicised on Pó de Vir a Ser’s social networks and newsletter, and all the participants from the previous session were invited directly via email.

After some time away from the previous session and all the

involvement we'd had during our two months in the summer, when we arrived back in Pó, it was time to reflect for a week on the location for this session.

I searched the space of the old slaughterhouse for a room with space, but all the spaces I found contrasted with an image created in my head - that of a clean space with only a carpet and the objects in its centre. I thought that Pó's space wouldn't be suitable for what I had imagined. I looked for other places outside Pó. I had access to a stage in a theatre rehearsal room and visited an empty warehouse space in the town hall. Neither space was suitable for the experiment: the first, due to its characteristics, could turn this experience into a show and the second, although large, was considered too big for the experience that was envisaged.

I went back to Pó to reconsider the space of the old slaughterhouse and began to realise that the roofless rooms of one of the old compartments of the animal path could be interesting places, not least because of the analogy it could evoke. A route that used to be for suffering and death, assisted by workers in machine mode so as not to feel any kind of empathy for the animal, had now become a route for feeling. The old slaughterhouse, once a place for mechanised bodies and bodies in pain, is now a stage for the body to feel and reveal itself without the presence of automatisms.

Between choosing and deciding on the space, in order to reflect in a more considered way, in collaboration with Luís Luz¹⁶¹, we worked on the sound piece for the experience. This piece is based on the text¹⁶² that António Guerreiro wrote taking into account his experience as a participant in the first session, even though he was asleep, and the reflective conversations we had throughout my residency process at Pó de Vir a Ser.

161. The artist Luís Luz also developed the sound piece for the experiment developed for Essay 1: *Encounters for the body* (2024) p. 91.

162. Full text in Appendix XV.

The sound piece was developed with several objectives in mind: it should be long enough for a participant to enter or leave the experience at any time, it should have characteristics that allow it to end and start again and it should be able, albeit subjectively, to give participants room to imagine beyond what is said in the text. Once these objectives had been set, the text was recorded in my voice, maintaining a serene, monotone voice, as Luís Fernandes suggests is the case with Autogenic Training; pauses of silence were made between certain paragraphs of the text so that the sound piece could suggest that it was starting or ending at that moment and so that it would be possible for other people to leave or enter the experience; and sound effects were introduced in certain parts of the text in order to emphasise them. The sound piece works in a continuous circuit, known as a "loop", thus allowing the experience to be continuous.



This continuity is suggested by the beginning of the text, which states in the opening paragraph:

“The experience we’re going to carry out does not have to do with art, but with what aesthetics originally meant: sensibility, the ability to feel, to have a perception through the senses”

In the last paragraph of the text, the last sentence reads:

“Here, we want the sensible body to triumph, the one in which the skin - we repeat - is the most profound thing”

One of the first sentences in the text and the last are related, they could be in the same sequence, which is why the text, although it has a beginning and an end, allows the end to be the beginning again.



Back in *Pó de vir a ser* space, it was decided that the room to be used for the experience would be the last one on one of the animal routes in the old slaughterhouse (**fig. 84**). It’s not a big room, but it has no ceiling, so when the participants lie down in that room at the beginning or end of the experience, they’ll see the sky.

Whereas in the first session the experience was carried out inside a room with a ceiling filled with shelves and tables that serve as the association’s library, this session took place in an outdoor space without any kind of element unrelated to the experiment.

The session started at 4pm and was due to end at 5.30pm, as the sun was beginning to set and the cold would become more intense. The visitors who would later become participants began to arrive, and they were directed to the experience room. The experience had around 25 participants, including people who had already attended the first session. They entered the ancient path of death and suffering, although some were unaware of this because it was their first visit to the association. During the journey they hear the sound that belongs to the experience and the silence begins before they reach the room. When they reach the last room, the visitors find a carpet, ten objects¹⁶³ in stone scattered around the carpet (this time there are no stones apart from the drawn objects) and they continue to listen to the sound, but here they can better hear the text behind the sound (**fig. 85**).

Before arriving in the room, in a crack in the wall, there are some sheets (**fig. 86**) with a brief introductory note to the experiment, António Guerreiro’s text (used in the sound piece) and the experiment’s technical sheet. But nobody saw this sheet before the experience ended.

The experience begins with my body being the first to receive the objects. No-one lay down at the same time as me, perhaps because

fig. 84. Pathways through the roofless rooms of the former slaughterhouse, current facilities of *Pó de Vir a Ser*.

fig. 85. Roofless room where the experience takes place, with the mat and objects arranged throughout the space.

163. In this session, only the objects drawn were present, discarding the other stones used in the first session. This decision was made with the intention of achieving a more controlled experience in terms of the number of recipients.

the carpet is so small or because the existence of only ten objects only suggests the presence of one body on the receiving end.

I lay alone, barefoot because I decided to take my shoes off, and waited for someone to take objects to my body. Since some of the participants from the previous session were present, they were the ones who brought the first objects to my body. I hadn't yet felt the weight or the cold of the stones. As soon as they placed the largest object on my chest, I felt an extremely comfortable weight on top of me. This object warmed me up in the cold room.

About the weight of the objects, you could hear: *"They make you feel the weight of the world and also its roughness."*

During my experience, as the text suggests, I always kept my eyes closed, so I do not know who took care of me, or who took the stones to my body so that I could feel it. As I listened to the sound and felt the weight of the stones on top of me, I decided not to do any of the suggestions António makes in the text: *"put your foot on a stone"*, *"rub a rough stone in the palm of your hand"* or *"try hitting one stone against another"*. I allowed myself to remain still, imagining the actions the text suggests and the place of vulnerability in which my body found itself.

During the experiment, between suggestions for action and induction into the experience, questions are also heard, including this one: *"In which area of the body do you feel the most weight?"*

My answer is:

– *On my chest, and even if I hadn't tried it, I imagine on my back and head too.*

These places in the body, as Luís Fernandes explains, are places of "armour"¹⁶⁴ that correspond to the accumulation of tensions and other emotional concerns. Since the body has less and less space and time to feel, and as such, what is felt does not disappear but accumulates and becomes hardened, one day the accumulation - the armour - reveals itself either through pain or through a manifestation provoked by an experience, as is the case with the one I'm reporting here.

With no more objects above me, I feel their memory, I feel the weight that no longer exists and my body begins to cool down until it loses the sensation of a living body, a body that feels. I open my eyes and I see the sky!

After me, other people lay down on the mat and the experience became more and more intense and organic. Just as in the first

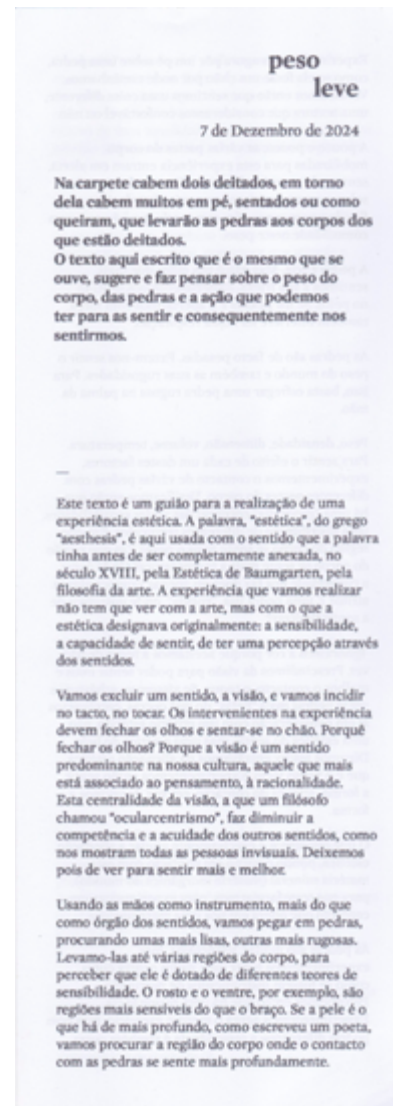


fig. 86. Program leaflet featuring introductory text about the experience, along with António Guerreiro's writing reproduced in the sound piece that forms part of the experience.

164. "Ordinary neck, shoulder and back pain often correspond to the manifestation of these armour plates, which are bodily defences against anguish that is not discharged consciously - what would happen if one were able to express these emotions or fulfil these desires." (Fernandes, 2021, p. 106. Own translation)



fig. 87. Object designed for the knee but used on the forehead.

session, the facilitators gave way to receivers and vice versa, and after being a receiver and occasionally a facilitator, I mostly remained an observer.

In contrast to the first session, in this one the participants used the objects according to the purpose for which they were drawn. The objects were placed on the part of the body to which their design corresponds, with the exception of one that was designed to be placed on the knee, but as it exists in duplicate, one of the objects was constantly placed on the recipients' foreheads (fig. 87). The deviation of this object to the forehead leads me to conclude that this point of the body is an important place to feel. Since the forehead had no object assigned to it, the involvement in the experience led the participants to unanimously consider this place to be common to all of them as an important place to feel.

From an observer's point of view, I realised that there was a great concern on the part of the facilitators to get the objects to the receivers quickly and to place them delicately on the other person's body. When a new receiver lay down on the carpet a second later, there was a facilitator picking up the first object to take to the other person's body. Among the participants who received the objects in their body, there was no room for pause, they quickly felt their body filled with weights while their withdrawal was slower. This is because, as I felt and as António says in his text based on his own experience, there is "*a certain comfort in this weight*".

At a certain point in the session, all the people present, around 30, had already been facilitators and receivers, but decided to become facilitators again. Some people have experienced the weight of objects or become aware of the weight of their body several times.



fig. 88. Documentation sequence of the experience where it becomes apparent that the activity begins in daylight and concludes at nightfall.

The session, which was scheduled to end at 5.30pm, lasted until 8pm, such was the need or desire to feel the body. The session began with sunshine and ended with dark skies.

Few people left before we all decided to finish.

Just before the end, two bodies leaning against each other were seen sharing the objects and therefore their weight, as well as the accumulation of all the stones in one place on the body of one of the participants.

THE CONSCIOUS BODY

After the experience, the body momentarily becomes a living organism, aware of its materiality. The weight of objects leaves a memory of them in the body and it takes some time for this to disappear. After the memory of the skin, the memory of the experienced episode appears as something good and rehabilitating.

