**RESEARCH REFLECTION**

**UNIVERSITY OF THE UNDERGROUND RESEACH BUREAU**

**10.12.2019 – 04.2020**

**CONTENT**

## EXPECTATIONS BY THE INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The University of the Underground presents itself as pluralistic, transdisciplinary organization that offers a tuition-free program. In the brief for the program, researchers where handed out the methodology and outcome expectations of the three-month program.

From the call one coulddraw the information that an attendance and dedication of 60 - 70% was expected.

The expected outcomes were
– Production and presentation of a concept book or magazine (with clear research, your script, your journey in the institution, your references etc...)

– A short performance / event or other of 5 to 7 minutes or more (a scene from your performance, a trailer and such) for exhibition.

– A group podcast presenting your research, this can be a series of broadcasts done individual or not.

– A public presentation of your mini-event's with selected critics and public of your choosing.

More specific were the methodology expected that was clearly communicated, but contained more or less information between the lines

In the research the participants were expected to

- choose an **organisation or an institute**, or **individual** they are interested in and willing to work with. This organisation and its main actors (employees, stakeholders or others, for you to define) should be dealing with countercultures, water and or the creation of community spaces (ie; urban, international affairs, politics or economics etc….). Furthermore this collaboration should entail going out of one's comfort zone, a specific style of interaction and should **embrace both contexts Amsterdam and Cairo.**
- implicitly in the brief and later more explicitly it was expected to chose an **area of research, a research question and link this to this entity.**

- to put the collaboration centrally and develop a relationship, by both examining and investigating the insitution and building up a

relationship with certain individuals. This collaboration also means to identify how an **insitution is doing something wrong**.

- to develop an artistic proposal to this entity, which would then be also their chosen audience or the community they work with. The proposal should be more designed for an **event.**

- not organize the event itself, but to collate a „**pitch"  in the form of a magazine, or other medium towards this entity.**



Instagram-Post of a friend.

LIPPARD, Lucy R.
(2012)

Do something that is: visually striking, socially radical, conceptually and contextually sensitive, sustainable, in the public domain (outside of art venues), and hurts no living thing—something that will change the world. Good luck!

**The Design of experiences research bureau criterias put together (in other words and emphasizes again), the expectations:**

1. Research (Define a research issue (question or problem); adopt and explain suitable methodology; appreciate the contribution the research makes)

2. Analysis (Examination and critical interpretation of situations encountered, ability to use research into the development of experiments and the production)

3. Experimental actions (Ability to demonstrate the formulation, development and implementation of series, groups and/or unique experimental actions in the context of the institution and in collaboration with a given community. Risk taking and testing of ideas and materials in the production of experiences)

4. Documentation of the process (Ability to demonstrate and record intelligent, strategic process, pow-er shifts and outcomes in the context of the institution. Skills in the selected media; awareness and adoption of appropriate conventions and languages; sensitivity to the needs of diverse audiences)

5. Production (Demonstrate skills and appropriate tools, planning and collaboration to enable the exe-cution of ideas, concepts, experimental actions and experiences)

6. Meaningful experiences (Demonstrate the ability to design and shape experiences with a potential to engage social dreaming, social actions and power shifts on a long term basis. These experiences have to introduce/and/or to reveal additional, possibly new meanings to the community, workforce, institution and original existing context.)

7. Innovation (Ability to create original knowledge, creative systems and to question status quo. Original and unique uses of theories, methods and techniques.) 8. Collaborative and / or Independent Professional Working (Demonstration of suitablebehaviour for working inclusively in a professional context, commit- ment and pro-activity)

**Design of experiences research bureau learning outcomes:**

LO1: Have the ability to synthesize your research and to reveal, to interrogate, to engage and to modify systems and power structures in a selected institution through your designed experiences (Films, theatrical practices, languages, critical design, digital and physical etc....) and engineered experimental actions.

LO2: Have the ability to take risks, to produce experiments and outcomes genuinely and innovatively and can push the boundaries of experiential-led and multidisciplinary research. Can demonstrate innovative use of a range of research methods and theoretical references from multiple disciplines relevant to the context of your selected institution.

LO3: Can demonstrate and document cultural entrepreneurship and engagement with institutions, context and community on a long-term basis (counterculture).