After the sessions that served as a rehearsal for the designed experience, and with a distance from what had been experienced in each of them, some of the participants were contacted via the e-mail address they had provided to the association at the end of the 2nd session. This decision was taken in the light of the information obtained in the 1st session, which revealed that the experience goes beyond the end of the interaction, i.e. the body is involved in what has just happened, even if there are no objects to make itself felt or the sound has stopped. In order to better understand the post-interaction effect, I use António's words from the text that echoed in the 2nd session, where we heard the word "*resonance*" used with the same meaning as the word "*reverberation*" to explain that in this experience, the body resonates, "*that is, it becomes an object of apprehension*". This effect, that of reverberation, inhabits the body after the moment of interaction, which means that

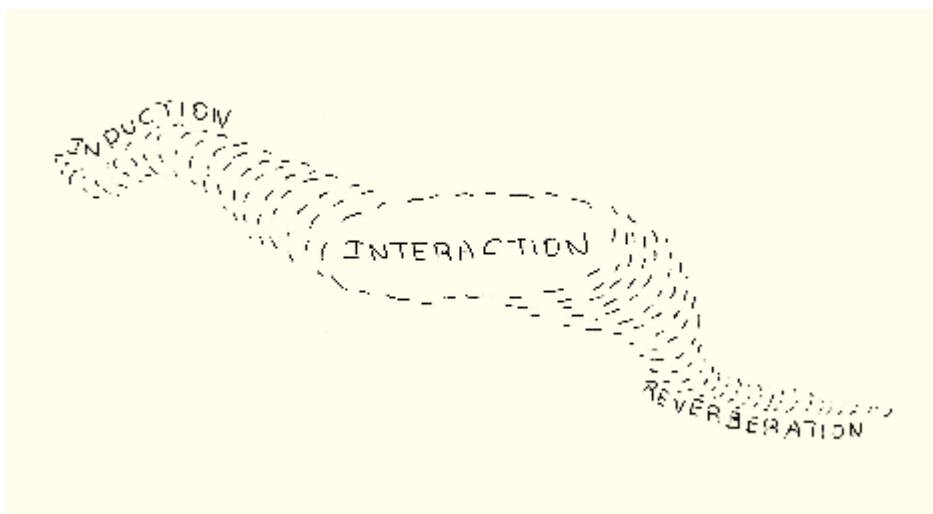


fig. 89. Explanatory map of the three moments comprising the experience.

this experience can be divided into three distinct moments (**fig. 88**): the pre-interaction, the interaction and the post-interaction. The pre-interaction is the moment of disinhibition and induction; the interaction is the moment of involvement and penetration into the experience; the post-interaction is the moment of reverberation and the body's apprehension of the interaction that has just taken place.

The last moment of the experience refers to an invisible action since it translates into individual and internal revelations of the body and this should not be interrupted with the collection of testimonies or other provoked conversations as was attempted in the first session. This invisibility goes back to Fatima Pombo's reflection on the "invisible structure"¹⁶⁵ (Pombo, 2020, p. 17. Own translation) that the visible allows. Although the reverberation of the experience is not perceptible to the eyes of others because it is an inner action of each individual, given the reaction of the participants at the end of the first session, it is understood that it is indeed happening. In fact, this moment in the experience - the reverberation - only becomes conscious of its existence at the end of the 1st session with the participants' contributions from the attempt at conversation in the place of the post-interaction, which did not happen as planned since the post-interaction is still part of the experimental action.

165. Theme explored in Chapter 2 - Objects and the experience of the body; Sensible elements for an experience: between conditioning and revelation, p. 55.

This realisation led me to question the method and the relevance of possibly collecting testimonies about the participants' experience of the experiment. These questions did not arise in other practical experiments, particularly with the Touch Machine (p. 124), since the testimonies were collected two months after the experience had taken place.

However, after some reflection and consideration, I decided, as I did in the previous essay, to collect testimonies after the experience was completely over, where only the memory of the moment remains. This decision can be explained by the use of testimonies in the previous essay that show the power of revelation that practical experiences allow. It makes sense that these experiences are only lived and that no quantitative results are expected from them, but the phenomenon of revelation is expected and in order to gauge it, i.e. to be able to realise whether it has occurred, it is necessary to ask the participants for some confirming data. This is why the testimonies were requested and, in contrast to the first session, they were requested at a greater distance in order not to interrupt the process of reflecting on the experience. As with the Touch Machine experiment, the only identifying element used in the testimonies about the experience in the 2nd session - "Light Weight" - was age. Personal data, identification of gender or class were once again not taken into account, as this experience is not intended to categorise, but rather to verify their capacity for revelation.

166. The email to collect testimonials about the body's experience with «Lightweight» was sent at the same time as the email to collect testimonials about the body's experience with the «Touch Machine». The collection of testimonials takes place at the same time, given the stage of the research process underway.

167. Table available in full in Appendix XVI.

After sending an e-mail asking the participants of the 2nd session to give their testimonies¹⁶⁶ about their experience with “Lightweight” between the end of January and April, I received several testimonies, which are shown in table 2¹⁶⁷ in the order I received them.

The testimonies are organised along three axes: induction (the journey to the experience), action (the interaction with the objects) and reflections (the symbolic layers awakened).

Some of the testimonies begin by pointing out the beginning of the experience, the journey to the room (S7) as an element that is already part of the action, addressing the space of the slaughterhouse, so this participant understands the implicit analogy between the objective of the journey once made and the journey that the experience suggests. Another testimony addresses the induction of the experience (S19)(S10) when he explains that with his eyes closed he was led on a journey of the sensible. This journey, the spatial and the sensible, activates the body to receive the weight and temperature of the stone objects.

Regarding the action of the objects, the body's reception of the weight turned out to be light (S1) (S3) (S4) (S9) (S11) for many of the participants, and all of them, when they write “light”, “lightness”, “weight” or “heavy” in their testimonies, are talking about the weight that the objects bring to the surface of the body that will be imposed on its interior (S5)(S8)(S11). This action, which also establishes a path from the outside to the inside of the body, reveals “invisible and intimate layers” (S9). Once again, Pombo's “invisible structure” becomes perceptible, manifested here in the tension between the tactile gesture (visible) and the emotional resonance of the body (hidden).

The body, at the moment of interaction with other bodies using objects as mediation or intermediaries (S6), realises its temperature in contrast to the cold of the stones (S2)(S3)(S7)(S8)(S11). This cold, described as icy (S3), is balanced by the weight of the objects seconds after reaching the surface of the body. In addition to weight, there is a transfer between the temperature of a living organism - our body - and the stone. As I mentioned when reflecting on the first session, the stones are cold when they reach the body, but when we pick them up they are warm and even hot. This phenomenon, beyond being material, is also reflected in the perception of the receiving participants (S3).

The weight and temperature, as well as the care taken to place the stones on the other (S7), to bring them to their body (S6) so that the other feels what a receiving body felt, brings to light the empathy (S3) (S6) and generosity that this experience allows and even the illusion of a tight hug (S6). The participants' actions, based on the interaction

of the bodies, were understood as concentrated and careful, without the presence of the acceleration of days or competition (S10).

During the interaction, fears and uncomfortable images arise that take the recipient of the experience to other scenarios, such as rubble and crushed people (S6).

In this context,¹⁶⁸ Baudrillard's reflection (Baudrillard, 1997) on the society of the spectacle through the image and the normalisation that the repetition of this image brings to society reappears. The images of war that cover social networks or television, after some time of repetition, become normalised content: what was shocking the first time it appeared, ceases to be so in its successive repetitions. When information is retained and synthesised into an image and this image becomes decontextualised, diverted from its origin, it will actually be a generated, virtualised and simulated image. This simulacrum in which we live will lead to indifference, since the information narrative is clearly insufficient and even manipulated¹⁶⁹. This experience, based on its tactile action, brings to light the images seen every day of the various outbreaks of war around the world. The image, the simulacrum, for brief moments, seconds even, becomes real. The experience, due to the place of vulnerability in which it places the body, leads the recipient to imagine beyond their current scenario and the context they inhabit every day.

168. Theme also addressed in chapter 3 - Designing the experience; Scenarios for the body, p. 82

169. «When (...) actions are freed (...) from their origin and purpose, they then enter into a self-representation to infinity. (...) They perpetuate themselves in a total indifference to their own content". (Amaral & Jung Rocha, 2004, p. 4. Own translation)

After feeling the actual weight of the objects on the body, the memory of the weight of the objects remains (S2)(S3)(S7)(8). and with it a reflection on the idea of a vulnerable body and the limits of power (S3). This experience transforms the body into a laboratory organism where, through objects, others will experience comfort and discomfort, weight, temperature and balance. From the reflection that emerges from this experience, there are still the testimonies that evoke everyday life (S3) (S10), which here gains distance from the dichotomy between those "*graced by lightness*" (S3) and others. In this experience, the weight and lightness reaches all those who submit to it, episodically breaking down the dichotomy that the testimony speaks of. There is also an analogy between what happens in the experience and the concrete reality of everyday life, in which the fragility of relationships is compared to the vulnerability of the body subject to the experience (S10). This body and the others present in the experience are the same as those in the fragile relationships of the day, the same ones that are subject to all the impositions that society places on them - disciplining, objectification, mechanisation¹⁷⁰ - and this one reveals itself to be sensible to acting outside of these programmed contexts. In this experience, the body occupies a place of vulnerability, as it becomes a living organism for experimentation and exposure. This role is episodic and distances it from the mechanics of everyday life.

170. Themes addressed progressively in this research and introduced in Chapter 1 - The relationship of the body, p. 29

The experience also brought revelations about the objects (often just called “stones” by the participants) for those who work with or use stone every day. In this action, “Lightweight”, which places any participant in another setting outside their usual everyday context, also decontextualises those who are usually close to the main material used for this action - stone. Although they feel it every day, touch it and understand its weight, in this action they felt it without touching it (S11).

Alongside the various reflections, the therapeutic potential of perception and awareness (S9) is particularly interesting, since in none of the sessions was the experience presented as an action for this purpose. In addition to the therapeutic context, the word “ritual” (S7) (S10) was also evoked to describe the experience as an organised, regulated but subjective and light action. As António Gonçalves points out in his reflection on memory and rituals, the aim of ritual “is to give coherence to the experience of the immediate as incoherent” (Custódio Gonçalves, 1999, p. 338. Own translation), in other words, to seek an explanation for the rarity of the moment. In this case, when the testimonies use the word “ritual” to describe the episode, it means that they are looking for meaning in their experience, since it is a rare moment, decontextualised from the daily lives of those who live it. The fact that the action takes place in an unusual space, with different people who are known and unknown to most of the participants, with uncategorised objects and a sound piece that is not music but a text with a high degree of subjectivity, leads to the search for a name that identifies the experience. This search is also a reflection of the mechanisation of the body. Some of the testimonies of the experience have a poetic structure that arises from the interpretation of the memory of the experience, which leads us to conclude that this experience has activated the sensible front of the individuals, which somehow leads them to adopt this type of language to express themselves. It is curious to note that the testimonies were collected a long time after the experience ended and yet, when the participants recall the experience, they express it with this type of language.

The poetic language adopted by the participants reflects the de-automatisation of perception. By breaking with everyday discursive logic, the experience frees the body for a more organic communication, where metaphor replaces literal and pragmatic description. The “Light Weight” experience is a paradox: the stone objects, heavy and cold, become catalysts for a human encounter. The weight of the objects, far from oppressing, frees the body from the automatisms of everyday life, exposing fragility, worries and fears as revelations of power. The testimonies, marked by poetic and introspective language, confirm that the reverberation of the experience transcends the physical moment, infiltrating the sensory memory and the invisible

layers of subjectivity. Thus, the apparent simplicity of the objects, together with the other elements that make up the experience - space and sound - reveals a political complexity : by materialising touch as an act of empathy and care, the experience makes the disciplined body conscious by contrasting it with the vulnerability to which the body is subject during the action of the experience.

So the question remains:

Why feel all this episodically, if the reality of the days is not going to change?