LO4: Have the ability to assess the potential of your own work; work independently and proactively to meet deadlines as well as to demonstrate ingenuity in addressing unpredictable situations and engineering meaningful experiences.

In my opinion all in all interesting strategies and aims, but also quite high expectations, especially if these expectations should be linked to other previous research and the trajectory of each researcher. To show the complexity of this endeavor I will in the following pages lay out the additional context I found myself in as a researcher.

# OTHER CONTEXT I PERCEIVE MYSELF IN RELATION TO

**Exclusions in the production of contemporary art**

Artistic work, through its institutional and architectural implementation is often highly inaccessible to many people. This may refer to the actual lack of knowledge of its existence, classic terms of inaccessibility (from wheelchair accessibility to text written in plain language) but also to the inaccessibility created through the conditioned unacceptance of other forms of valid knowledge production outside of the academic apparatus of many people in the Global North. The economies of creating a career in the art world (which enables one to interchange the currency reputation against the currency of e.g. project funding) force artists to adapt to a set of rules that reproduce the artworlds exclusionary mechanisms. Cultural producers, who want to challenge the way in which we produce, use and distribute art, therefore have not only to think about their artworks, but also about the various frameworks in which it is created, used, experienced and archived and the people that play a role in this.

**The disciplined value of contemporary cultural production / Transdisciplinarity and the framework of the University of the Underground**

Artistic work's value is, therefore, dependent on which artworld, often measured and validated by the artist's mobility in terms of participation in organizations being able to give credit. This understanding might be a bit shortsighted, but I formulated it drastically here for the aim of situating the UU as an alternative to the University (without morally judging it). From my perspective the University of the Underground is not directly situated inside of an artworld, but rather at the margin or on the intersection with neighboring disciplines and science. It was associated with the design faculty of the Sandberg institute but has been criticized for the way it was funded and the appropriation of historically charged vocabulary. The UU stresses transdisciplinarity but clearly puts aesthetic production centrally. The visual identity of the University is already refusing the subtle languages of the 2020 art world of the Global North, and the public verbal language is not sensitive enough for some its distinguished discourses. The founder has situated herself between different fields, most clearly associating with the design field, in the domain of experience design. I can't make a profound statement about different verbal and aesthetic languages and the untranslatability of various disciplines, but transdisciplinarity requests people to think about the boundaries of their reference fields.

Disciplines have their histories and are based on premises, axioms and a priori (these terms are used interchangeably to refer to the basic assumptions about reality that form the base of a discipline). Deriving from that methodologies emerged, disciplinary behavior, languages and thought patterns developed. Most "disciplines" we think of are part of Academia, which in itself is based on premises that keep academic knowledge production alive and requires certain behavior patterns and vocabularies. To dismantle and question those premises from a global perspective (which one could call decolonial and feminist) is source of conflict, misunderstanding and at the same time a stimulation in transdisciplinary research and collaboration. With the founder's own in-betweenness, the methodology suggested, seems to draw from her own experience and ideals.

**Academic knowledge**

I mostly write in an academic language here in order to fulfill the requirements to be taken serious in hegemonic systems of value added. And because this language has become a part of me, to a point where I can't write in other words anymore. I mostly rely on books out of the academic canon in order to create confidence in saying what I want to say, but I am deeply critical of the hierarchies and dependencies it creates.

I am a first generation academic, so I am well aware of knowledge that wasn't transmitted in interaction with later-generation academics. I also come from an university that did not offer a tight knit curriculum and in retrospective and comparison not a very up-to-date, diverse or qualitative program (of course there were exceptions and qualitative means measured by the exclusionary means

of academic excellence), which drove me to look for theoretic input in other faculties. I only can name this now, because I took part in another academic training that showed me the richness of what a curriculum could look like, However, if I now reflect on my practices in the language I use here, there are only few who can follow. I am part of an economy I can't escape so easily, because I believe that if I want to work artistically and don't fulfil the requirements of the artworld's in terms of reputation, I must at least be able to relate to the discourses.