Table 2: Excerpts from the testimonies Light Weight

	Age	Testimonials
S1	25	I felt lighter. Mentally and physically lighter (...)
S2	33	(...) cools the body that heats the stone and the hot weight of the stone warms the body (...)
S3	33	<p>(...) the lightness of a cold marble blanket on the chest, or the insinuation of a small polished pebble under the fingers and the weight of the warmth of memory, when the heterodetermined choreography imposes the absence of stone on the body.</p> <p>(...)</p> <p>not ceasing to be an aesthetic or sensory exercise, it is a reflection on the limits of power (individual and collective) or on the dimension of empathy in the face of (...) a perfect stranger.</p> <p>(...) getting back down, being fragile again (...)</p> <p>(...) the dichotomy of everyday life (...)</p>
S4	48	The stones make us light.
S5	27	“A weight is born from the gravitational centre of the stone and this weight is the molecular soul of the union.”
S6	24	<p>(...) in the tightest, most comfortable and, at the same time, most impersonal embrace I’ve ever felt. (...)</p> <p>The pleasure of “receiving” the weight of the stones is transformed into the desire to “put” the stones on the next person, so that they can feel the same (...)</p> <p>The experience of light weight is an experience of empathy, which only happens if there is someone to put it on, and to receive it. The stone (...) an intermediary of touch. The intermediary of a hug.</p>

S7	29	<p>Space of a former slaughterhouse. Depth to act space. Yellow walls. In the centre is a purple carpet, flanked by several carved marble stones of different sizes and shapes. (...) I felt somehow nervous.</p> <p>(...)</p> <p>touched the bodies with the cold weight of the stone, picking them out and testing their balance.</p> <p>I felt a calm responsibility - almost a ritual - as I searched for the right place for each piece and at the same time the right way to place them on the other's body.</p> <p>(...)</p> <p>- a very concentrated, almost ceremonial weight, which made me aware of my breathing and contact with the ground</p> <p>(...)</p> <p>My imagination went to rubble and crushed people. (...) I felt the care taken by the others in placing the pieces. (...) But I did not realise that the last one had been removed. (...)</p>
S8	67	<p>(...) its own temperature, penetrating the interior.</p> <p>When the stones are removed we feel the lack, the absence, we have already established a relationship with the memory of the world from 700 million years ago.</p>
S9	33	<p>(...) a journey between lightness and weight - physical and symbolic. (...) It touched an intimate layer: it made me think about how we are affected by invisible charges. It was undoubtedly an artistic exploration of the therapeutic potential of perception, in consciousness.</p>
S10	34	<p>In the centre, a body, lying face down on the floor, in an area marked by an irregular purple felt figure (...)</p> <p>As with any game, it's a ritual; as with any ritual, it's a relational protocol, made up of rules, few of them explicit and always open to confusion, adaptation and subversion. (...)</p> <p>Here, the bodies were careful, diligent and focused. They did not talk to each other, they did not run, they did not compete (...)</p> <p>This is the perception of one of those bodies, present in an exercise of analogy with what happens outside the felt carpet, where the objects are much more varied than those available here, and the rules and relationships are as fragile as the body at the centre.</p>
S11	44	<p>I always felt the weight of the stones when I held them in my hands. (...) Time and words were essential for entering a space of lightness and weight.</p>

The four episodes for the body

- Experimental sessions

The four essays “Encounters for the body”, “Touching the body in parts”, “The whole body” and “Dimension of the body” come from the practical experiences - “Formal Encounters”, “Touching the Common Place”, “Touch Machine” and “Light Weight” - developed around the body. They are actions of progressive search for numb places in the body, turning it into a living laboratory organism. Each experience progresses in the exploration of the body, starting from superficial interaction, to an action of touching parts of the body, to a full-body action, until reaching a more complete experience with a greater focus on the body.

The practical experiences establish an informed relationship with each other, i.e. they transmit information from one to the other regarding the elements of composition, ways of communicating and approaching the participants, and the share of the results of each one.

The approach adopted for the research narrative focuses on the intervention and the level of depth that the various practical actions had with the body, and not on the progress of the composition of the experiences. In other words, the narrative that is favoured is the one that best explains the impact that each experience has on the body and the gradual way in which each action increasingly penetrates the body.

The search for the body’s numb places was continuous and took place progressively, but not always linearly. The experience “Touching the Common Place” (S2), dealt with in Essay 2 (p. 104), was the first action to be put into practice, but based on its results, it was important to think about a prior approach to the body before making it available to be touched. The “Formal Encounters” (S1) in Essay 1 (p. 91) are the response to the information gleaned from the first experiment. This practical action - Formal Encounters - allows for a more superficial approach to the body, where people interact and are close, but there is no designed and established touch. The body, in this experience, is not as central to the action, nor is there as deep an exploration of the individual body as in the following experiences. The “Formal Encounters” experience forms an encounter between people, they interact with each other, establish conversations, dialogues, get to know each other, move away from discomfort and all these movements serve to prepare the body for a deeper reflection on it.

However, this (S1) experience, in contrast to the next (S2), is more organised from the point of view of the elements that make it up: a space, objects and a sound piece. Whereas the next experience (S2),

because it was the first to be devised, did not have the same concerns about its composition, in terms of the space and the communication of the experience to the participants, with the exception of the last session which indicated the need for attention to these elements.

In the 4th session of “Touching the Common Place” (p. 121), in an organic way, i.e. unplanned, a large group of people interacted and this movement was important for the elaboration of the “Formal Encounters” in which the decision was made to first put people in touch with each other.

Although the first experience presented in this research is more complete than the second in terms of the elements that comprise it, because it was drawn up after the information taken from the second, the truth is that for the purposes of a narrative of access to the body, it is more pertinent to start with its surface. In this way, the “Formal Encounters” are presented as the first experience to be had and it is only in the following actions that the body begins to gain greater individuality and prominence.

In the “Formal Encounters” experience, the surface of the body is approached through the interaction of the participants’ presence and the relational action that is established, with no intention of accessing deeper places in the body. In this experience, however, there is more decontextualisation than in the next. In “Formal Encounters”, people go to a place that is unknown or has some degree of neutrality - in other words, a space that is neither domestic nor in everyday use. In “Touching the common place”, in the first three sessions, the space used had the characteristics of environments commonly frequented by everyone, such as a house - even if, for many participants, it was initially an unfamiliar place.

In “Touching the Common place”, although the composition of the experience is less rich, the approach to the body is already more intense because it brings revelations from other places in the body, those that are numb. These revelations will touch on Ligia Clarck’s reflection on the phantasmaties¹⁷¹ of the body, which is where the author wants to access her experiences. From the materiality of her so-called “non-objects”¹⁷², Clarck is interested in what they produce and who interacts with them.

All the experiences presented in this research involve accessing some place in the body, whether superficial or deeper, in order to bring some revelation and awareness to the consciousness of the person. Like Ligia Clarck, in this research, more than the experience and its materiality, its action and who attends it are important.

171. Theme addressed and developed in Chapter 3 - Designing the experience; Dialogue between objects: revelation and phantasmaties, p. 76.

172. “Lygia Clark became interested in the sensitisation that objects produce in those who interact with them (...) the relationship that is produced between the participants and their non-objects.” (Alves de Almeida, 2016, p. 668. Own translation)

So, just as Lygia Clark sought to access the “invisible layers”¹⁷³ through her “non-objects”, these experiences revealed areas of bodily silence - where the fantasising of everyday life, especially its automatisms, dissolved into gestures of surrender and availability over the body and the bodies of others.

173. Taking up Fátima Pombo's concept (Pombo, 2020, p. 17. Own translation)

The “Touch Machine”(E3), exhibited in Essay no. 3 - The whole body (p. 122), builds on the previous tactile experience (E2), and aims to take touch to other parts of the body in order to bring more revelations and more information than before. In this experience, testimonies have already been collected in order to better understand what the experience was like for those who took part in it and what it brought to the individual and collective body.

– *What is this relationship between the individual and collective body?*

In the various practical essays, this relationship was mentioned as the objective of each action, in other words, from the individual to the collective. From the relationship between two or more people, as Laing explains, the “experience of each person is modified by the behaviour of the other”. (Laing, 1972, p. 23), in other words, the interaction between two people causes a change in each of them and this reconfigures their experience. Thus, if experiences focus on the body, especially the individual body, from its interaction with others, with the collective, its experience but also its behaviour, even the automated and therefore unconscious ones, can be revealed and reconfigured. If the individual reconfigures himself, this action will have an impact on the collective, since the experience of one has an impact on the others. Revelation, to make the known or unknown conscious, can lead to transformation and perhaps to a new relationship with the revelations provoked by an action. Laing reminds us that experience is only transformed by action¹⁷⁴. Here, collective action - whether it's placing objects on a body or touching a stranger through a machine - has not only changed individuals, but has reconfigured and questioned tacit social dynamics, challenging the logic of the body-machine.

174. «only through action can our experience be transformed” (Laing, 1972, p. 22. Own translation)

In “Touch Machine”, the need for interaction between bodies is more evident, given that it is the first action that places a body in a place of greater exposure, even though it is completely covered.

While in the two previous experiences (E1)(E2), the participants interact on the same level of relationship, in the “Touch Machine” (E3) and the “Lightweight” (E4), the participants are divided between receivers and facilitators, making the receivers' bodies more exposed and in a place of greater vulnerability.

The last experience, “Lightweight” (E4), is the most complete, from the point of view of the elements that make it up to its approach to the body. This experience takes into account the route, the space, the objects and the sound piece that covers the entire action. Here, the body is not covered and is equally or even more exposed than in the previous experience (E3). From observing this experience and the testimonies of the participants who lived it, this is the action that had the greatest impact on the individual and collective body.

175. See Chapter 3 - Designing the experiment; Three operations, p. 85

Returning to the three operations¹⁷⁵ for an experience, the four actions presented in this investigation are decontextualised episodes of access to the sensible body, based on an empirical experience. I’ll end with a possible answer to the question I posed at the end of the 4th essay (p. 164):

– *Why feel all this episodically if the reality of the day isn’t going to change?*

Material reality won’t change, but these episodes allow us to become aware of it. From conscious reality it is possible to trigger a transformative process, towards a new relationship with the individual and collective body.

Table 3: Corresponding experiments and tests

	Experience	Essay	p.
(E1)	Formal Encounters	Encounters for the body	91
(E2)	Touching the Common Place	Touching the body in parts	104
(E3)	Touch Machine	The whole body	122
(E4)	Light Weight	The weight and lightness of the whole body	144

After the experiences

The body

THE OBSERVATION

In this research I took on various roles: designer, participant and observer. The occupation of these positions, with the exception of that of “designer”, happened organically according to the gradual evolution of the research and the needs that arose, in other words, these positions were not determined in the research plan, they happened.

In all the experiences presented, the body was a living laboratory, where various actions were put into practice to reveal it. And in Laing’s words, I find comfort and confidence in the relevance of revealing the body, since according to the author, “Man creates by transcending himself in the act of revealing.” (Laing, 1972, p. 40. Own translation).

Theoretical reflection and the collection of contributions from various authors were fuelled by the practical component of this research, which was built up progressively. With each practical test, we came to understand the body’s need to discover itself, to de-automatise itself, in order to return, episodically, to what it is in its most original and primary form, a living and sensible organism. As Luís Fernandes understands: “The individual begins in the body” and this research, through its practical component, proposes the “return of the body to this primordial condition of its presence in the world” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 64. Own translation), in other words, the return to feeling the body as it was when we were born, when it is felt and makes itself felt.