**Specifics of the UU methodology:**

As I am currently in the process of grasping and refining my artistic methodology, I was excited to try out the suggested methodology. The key difference between what I was doing and the UU methodology is again axiomatic (see above when I talk about the foundations of a discipline). Both my approach and the UU's approach aim at changing the world through cultural interventions and through the collaboration with unexpected audiences. However the UU acknowledges the given power of "institutions", and refers to institutions as "workforce, power

dynamics and architecture" in the dimension of what I would still call an organization, examples would be e.g. the United Nations, Nasa, but also a city municipality or even smaller organizations.

I, however, look at institutions as relative stable thought patterns, set value creation and validation mechanisms, and frameworks through which we perceive reality, e.g. gender dualism, heteronormativity, hierarchical thinking etc. In my understanding institutions can create organizations (and vice versa), from nations to small businesses but do have very diverse arenas, from intimate relationships to global news channels. In another model, e.g. the model of the dispositive of Foucault, institutions would be "nonverbal practices", practices that originate or are in reciprocal dependency of (often historic) verbal practices and produce and are produced by manifestations (such as architectures, books, … ). For me the role of institutions therefore is much more entangled with a multitude of other practices and I question the power of these large-scale organizations in shaping societies.

While both attitudes can be seen as polar to each other, in reality they

are probably closer than presumed at first glance, however I first had to overcome my aversion towards structural authority / power positions. I don't like to speak with people in power and I don't see them much as active, but much more as execution forces of systems beyond their agency, as for them in order to claim or remain in this position they have to perform according to the requirements of these positions. For me changing these systems is more a liberation for those in power, which can't come from those in charge themselves.

However, I put myself under the challenge to really address my bias. Amongst the requirements for the program were furthermore general outcomes like a tangible experience for the public (which public?) and the empowerment of countercultures and the revealing and shifting of power structures. We are asked to produce a written form of reflection (in a booklet), a performance or presentation of 5-7 minutes and a podcast. Methodologically we should work with an institution in the form suggested by the UU, write a research proposal including a research question, do experiments inside of this institution, develop a concept or event in the form of

a script or play, pitch for a format which can best support communities and countercultures in relation to this institution.

**Working with video/documentation and the draft as parts of processes / ethnomethodology account making**

My method of choice, next to organizing is process documentation and evaluation through audiovisual means. I produce notes and other forms of written process documentation, audio recordings and videos, but also the perceptive state of documenting in the very moment, alters how I relate to my surroundings, creating a heightened attention, which sometimes even makes the recording obsolete. By doing so I observe how people refer to their surroundings, how they create explanations about reality and how they try to be convincing in doing so. Done academically, this evaluation can be executed with an ethnomethodological approach, which gives clear instructions of how to analyze communicative accounts of reality, assessing the social position of the communicator and the limits of their communication to present an accountable explanation of reality, but it also addresses the relationship to

the recipient of this communication. However, I believe I am trained to make these observations on a less conscious level through documentation, which allows me to later evaluate the statements made more closely if necessary. To me most human-related phenomena contain communicative aspects, objects and the way interaction is made with them „speaks" and can therefore be analyzed, in analog manner to human interaction.

Most of the material is never used, but often it only comes to my mind in post-production how something that was said or visible relates to what I am researching at the moment. The re-assembly of those artefacts most of the times results in a form of essayistic, documentary and poetic video, accompanied by text in order to reflect on the process of making.

In parallel I perceive myself as an active part in organization of togetherness, which is a strand of my research I learn from a lot, but which I often don't acknowledge enough.

## Geographic/financial frameworks

The program was taking place in Amsterdam and was connected to Cairo (through one of the facilitator's working relationship and friendship with a woman living in Cairo and some of the participants) – however I did not have a relationship to either of the cities before. In Cairo we took part in a curated program consisting of lectures at the American University, a guided tour through the Egyptian museum, Islamic Cairo and its connection to water and downtown Cairo, an oud lesson, a lesson in belly dance and discussion on contemporary dance in Egypt, a trip to the dried out sea beds in the white desert, a visit to the initiatives "Studio Khana" and „Athar Lina."

## Around these scheduled times, there was very little time to undertake other research trips.

I could take part in the program through the generous continuation of my parent's support and the work I can do remotely at Archive Books and Archive Kabinett. The economic means were the reason for most of the dropouts of the program. Coincidences (like a gig with Gucci), in the widest sense "inherited" money, other forms of wage work and alternative economies (sharing space) made it possible for those to participate, who could afford it. The awareness of the means that made my and the participation of my fellow researchers possible is important, because "tuition-free" – as the UU promotes itself, as well as a small travel stipend for very few involved, does not mean "free education". To go and spontaneously live in Amsterdam requires financial means that many can't accumulate (this quickly).