This research is the result of empirical work, of contact and relationship, which has gradually deepened the subject, allowing us to use the methods that arise from the needs of the moment without predictions or preconceptions.

As a way of gauging the results of the practical experiences and their effects on the participants’ bodies, observation was the most commonly used procedure. My roles were divided into designer and observer and participant and observer. Since I was the one who designed the experiments, planned and organised them, it was never possible to distance myself from the position of curious observer. And this space of observation was crucial to understanding the dynamics of the experience and the involvement of the participants, serving as food for theoretical and practical reflection in the research.

In my experience, I realise that observation is one of the most pertinent exercises in the design process when it comes to proposing a new project to the world. This project must be the result of an observation, in order to provoke discussion, mitigate or overcome a problem.

This research, based on material and practical proposals, proposes a discussion on the place of the body in today’s society and in the future.

Alongside observation, recording methods were used as a way of freezing what was observed, such as photography, video and writing notes on what was seen and heard. At a certain point in the process of delving deeper into the subject, it was important to gather testimonies in order to understand how others saw and lived the experiences. The participants became observers of others and of themselves. This position they occupied meant that the experimental process to which the body was subject was a self-observed process and therefore: conscious and felt.

I return to Laing to emphasise the importance of “experience as evidence” (Laing, 1972, p. 15. Own translation) as a source of reflection and theory¹⁷⁶. This research understands precisely this process, since it is from empirical experience that reflection and possibilities for the next experience emerge.

176. «We need theory no more than we need experience, which is the source of all theory.” (Laing, 1972, p. 15. Own translation)

In all the practical actions, there was a concern to ensure diversity in the participants. People were never chosen or selected, but due to the nature of the experience it was possible to reach audiences from different social backgrounds and of different ages. Some people took part in more than one experience or more than one session, for example, people living in or near Alentejo took part in “Formal Encounters” and “Lightweight”. People from Porto took part in “Touching the Common Place” and “Touch Machine”.

If one of the aims of this research is to rescue the body from its alienation as a result of the distancing imposed by the processes of mechanisation of the body and its virtualisation, using the words of Eduardo Almeida regarding the relational work that Ligia Clarck developed, the experiences of this research enable “a softening of the machine.” (Alves de Almeida, 2016, p. 677. Own translation). This means that the practical project of this research aims to achieve, albeit episodically, the deceleration and de-automatisation to which the body is subject, and to allow it to reorganise itself based on the revelations that these experiences bring.

ANSWERS FOR THE BODY

This research presents a set of practical responses to the problem that makes the body a machine “without subjects or affections” (Le Breton, 2003, p. 9. Own translation) that Federici, Breton and Luís Fernandes explore, the “disciplined body” that Foucault exposes and the “semi-dead” body that Laing talks about.

These responses do not claim to be solutions, but rather contributions to reflection and new relational practices with the body.

The reflections generated from the practice raised questions that illustrate the concerns that accompanied this research and that

marked the content of this thesis.

I collected ten of these questions in order to look at them again, and after the whole research process, answer them again.

1. How can the body reconcile its exaltation with the repression of its sensible power? (p. 38)

The body lives between its biological condition as a living organism and its condition as an object that has been turned into¹⁷⁷. This last circumstance, that of an object with mechanised reflexes, gestures and actions, pushes the body into the position of a commodity (Varela & della Santa, 2024, m.1.28. Own translation). This commodity, once used as labour power as if the body were a machine, is now used as a decontextualised and de-corporealised consumer image. The body has lost its own body, the one that is palpable, touchable and alive. Today, the body is consigned to an imaginary reality, a reality that is unreal, fictitious and therefore misleading. As if it weren't enough for real bodies to become staged images, we are now seeing those same bodies generate others that do not exist but seem to do everything a real body does. Take the AI-generated influencers Aitana Lopez and Olivia C., who walk around, read books, advertise places and products, go snowshoeing and sunbathe. These two characters, who look like people, represent the furthest the body has gone to date, an unreal place. The machine body, the labour power, its disciplining has led it to its own unreality. Let's note that Aitana and Olívia show a seductive side to life, that of strolling, consuming and relaxing. The body is no longer just a labour force, but continues to be a machine and an object, but now for consumption and to generate more consumption.

The body lives imprisoned and at the mercy of society's impositions that dictate where and what the body should do, whether through the imposed policies that force us to work 5 days a week, 7 or 9 hours a day, or through the virtualised images of real bodies and generated bodies that simulate a seductive reality.

I'd say that the body can't reconcile its biological condition as a living, sensible organism with the repression to which it is subject, which is why its sensible front is numbed and the body becomes an automated, obedient and "docile" tool.¹⁷⁸

With no apparent, quick or immediate solution to this problem, this research encourages the revelation of the body by decontextualising it and taking advantage of its tacit side and its empirical need¹⁷⁹, i.e. real experiences¹⁸⁰, as a way of demonstrating its sensible needs and making them conscious, as opposed to the numbness that we are witnessing.

177. Problems addressed Chapter 1 - The body and the relationship, p. 29.

178. "During the classical era, there was a discovery of the body as an object and target of power. We can easily find signs of this great attention devoted to the body - to the body that is manipulated, modelled, trained, obeyed, responded to, made skilful or whose forces are multiplied." (Foucault, 2010, p. 117. Own translation)

179. Chapter 3 - Designing the experiment; The Three operations, p. 85.

180. Chapter 4 - Body tests, p. 89.

2. *Will the result of these revelations be the “phantasmatic” of the body?* (p. 76)

The revelations that come from the practical actions of this research are the result of the individual and collective experience of the body or bodies subject to the action. None of the practical experiences were intended to become a therapeutic method, unlike Ligia Clarck's.¹⁸¹

181. Chapter 3 - Designing the experience; Dialogue between objects: revelation and the phantasmatic, p. 76.

The word “ghostly” refers to the idea of something invisible, asleep in the body or inhabiting the body, but it also carries the weight of something that can be frightening, ghostly. The aim of the practical experiences in this research was not to reach the body's ghosts, but rather everything it wanted to reveal. Above all, the aim was to give it time, outside of its usual context of action, to get to know itself, understand itself, feel itself and reveal itself to itself and to others.

The results of practical experiences are revelations, and these may or may not be related to the phantasm of the body.

3. *«What do we have that is most immediate if not our corporeal presence in the world?»* (Fernandes, 2021, p. 173. Own translation). (p. 79)

I responded to Luís Fernandes' question with another question of my own: If the body is matter, how can we not experience it and reflect on it through concrete material experiences?

I used Luís Fernandes' question and formulated my own, in relation to the debate on scientific methods and ways of operating in a research context. However, I believe that these questions are more interested in providing answers about the use of the body than about scientific methods.

The body is indeed our presence in the world, it is an “intermediary” (Braunstein & Pépin, 2001, p. 137. Own translation). However, again using the words of Luís Fernandes, the body “is to the person as water is to fish: it is so omnipresent that it only becomes present if we look at it strangely” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 10. Own Translation). In other words, the everyday body is invisible. This invisibility is not due to the normalisation of the body because we see it every day, but rather because the body is subject to a place of discipline and rule that turns it into a mechanical “aggregate of limbs” (Descartes, 1985, p. 123. Own translation), or a “bipedal computer” (Varela & della Santa, 2024, m.13:45. Own translation) that does not allow it to be aware of itself.

This is why I considered it necessary in this research to work on decontextualising the body, because the strangeness that Luís

Fernandes talks about as a method of looking at the body so that it becomes aware of its existence can be achieved by decontextualising the body through the practical experiences designed.

When the body finds itself using unfamiliar objects, in a context that is not the one it inhabits every day, the body becomes alert to respond to the curiosity imposed by the experiences and the discomfort generated by the unknown. In this state of alertness, of curiosity, the body is feeling itself, it is learning about its existence, questioning and testing itself, and finally revealing itself.

4. *Are we thus immersed in a process of asceticism of the body, in which its organic dimension is suppressed in favour of a functional and now also virtualised existence? (p. 80)*

The construction of this research is admittedly progressive, i.e. the process of reflection was built up as practical experiences fuelled the theoretical reflective process and vice versa. This gradual construction of the research is noticeable throughout its body of text and imagery, which from chapter to chapter delves deeper into the subject under study and in this process new terms emerge, such as “asceticism of the body” - understood here not as spiritual negation, but as capitalist suppression of sensitivity in favour of functionality. The ascetic body is one that seeks perfection by inhibiting itself from all pleasures. The body we live in is, to a certain extent, an ascetic body, a body that is deeply lost in the automation of our days, but which, depending on the class in which it operates, deceives itself into thinking it is a free body. The search for the perfect body, whether from a professional, personal or physical point of view, inhibiting oneself from all pleasures in order to achieve it, is not just a personal choice, but rather a social imposition leveraged by circumstances that have come down to contemporary times that dehumanise the body and turn it into a machine, object or image. In Le Breton’s words, he suggests that “If the machine is becoming humanised, man is becoming mechanised.” (Le Breton, 1991, p. 24. Own translation), to say that if the evolution of the machine leads to the partial or complete replacement of the body, it is because the body is increasingly mechanical. In other words, the body and the circumstances in which it operates today are less and less controlled by itself, but more and more controlled by the impositions of the interests of an increasingly individualistic society immersed in capitalism, which is interested in having the obedient and docile bodies that Foucault talks about.

So, yes, the body is a set of functional limbs, either to be used as labour power, to persuade others or to perpetuate the regime without the right to the sensible body in which we live.

5. *Can today's physical meeting spaces be spaces of adventure or spaces of escape?* (p. 91)

This question arises in connection with the first essay “Encounters for the body” (p. 91) around the first practical experience designed “Formal encounters”. All the practical experiences presuppose a relational action between bodies, for the revelation of the individual and collective body. In other words, all practical experiences, even though they may seem to focus on just one body - for example the one that is touched - always contain a relational action mediated by the objects and the other elements of the experience, as a way of achieving understanding and awareness of one's own body and its place in the world in relation to others.

Thus, all experiences and their results are the coexistence of the individual body with the individual body of another, in other words, they all establish relational action as a principle.

In essay no. 1: Encounters for the body, where this question arises, we reflect on the encounter as a means of first approaching the body, because we understand, from the readings made around Badiou's reflection or Patricia Soares Martins, that the physical encounter is increasingly an action of resistance in relation to the virtualisation and automatisisation imposed on the body. It is in the encounter, for whatever purpose, that a greater understanding of the other is established and places us in a collective relationship with the individual. By this I mean that the encounter allows for communication that goes beyond the verbal or written communication of social networks that camouflage information, in other words, the encounter allows for bodily communication between individuals that places them in a mutual relationship. Virtual encounters, on the other hand, omit information, cause mistakes and ambiguities that contribute nothing but to distancing and bias in relationships.

Today's physical meeting spaces, and this was also foreseen in the designed experience “Formal Encounters”, are in fact places of challenge and exposure for the relational body since it lives and acts in disciplined spaces that force it into certain forms of action, whether these are social networks or chat rooms, or factories or other workplaces where the aim is only to operate and not to relate.¹⁸²

182. “In the factories that appeared at the end of the 18th century, the principle of individualising gridlock became more complicated. It is important to distribute individuals in a space where they can be isolated and localised; but also to articulate this distribution of bodies, the spatial arrangement of the production apparatus and the various forms of activity in the distribution of “posts”.” (Foucault, 2010, p. 124. Own translation)

6. *“But isn't designing objects to provoke a certain type of encounter too much of a desire to control the uncontrollability?”* (p. 93)

This question arises from Essay 1 - Encounters for the body (p. 91), but in reality it can be applied to all the practical experiences in this research. All the experiences designed throughout this thesis

are in fact actions of control over the lack of control in which the body itself lives.

What I've just said could lead to another question:

– *But isn't the body controlled and disciplined?*
How can it now be said to be uncontrolled?

Yes, the body is tamed and disciplined by the power, system and interests in force, and it is because of this imposed discipline that it is uncontrolled, because its control is not an option, but an imposition. This means that none of us chooses what will happen to our bodies, since we are all, or almost all, subject to this condition of disciplining. That's why, because it's not an option, I realise that the body is uncontrolled for its subject.

In this way, returning to the answer to the initial question, the practical experiences on which this research is centred are actions whose control, present in each one of them, aims to achieve a lack of control over our own bodies. This lack of control reflects the lack of knowledge we have about ourselves and others, since only society is controlled to operate and comply with rules, which sometimes leads to surprising phenomena.

On the subject of ignorance about others, the control society and surprising phenomena, I recall Ardener's diagram^{183 184} of the relationship between the dominant group and the silenced, in this case men as the dominant group and women as the silenced group. This diagram reflects the dominant structure of society - men - and the unknown - women. Elaine Showalter¹⁸⁵ says that in the case of the dotted circle corresponding to the silenced group, that of women, this represents a "wild zone" (Showalter, 2002, p. 67). Unlike men's space, which is dominant and therefore known to women because they live within its constraints, the "wild" space corresponding to women is unknown to men because women are not allowed to participate in building the structure of society.

Sometimes, when the "wild" or unknown side of women reveals itself, it brings a series of surprises that make society question itself. Just like anybody that is controlled and therefore unaware of its power to act, it can reveal itself and be surprising.

The experiences in this research highlight some social barriers, as is the case with the results of the "Touch Machine"¹⁸⁶, an experience that did not impose any gender restrictions, although some men said they did not feel comfortable touching women and vice versa.

183. See Appendix XVII.

184. Edwin Ardener (1927-1987), English anthropologist.

185. Elaine Showalter (1941), literary critic and feminist writer from the United States.

186. Chapter 4 - Body tests, Essay 3: The whole body, p. 122.

7. *Are these objects tools to inform the body?* (p. 114)

This question, posed in Essay 2 - The body in parts (p. 104), like the previous one, also applies to the rest of the practical reflection essays. My answer to this question is now straightforward: yes, these objects are tools for feeling and informing the body about itself and its relationship with the world and others. In the last essay of this research, ““The weight and lightness of the whole body” (p. 144), in one of the testimonies of the experience¹⁸⁷, the witness also understands that these objects are utensils or tools and wonders whether he is right or wrong.

187. See full testimony in Appendix XVI.

In all practical experiences, objects are utensils or tools that mediate a particular action, whether it's to form an encounter, touch the body in parts, feel the whole body or understand its dimension. In all experiences, objects that are utensils or tools are useful for understanding and are working tools for the body. An object that is a utensil presupposes that it has a useful and supportive dimension, while a tool presupposes a gesture of transformation, so yes, the objects in all experiences are useful for discovering the body and are tools for working on that discovery. Whatever the discovery, also understood as revelation, it is leveraged by the objects that make up the experience and it is these that instigate the whole action of apprehending the experimental action.

8. *Has our body become a naive body again?* (p. 135)

In the reflection in Essay no. 3 - The whole body (p. 122), this question arises, which includes an answer that treats the body as a living organism that always contains something to be discovered and therefore always has a dimension of naivety.

I now realise that the body, beyond what remains to be discovered in it, never completely loses its primordial body side, which always depends on its relational action. In other words, even in adulthood and therefore less dependent on others than when it was born or was a child, the body manages to return to its primary condition. This condition, which presupposes a place of vulnerability, exposure and dependence, is evoked in all the experiences as a practice of reflection on the body. By placing the body in this condition, we can understand it as a relational living organism, whose existence depends on the relationship it establishes with others. By exposing itself to a place of vulnerability, where action on its body depends on the empathy and will of others, the individual body reveals itself and becomes conscious.

In the practical experiences of this research, this primordial place of its existence, which carries a space of vulnerability and naivety,

is formed from the design of the action that constitutes each experience. It is through the elements that make up each experience - objects, space and sound pieces - that I try to take the body back to its relational memory of its primary condition where it feels and makes itself felt, referring to the concept of “tactile bipolarity” mentioned several times throughout this research.¹⁸⁸

188. pp. 33; 61; 105; 108; 125

The body encountering other bodies through a carpet that takes us back to childhood memories of the primary school play mat; the tip of a finger encountering another tip of someone’s finger through an object that provokes a gesture of seeking to know the other person’s body, like the gestures we have when we hold a baby and appreciate its size; massaging someone’s head through a machine that allows someone to care for and explore the other person’s body in order to feel it themselves; or bringing heavy, cold objects to someone’s warm body so that they can feel its weight and size. This list refers to some of the choreographies, actions and gestures that the practical experiences of this research provoke through the elements that make them up.

Directly in response to the question I asked myself, I would say that the body does not return to being a naive body from the place it occupies in the experiences of this research, but rather a body that returns to itself, to its primary memory of being relational.

9. Why feel all this episodically if the reality of the days isn’t going to change? (p. 172)

The last question of this investigation was posed in the last text of Essay 4 - The weight and lightness of the whole body (p. 144) and answered later when reflecting on the four practical experiences (p. 169). However, although it has been answered, like the vast majority of these questions that I’ve been provoked into answering again, I think it’s important to mention the practical experiences again as fleeting episodes. This means that the practical experiences of this research are not an action to solve the problem, but rather actions aimed at making the place of the body conscious. This awareness is achieved through the experience that makes us suspend the frenzy of everyday life, that makes us withdraw from the places we usually frequent, that makes us place the body in another condition than the one we are conditioned to.

Thus, practical experiences and the reflection they generate are a contribution to revealing the body, to making its existence conscious, to a possible transformation of its condition, which is decisive for a new relationship with the body.

These experiences are considered episodic, that is, fleeting, small breaks in the days of those who took part in them, yet they are

proof that the body loses the conditioning that is imposed on it as soon as it is placed in a breach of freedom such as the actions of this research.

Table 4: questions found throughout the thesis

p.	Question
1 38	How can the body reconcile its exaltation with the repression of its sensible power?
2 76	Will the result of these revelations be the “phantasmatics” of the body?
3 79	<i>“what do we have that is most immediate if not our corporeal presence in the world?” (Fernandes, 2021, p. 173).</i>
4 80	<i>Are we thus immersed in a process of asceticism of the body, in which its organic dimension is suppressed in favour of a functional and now also virtualised existence?</i>
5 91	<i>Can today’s physical meeting spaces be spaces of adventure or spaces of escape?</i>
6 93	<i>But isn’t designing objects to provoke a certain type of encounter too much of a desire to control uncontrollability?</i>
7 114	<i>Are these objects tools to inform the body?</i>
8 135	<i>Has our body become a naïve body again?</i>
9 172	<i>Why feel all this episodically if the reality of the day isn’t going to change?</i>

WHAT WILL BECOME OF THE BODY?

I end this research with the question that will keep it going: *What will become of the body?*

There is no single answer to this question, but according to the evolution of this research, I believe I am in a position to say that the body will be the first target of the installed power and will always be the one that each of us has as a refuge.

The practical experiences, those that predate this research and that alerted us to the body’s need to relate to others, as well as those developed for this research that affirm this need and trigger a series of revelations that will contribute to a different perception of the body, are confirmation that the body in episodes of freedom reveals and transcends itself.

Adrienne Rich¹⁸⁹, in her reflection on the politics of localisation

189. Adrienne Rich (1929–2012), writer, poet and feminist activist from the United States of America.

and feminism, lists a series of data that are part of someone's localisation, such as their origin, religion and so on, but she postpones them to say that someone's localisation begins "with the nearest geography - the body" (Rich, 2002, p. 17). She goes on to say that from the body he knows that he exists, that he is a living, individual human being, "whom the young Marx called 'the original principle of human history'" (Rich, 2002, p. 17).

Rich's reflection, as a feminist and activist, places the body as a matter to be reclaimed "against arrogant and privileged abstraction." (Rich, 2002, p. 18. Own translation). For Rich, it is in the body that women's struggle begins, because it is the closest and therefore most authorised territory, in other words, it is the closest thing we have so that, although subject to conditioning, we can use it as a source of indignation.

In "Scenarios for the body" (p. 82) I mentioned the right to feel, to feel the body, a right also claimed by Ligia Clarck, which disrupts the machine body, the object body, the docile and disciplined body they want to keep us in.

In this research, based on design, practical experiences were established that constituted episodes of access for the body to feel, putting on hold or questioning the discipline of the day. These episodes allowed us to become aware of certain symptoms that make our bodies a controlled place with restricted access to its sensible front.

Although these experiences are episodic and ephemeral for the participants, they reveal seeds of change in each body, i.e. even when they are over and the reverberation process has passed (p. 162), they remain in the memory.

All these experiences culminate in a localisation of one's own body and that of others. This localisation occurs from the revelations that each experience brings to the body, which inform individual and collective action to transform it and move a new relationship about this action and primarily about the body.

This research presents itself as a path towards this transformation and the resulting new relationship.

Just as Rich locates the feminist struggle in the body, the essays and practical experiences of this research locate resistance to the automatization and disciplining of everyday life in the body. And just like Clark's "non-objects" (p. 76), the objects of "Formal Encounters", the "Guts" of "Touching the Common Place", the "Touch Machine" and the objects of "Lightweight" (Table 3. p. 172) operated as artefacts of disobedience, disrupting the logic of the docile body.

– *What will become of the body?*

The body, even if asleep, remains a living organism, capable of recovery and rehabilitation at any time.

Design can contribute to this process and as far as I and this research are concerned, I will continue to leverage proposals for access to the body in order to study it, reveal it and transform it, even if only episodically.

I'll end by returning to what I began by saying in this final text, "*the body will be the first target of installed power and it will always be the one that each of us has as a refuge*". It's up to us, designers, artists, activists, humans, to turn this refuge into a territory of insurgency. I hope that this investigation is not an end, but an invitation to touch, care for and feel more.

Final note: The “Touch Machine” (p. 124) is being studied by two psychologists, Rita Antelo and Luís Fernandes (who was mentioned a lot in this research), in order to understand the impact of touch on each person who uses the machine.

The experience “Lightweight” (p. 150) led to the development of the proposal “O corpo comum” (The common body), an experience developed for “Formas de Vizinhança”, the activation programme for Braga’25 - Portuguese Capital of Culture. This experience will bring together people who share the experience of the Quinta da Capela neighbourhood in Braga, Portugal.



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FIGURE CREDITS:

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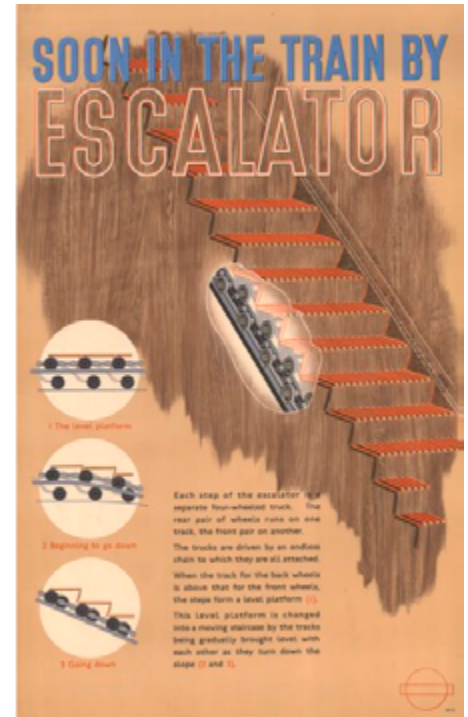
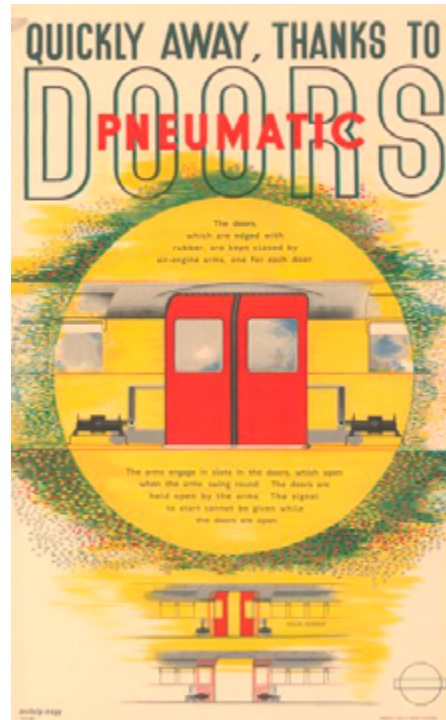
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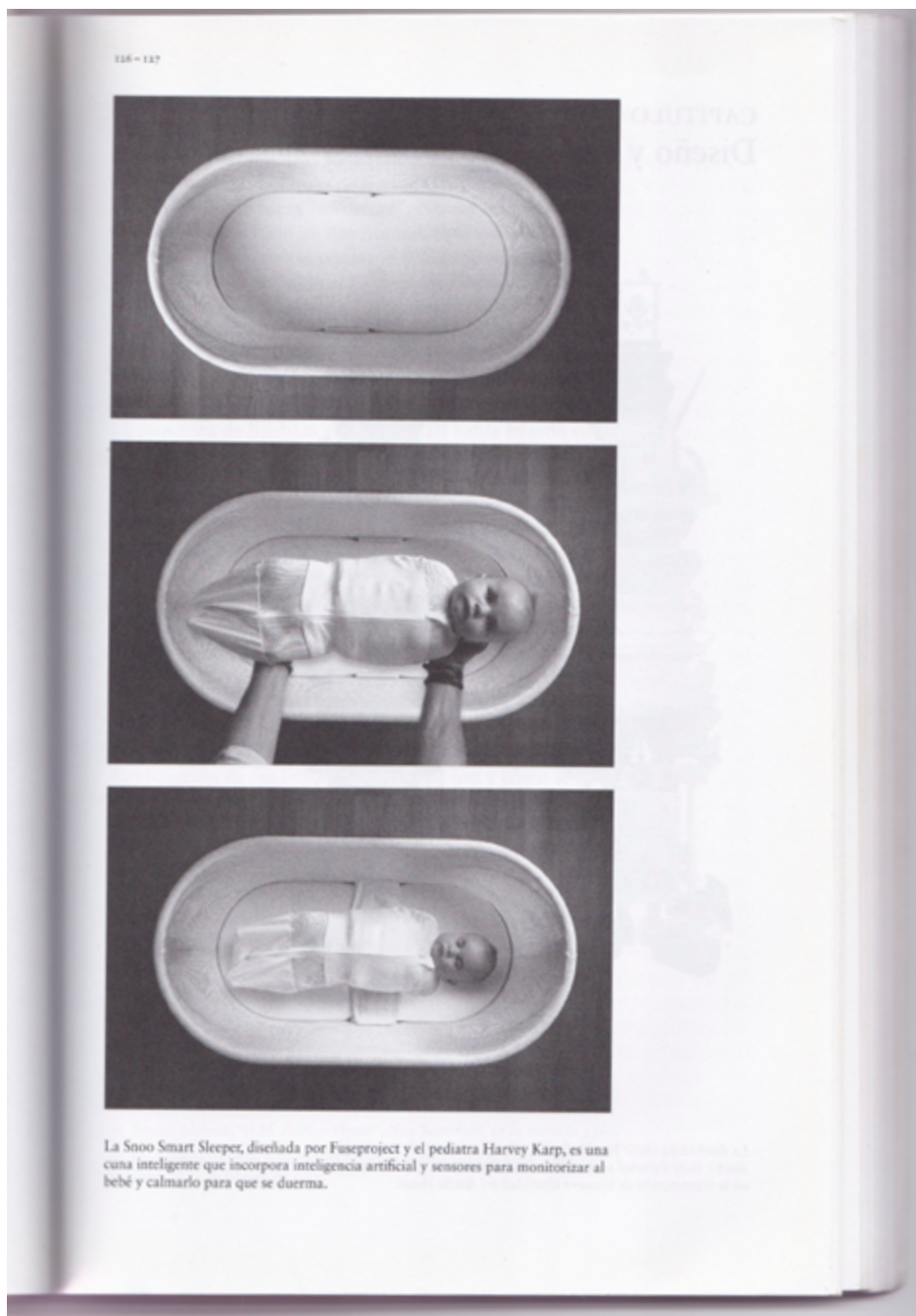
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Appendices

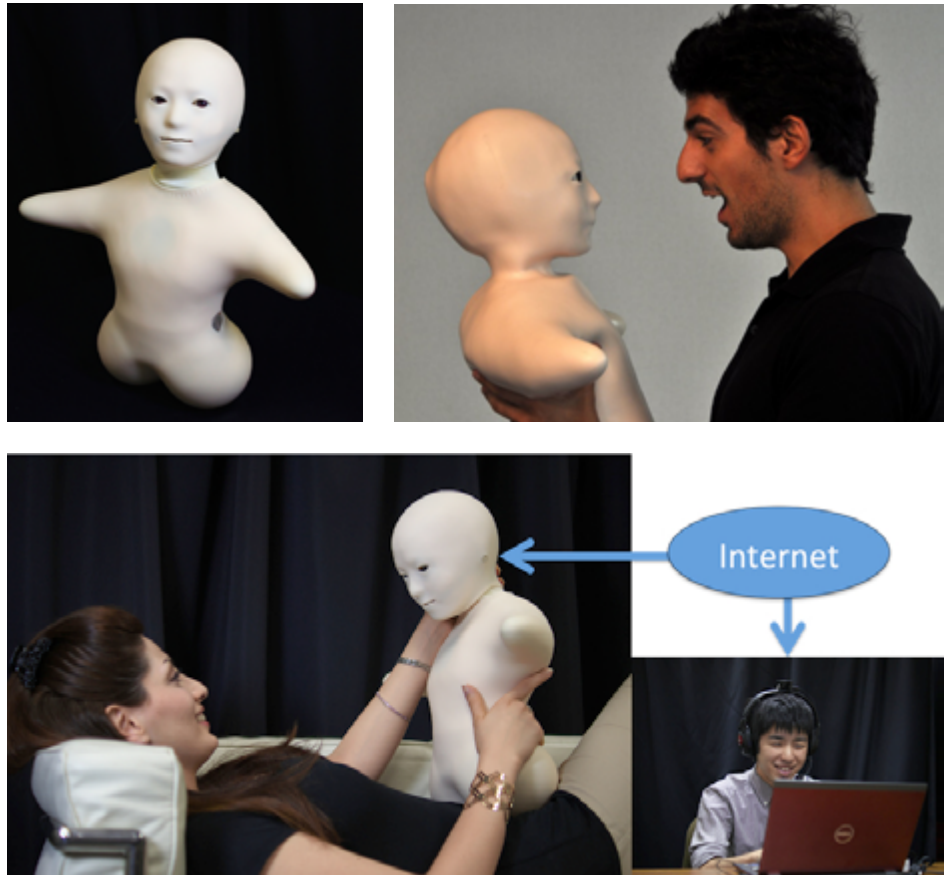


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APPENDIX IV

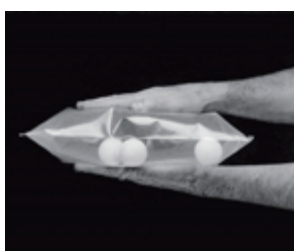


Link
For Mouth and Ears



Link
Objects for a relationship

APPENDIX VI



- 1) Lygia Clark, Objetos Relacionais, Pedra, 1976
- 2) Lygia Clark, Método Terapeutico, Estruturação do Self, 1976
- 3) Lygia Clark, Método Terapeutico, Estruturação do Self, 1976
- 4) Lygia Clark, Método Terapeutico, Estruturação do Self, 1976
- 5) Lygia Clark, Objetos Sensoriais, Ping Pong, 1966
- 6) Lygia Clark, Objetos Sensoriais, Diálogo de Mãos, 1966
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**Text of the sound piece for the
Encounters for the Body session
Luís Luz, 2024**

Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water.

Position yourself by your head, in the area of the top, leaving the wide end to your right and the narrow end to your left. The narrow end should be about the height of your ear.

Note that the verse starts facing outwards.

Just move the wide end.

Take two steps forwards or one to the rear.

Avoid parading.

Adopt a slower rhythm by pressing for a modest moment before returning to the rest position. Continue with this rhythm while you are flowing. If your hand gets tired, try using the other, if both are tired, use your head.

Haste is the enemy of perfection

If you have any doubts about the body's greatest pressure points, we suggest that you pay attention to the most common ones, which include the heels and bunions (on the side or at the tips).

On the other hand, you can thank us later for walking barefoot to avoid friction.

It's a valuable tip, especially if you live in a climate that is instrumentalised by pilim.

Taking your shoes off well, on small occasions, for a short time, but often, will make it easier for you to adapt. Whenever possible, do it anywhere and use your imagination if necessary.

Set expectations and utopian goals for this purpose. Respect their pace and needs, second by second.

Be flexible and accept that you will do what you will do.

Invest

Relate and Ritualise the infinite in order to produce sweat.

Be a self that is also the other.

Put on the myth, paradise and a pair of boots.

Identifying the needs and functionality requirements and comfort mentioned here enhance performance with maximum comfort and safety a.

So more contemporary and with those who wear it in mind:

What is desirable is impossible, what is possible is not undesirable, nor is what,

being of the order of ought to be, deserves to be and therefore needs to be,

making it possible to wait confidently for a tear!

OFFICINA
MUNDI

SÁBADO

22 Junho às 17h

SORAIA GOMES TEIXEIRA LUÍS LUZ

Os artistas residentes de 10 a 22 de Junho na Officina Mundi, propõem uma experiência onde talvez se aguardem episódicos encontros que poderão dar coerência à vivência dos dias.

Participação especial de Amélia Miquelina

Apoios:

REPÚBLICA
PORTUGUESA
CULTURA
DO ALGARVE

dgARTES
DIVERSIDADE, GERAÇÃO, ARTE E CRIATIVIDADE

APPENDIX IX



Link
touching the body in parts - 4ths session

(27th October)

Sitting in my father's workshop, as I bid it farewell, while my parents sew part of the "machine", I think of the reason why I'm making a "Touch Machine". I list the motivations and relate them to conversations with António Guerreiro in Évora and to the writings of Laing.

-Why touch someone without them knowing who touched them?

While discussing another project with António, he told me that the use for those objects constituted an aesthetic experience, in the most radical sense of the word. This machine is too.

It is a place, an object which allows us to feel the dormant and living parts of our bodies. It is a machine because it admits touch repetition from various hands on various bodies.

-Why touch someone without them knowing who touched them?

It is an action which can provoke some strangeness, however it aims to place an object in the "(...) chasm that exists between people" (Laing, 1972) to reveal a known but unspoken behaviour, an unknown behaviour that is therefore hidden.

- This is a disclosing machine?

"When our personal worlds are rediscovered and validated, we start by discovering a carnage, semi-dead bodies" (Laing, 1972). Maybe this experience and others that allow for touch, rescue us from the restrict collection of gestures and behaviors that we're taught to experience at 2 years old.

- This machine is an aesthetic experiment, it is an object that occupies a void, an object that reveals, and at the same time an object that rescues?

(30 October)

Sitting in my father's workshop again, it has been two days since I have started to write a rewrite this small text, and still I cannot find the answers to the questions I have for myself.

The effect of the experience of being touched by others' hands, known or unknown, is an ambiguous one. But it is inside the machine, when we allow ourselves to feel our body be touched that we approach a conscience on touch.

Design is an integral part of how we interact and organise ourselves socially, playing a crucial role in our experiences, both on an individual and collective level. In this context, objects assume particular relevance. Many times, they are designed as an answer to a functional or productive necessity, or assume symbolic value that is related to memories, spaces and beliefs. However, these objects can also be created with the intent to mediate investigative approaches in design, playing an important role in the construction and expansion of the knowledge related to the individual.

In “Maquina do Toque” (Touch Machine), each part is designed in order to suggest an interaction with a specific body part - the head, the torso, the arm and the leg -, and by means of this object, which all are called upon to interact with, we look to observe behaviours that translate the relationship between two bodies: one which takes the place of being touched, and another which takes the place of touching.

By closing the distance between the bodies through hand touch, these authorized gestures represent not only a new form of proximity, but rather propose a reflection on the influence of social, human and cultural values in the approximation and relation to the other, while simultaneously exposing the complexity and nuances of human relationships.

Luís Fernandes on Autogenic Training.

this type of relaxation is based on two elements: inducing body sensations and breathing

the environment should be calm and the therapist's voice serene and monotone

when there's time I do induction on all four limbs, when I have less time I do it on the upper or lower limbs - induction sequence: right upper limb, go through the shoulder, arm, elbow, forearm, wrist and hand segments until you reach the whole body.

We all say the same thing: your arm (or shoulder, or elbow, etc) is getting heavy.

You can speak in the first person: I feel my shoulder getting heavy, my shoulder is heavy...

And he finishes: my whole body is getting heavy, my body is heavy...

From time to time, remember to breathe: and I breathe... I breathe and I'm calm...

then move on to the upper limb on the left and repeat everything

stand on top of the person (behind the head) and say: I'm calm, I'm breathing and I feel good

go again to the right side, right upper limb and repeat everything, but where it said heavy it now says light.

Do not say no longer heavy. If you want to induce lightness, the word heavy must not be present.

remember to remind yourself to breathe from time to time: and I breathe... I feel my breath, I'm calm.

Touch Machine testimonials attached:

	Age	Testimonial
S1	63	The experience of touching and being touched by the Touch Machine was so unique that R. and I then walked up Rua dos Clérigos to the Piolho café. For the next half hour we couldn't stop talking about what we'd just experienced. We both have the feeling that the experience has brought us closer together. I feel R. getting closer, I feel that the level of relational trust we both already had has risen.
S2	57	Putting on availability, without judgement or aprioris, in the satiny comfort of the "Touch Machine", was like turning inside out the clothes we wear every day .
S3	41	My experience of the work "Touch Machine" was as an observer. I decided not to wear the proposed garment or interact directly by touching the person wearing it, because I did not feel comfortable taking on either of these roles. My choice not to wear the garment or touch the body inside it was motivated by personal discomfort. This decision, however, did not distance me from the experience. It invited me to think about personal limits, the exposure of the body and the complexity of interpersonal relationships mediated by touch . The decision not to act directly did not invalidate my connection with the work, but transformed it into an exercise in reflection and perception. The symbolism of clothing as a second skin - an element that protects but also delimits - brought up questions about vulnerability and consent. By not getting directly involved, I was able to understand how touch became a vehicle for exploring personal boundaries, both for those who touched and those who were touched.
S4	29	I do not know why, but I did not have the courage to go into the machine. I should have... I felt exposed being outside and being touched. Maybe if I was inside - being touched - I'd feel less exposed. What the eyes can't see, the heart can't feel. Why would I be touching the body of this unknown person? In any other circumstance, I wouldn't. Strange.
S5	29	To enter the machine was to transform my body into a homogeneous mass , where the part I was touched was irrelevant, while when I touched others I chose which part of someone else's body my hand was going to touch.
S6	37	It was a unique sensory experience. I feel that the Touch Machine is the antithesis of a sensory deprivation tank. Both are designed as sensory experiences, but while the popular tanks create a deeply individual experience, the Touch Machine promotes extreme awareness of the external and the other . One invites disconnection from the outside world, the other invites connection with one's neighbour. An avenging counter-culture object.

S7	35	Despite some initial apprehension, with a mixture of curiosity and fear of the unknown, the experience proved to be extremely calming, like an invitation to drop our defences and let ourselves be embraced by the other in a detached way. As an observer (and player), you feel a closeness to the anonymous in a caring, light and even amusing way.
S8	36	The strangeness of being touched - essentially affectionately, but in fear - by hands that I did not know who they belonged to, made me think about how we have become a society that increasingly uses interfaces/ artefacts/ distancing tactics to live together and show affection. I also thought, as a woman, about the difficult balance between consent and the spontaneity of touch / the desire to be touched but without having my space and body harassed. I also thought about what touch would be like in a society without class markers - would we touch or massage the head of a poor person, a homeless person, a person who does not dress like us if they weren't "invisible" inside a suit?
S9	32	Before entering, I imagined this machine as a second layer, a second skin where I would feel added protection. However, that feeling of protection quickly turned into a double feeling of amusement and vulnerability: I was immobilised, with a limited field of vision, and I was being touched by unpredictable hands. The touch, between tickles and cuddles, brought a feeling of comfort, but discomfort quickly arose from the uncertainty of who was touching me.
S10	50	When I saw the Touch Machine, I immediately wanted to go in and try it out. I did not think so much about what would happen next, the touch of others. The touch was strange, less invasive than I thought, the absence of a barrier between the toucher's hand and the body being touched emphasising this strangeness. I was immobile and apprehensive and immediately wanted to take off my suit and leave, but I did not. When I touched there was restraint, fear of feeling parts of my body that I might not want to be touched by strangers. Perhaps the experience of touching was conditioned by the experience of being touched.
S11	32	First I touched it. I touched a stranger's cucuruto. It was strange to have touched it, but even stranger to realise that touching cucuruto is special. Monday I was touched (with consent! The fact of consent!?) and by several unknown people at the same time!!! «Ahhh, so this is what dogs feel when several humans pet them at the same time."

Script 1st session Lightweight:

We session based on Soraia Gomes Teixeira's residency project

18th October 2024

This activity is a sensory experience and no results are expected. It's an experience of generosity with the body of the other and with the body itself, which takes it away from the foam of the days and concentrates it in its materiality.

This action is part of the autogenic training that is commonly used to help people detach from their daily anxieties and concentrate on what is closest to them, which is their body.

1st, let's all look for stones, just one per person. A small stone whose shape tells us that it will relate well to the leg, the arm, the neck, the chest, the head, the foot, the fingers.

2nd Identify the stones and which part of the body they are for.

3th Divide the group of participants between

1 person lying down

1 person distributes the stones over the other's body according to the narration

1 narrator

4th begins the experience of distributing stones throughout the body

The participants wait for the stones to reach them.

As a narration suggestion, other parts of the body can be introduced, depending on the stones being used:

- We're in a quiet space (describes the space according to what the person reads of it)
- My arm is getting heavy (place the arm stone), my arm is heavy
- My elbow is getting heavy (place the stone on the elbow), my elbow is heavy
- My forearm is getting heavy (put the stone on my forearm), my forearm is heavy
- My hand is getting heavy (put the stone in my hand), my hand is heavy
- My thigh is getting heavy (place stone on thigh), my thigh is heavy
- My knee is getting heavy (put the stone on my knee), my knee is heavy

- My leg is getting heavy (place stone on leg),
my leg is heavy
- My ankle is getting heavy (put the stone
on the ankle), my ankle is heavy
- My body is getting heavy (putting the blanket
of stones on my body), my whole body is heavy
- Remove the stones
- My arm is getting lighter (remove stone from
arm), my arm is lighter
- My elbow is getting lighter (remove the stone
from the elbow), my elbow is lighter
- My forearm is getting light (remove stone from
forearm), my forearm is light
- My hand is getting lighter (remove stone from
hand) my hand is lighter
- My thigh is getting light (remove thigh stone)
my thigh is light
- My knee is getting light (remove knee stone),
my knee light
- My leg is getting light (remove stone from leg),
my leg is light
- My ankle is getting light(remove ankle stone),
my ankle is getting light
- My body is becoming light (remove the blanket
of stones from my body, my body is now light)

Breathe, stand up and feel the ground!

Now we're light

Text of the sound piece for the soundtrack of the second Lightweight session

António Guerreiro, 2025

Link
soundtrack of the Lightweight

This text is a guide to the realisation of an aesthetic experience. The word “aesthetics”, from the Greek “aesthesis”, is used here with the meaning it had before it was completely annexed, in the 18th century, by Baumgarten’s Aesthetics, by the philosophy of art. The experience we’re about to have does not have to do with art, but with what aesthetics originally meant: sensitivity, the ability to feel, to have a perception through the senses.

Let’s exclude one sense, sight, and start with touch. Those taking part in the experience should close their eyes and sit on the floor. Why close your eyes? Because sight is the predominant sense in our culture, the one most associated with thought and rationality. This centralisation of sight, which one philosopher called “ocularcentrism”, diminishes the competence and acuity of the other senses, as all blind people show us. So let’s stop seeing in order to feel more and better.

Using our hands as an instrument rather than a sense organ, we pick up stones, looking for smoother ones and rougher ones. We take them to various areas of the body to realise that it has different levels of sensitivity. The face and belly, for example, are more sensible than the arm. If the skin is the deepest thing, as a poet once wrote, let’s look for the area of the body where contact with the stones is most deeply felt.

Let’s try putting our foot on a stone, as if it were the ground we were walking on. You’ll see that you feel something different, a texture that you find comfortable or not.

Little by little, the various parts of the body mobilised for this experience become alert and feel differently. A heavy stone on your belly is uncomfortable at first. But after a while it makes us feel a certain comfort in this weight.

The stone is cold. But it’s not in your hands that you feel its coldness the most. Try feeling it in your chest. If it’s heavy and you squeeze it hard, it also interferes with your breathing.

Stones are indeed heavy. They make you feel the weight of the world and also its roughness. All you have to do is rub a rough stone in the palm of your hand.

Weight, density, size, volume, temperature. To feel the effect of each of these factors, let's experience with the contact of various stones with different parts of the body. We then see that there is a body "geography" of the various sensitivities, a distribution of different territories. Which part of the body feels the most weight? In which region of the body do you feel the temperature the most? Where does roughness hurt or just cause friction? And a smooth, "rolled" stone, where do we like to feel it slide?

We ignore colour because we have accepted the rule of not seeing. We do without sight in order to feel contact, touch, more and better. If we could see, we would find some stones more "beautiful" than others, we would be considering them with an aesthetic criterion, not an aesthetic of feeling, but an aesthetic of beauty. Let's put it this way: we were entering into aesthetic alienation, which is our addiction. So let's try feeling the form, through contact, instead of seeing the form.

What we want is precisely to annul aesthetic alienation by bringing the body into contact with this mineral matter (the inorganic matter of the world) in order to transform ourselves, to experience a contact that brings about our metamorphosis.

The stones are mute, silent, but let's try hitting one stone against another, as if they were percussion instruments. You realise that there is a resonance. Now try the same exercise, but with different stones: the resonance is also different.

The word "resonance" can be used here as a metaphor. Through touch, through the contact of the stones with the body, it resonates, that is, it becomes an object of apprehension, it emits a music, it becomes the centre of an affective tonality. Tonality, in an acoustic-musical sense, rhymes with the affections of the body.

There is the erotic body, the model body, the utopian body, the obscene body and even the body without organs of schizophrenia. None of these bodies are evoked in this experience. Here, we want the sensible body to triumph, the one in which the skin - we repeat - is the deepest thing.

Lightweight testimonials attached:

	Age	Testimonials
S1	25	I felt lighter. Mentally and physically lighter. Fresh in mind and spirit."
S2	33	<p>The cold weight of the stone chills the body that heats the stone and</p> <p>the hot weight of the stone warms the body the starry sky can't touch</p>
S3	33	<p>"on lightweight, in three acts: one, the lightness of an icy marble blanket on the chest, or the insinuation of a small polished pebble under the fingers and the weight of the warmth of memory, when the hetero-determined choreography imposes the absence of stone on the body. accept the absence and, finally, the loss of memory.</p> <p>two, the light weight as an expression of what we are before the disposition of the other's body, which lies there waiting for the weight, the choreography, the memory. not ceasing to be an aesthetic or sensory exercise, it is a reflection on the limits of power (individual and collective) or on the dimension of empathy in the face of what can be a perfect stranger.</p> <p>three, to return to the ground, to be fragile again. to respect the other person's space of curiosity before our inert body, to intuit the limits of their freedom. feel, once again, the marble blanket on the back, a new small polished pebble on the phalanges (11.), on the forehead (12.).</p> <p>An entire philosophical-political treatise on a 1.5m2 carpet, based on the dichotomy of everyday life, far removed from the linear separation of the world between those who are blessed with a permanent state of lightness and those who allow themselves to collapse under the weight of a lorry."</p>
S4	48	The stones make us light.
S5	27	"A weight is born from the gravitational centre of the stone and this weight is the molecular soul of the union."
S6	24	<p>The first time I felt the weight of the stones, I was tickled by the sensation of strangeness in my back. On further attempts, the weight and contact became the tightest, most comfortable and, at the same time, most impersonal embrace I've ever felt. The cold of the stone, its weight on every part of my body became the main distraction occupying my mind - the "real" weight overcame all others.</p> <p>The pleasure of "receiving" the weight of the stones is transformed into the desire to "place" the stones on the next person, so that they can also feel the same. In parts of the body where they would also like to feel a certain shape, weight or temperature.</p> <p>The experience of light weight is an experience of empathy, which only happens if there is someone to put it on and receive it. The stone (at first impersonal) becomes, after all, an intermediary for touch. The intermediary of an embrace.</p>

S7	29	<p>Space of a former slaughterhouse. Depth to act space. Yellow walls. In the centre, a purple carpet, flanked by several marble stones carved in different sizes and shapes. A silent atmosphere between the pairs - with only the sound and voice guiding us, describing the steps to follow and what the experience was about.</p> <p>The anticipation was immense. I felt somewhat nervous.</p> <p>One person lay down in the centre and, one by one, the others placed the pieces on their bodies.</p> <p>At first I was a “fitter”: I touched the bodies with the cold weight of the stone, choosing them and testing their balance. I felt a calm responsibility - almost a ritual - as I searched for the right place for each piece and at the same time the right way to place it on the other’s body.</p> <p>Secondly, I was a receiver (I took part twice): From the first, the stones were scattered all over the body, creating a sense of dispersion, of fragments. The second time, they lined them up precisely on my back, shoulder blades and head - a very concentrated, almost ceremonial weight that made me aware of my breathing and contact with the floor. as they placed the pieces, I felt my chest being crushed against the floor. I really felt like I could stop breathing. There was a micro-second of fear. My imagination went to rubble and crushed people. At the same time, I felt the care taken by the others in placing the pieces. As they removed them one by one, I felt relief. But I did not realise that the last one had been removed. I felt the weight of the experience, the presence of the stones. Only when I stopped feeling the footsteps of the others around me did I realise that they had removed everything.</p>
S8	67	<p>The marble devices, built by Soraia Teixeira Gomes in 2024, applied to a body at rest horizontally adapt to the volumes, weighing continuously with their own temperature, penetrating the interior.</p> <p>When the stones are removed we feel the lack, the absence, we have already established a relationship with the memory of the world from 700 million years ago.</p>
S9	33	<p>With my eyes closed, guided by the speaker’s voice, I was taken on a journey between lightness and heaviness - physical and symbolic. At first, “the arm is light”, and when the stones were placed on me, the speech changed to “the arm is heavy”, and the feeling of heaviness became real, but curiously not just in the body - it also brought to consciousness internal weights, memories, fatigue. The moment the stones were removed and the voice returned to lightness, it was a profound, liberating relief. The experience, although simple in form, touched an intimate layer: it made me think about how we are affected by invisible burdens. It was undoubtedly an artistic exploration of the therapeutic potential of perception in consciousness.</p>

S10	34	<p>In the centre, a body, lying face down on the floor, in an area marked by an irregular purple felt figure and with a voice echoing in a loop, a mantra that does not give instructions, just offers a reflection that gives solemnity to the moment. Around them, other bodies take turns in the task of: first, choosing one of the stone objects (utensils? instruments?) arranged around them - a concave disc, a cylinder, a bow, an accordion, a chain mail, all made of marble and/or wire; second, placing it under, over, between, supporting, pressing, moving any part of the body away from the lying centre; third, waiting and deciding when it's their turn; and finally, repeating.</p> <p>As with any game, it's a ritual; as with any ritual, it's a relational protocol, made up of rules, few of them explicit and always open to confusion, adaptation and subversion. Who has the power in this exercise? Is it the shape of the objects, which are quite generic and suggest certain uses? The voice-over? The body that submits or allows itself to be subject? The bodies that obey or constrain? The body called Soraia that designed these objects and sculpted them, designed the felt and cut it out, narrated the recording and pressed play, imagined this performative experience and activated it?</p> <p>Here, the bodies were careful, diligent and focused. They did not talk to each other, they did not run, they did not compete. They took turns between the position in the centre - also lying on their backs, on their sides, arms and legs outstretched, in the fetal position, always with their eyes closed - and the standing margins. If it were other bodies, other objects, another voice, would the result be different? You have to experiment.</p> <p>This is the perception of one of those bodies, present in an exercise of analogy with what happens outside the felt carpet, where the objects are much more varied than those available here, and the rules and relationships are as fragile as the body at the centre.</p>
S11	44	<p>I always felt the weight of the stones when I picked them up with my hands. In this experience, I felt their weight, their cold, their texture, but I did not pick them up. The most tactile part of my body went into the background, everything else became more alert and sensible. Time and words were essential for entering a space of lightness and weight.</p>

Observemos agora o diagrama da relação entre o grupo dominante e o silenciado de Ardener:



Contrariamente ao modelo vitoriano das esferas complementares, os grupos de Ardener são representados por círculos que se interceptam. Muito do círculo silenciado Y cai dentro das fronteiras do círculo dominante X; há também um crescente de Y que se encontra fora da fronteira dominante e é, portanto (na terminologia de Ardener), "selvagem". Podemos pensar na "zona selvagem" da cultura das mulheres ao nível espacial, da experiência, ou metafísico. A nível espacial, significa uma área que é, literalmente, terra de ninguém, um lugar proibido aos homens, que corresponde ao lugar em X que está fora dos limites das mulheres. A nível da experiência significa os aspectos do estilo de vida feminino que estão fora de e são diferentes dos dos homens; do mesmo modo, há uma zona correspondente da experiência masculina à qual as mulheres são alheias. Mas se pensarmos na zona selvagem em termos metafísicos, ou de consciência, não temos um espaço masculino correspondente, uma vez que toda a consciência masculina se encontra dentro do círculo da estrutura dominante e, portanto, apenas acessível ou estruturado pela linguagem. Neste sentido, o "selvagem" é sempre imaginário; do ponto de vista masculino, pode ser simplesmente a projecção do inconsciente. Em termos da antropologia cultural, as mulheres sabem como é o crescente masculino, mesmo que nunca o tenham visto, pois este torna-se o sujeito da lenda (como o espaço deserto). Mas os homens não sabem o que existe no espaço selvagem.

Para algumas críticas feministas, a zona selvagem, ou "espaço feminino", tem de ser a morada de uma crítica, uma teoria e uma arte genuinamente centradas na mulher, cujo projecto partilhado será trazer à luz o peso simbólico da consciência feminina, tornar visível o invisível, dar voz ao silenciado. As críticas feministas

Edwin Ardener diagram

This diagram represents a world dominated by men and their ignorance about women. Since the system we live in is built on patriarchal rule, women have minimal influence in the public sphere, rendering their perspectives largely unknown. Thus, when these perspectives emerge, they appear unfamiliar and are sometimes labeled as 'wild.'

This is my interpretation of the framework Elaine Showalter presents in her essay 'Feminist Criticism in the Wilderness' (1986).

Showalter, E. (2002). A Crítica Feminista no Deserto. In *Gênero, Identidade e Desejo. Antologia Crítica de Feminismo Contemporâneo*. (pp. 37-74). Cotovia. p. 67

Embodied Experience:
Design as Practice for Unveiling the Sensible

Soraia Gomes Teixeira