## Working with groups/ Group dynamics

A group has a beginning, a duration and sometimes an end (even if this is far into the future). Groups do different things together, they solve problems in many ways, they get bored, stuck and overwhelmed and they have conflicts. Everyone seems to know the feeling that occurs if someone has left the room that apparently was very influential in an atmosphere and flow. It leaves a short silence and uncertainty until a new dynamic develops. Some group movements manifest and institutionalize and in a blink of an eye everyone talks bad about one person, unquestioned authority is awarded, or a certain tone has established. People complain about ineffectivity, mistrust, exclusion, costs of inclusion, being left out of decisions and having to take decision… Also, a group is reacting differently to the same thing in different constellations. A dynamic of a group changes with everyone contributing to it. It's getting harder to track these manifestations the bigger a group is and in an analog manner it is becoming more difficult to detect their negative drives, understand one's own role in it , to know the means one has to counteract it and to find the confidence to do so.

Group dynamics are a difficult thing to talk about, because they are ultimately observed from a subjective position. When they are voiced in a form of observation, dependent on who is voicing their thoughts, group dynamics kick in again. The nine researchers we were together, underwent many interesting phases that each contributed to my work and I also contributed to it in my research. I think it is part of the research to also address these group identities we lived through, however I think that this framework does not allow me an in-depth reflection of the life of the group and I will soon forget about the details, so these relationships go undocumented (even though one could draw conclusions from our protocols, files and WhatsApp chats).

The point that I want to make here is: Our lack of knowledges of how to deal with groups in an individualizing framework is an influential factor to anything that happens in relation to this group. It affects e.g. effectivity, satisfaction and brilliance and therefore must be taken into consideration. In the beginning I was very unhappy with the group, as we didn't have a chance to get to know each other. I quickly realized that the diversity wasn't as big as I had hoped for and that the backgrounds in working with groups of the single people present was very one-dimensional. As a person who has worked in various group constellations I would think that I can quickly get a feeling for how well oneself knows in different group constellations and positions, so to me it was apparent that most collaborative experiences of the participants had been prestructured by institutions they have been working with (e.g. film team, teaching,...)

**Working with groups / methodology and relationships**

I have some years of experience in self-organization and group work. Even though I am not professionally trained I have worked in and with groups in various capacities, from teaching positions to representing documenta 14 towards 200 people working as guides, to the initiation of an anti-hierarchical feminist collective. The sizes, tasks and participant's abilities have varied widely. The biggest challenge for me, was to asses my own positionality within groups. I have developed from a speaker to a moderator, using my articulative, synergetic and observational power in order to facilitate that everyone's voice is being heard and braided into more collective agency.

In learning by doing and I have gathered a catalogue of methodologies and skills to plan, improvise and cater to different dynamics for short terms and up to a period for two years (group dynamics change a lot over a longer period of time). However, despite the practical "success" and "failure" I learn from, I lack vocabulary and official terms to describe what I am doing.

That doesn't mean I haven't read about it, but it never fit (due to discipline borders mostly). I know a lot about groups, recurring struggles (the quest for unity vs. the desire for diversity and individual autonomy, recurring difficulties in decision making processes and different forms of deciding), and how to handle different currents.

Coaching, social work, group leading, or teaching do not describe the processes I am part of. They are hyper flexible and originate from my close observation and my artistic practice. I consider social practice and organization as part of my artistic work, because I discuss, build and help relationships grow.

I perceive that we lack vocabulary to describe the different forms of relationships we engage in. We can't describe different forms of friendship, love, exploitation, vulnerability exposure, sexual attraction or conflict easily. It gets even more difficult if we want to track and archive those relationships, because the prominent modes we think in are (in)formal hierarchies and networks (centralized and distributed e.g.), which are not flexible enough to describe social life, nor our variations of relationships. It also ultimately results in the glorification of individuals and fosters some kind of vagueness and mystery around the exact ways that bring forth accumulations of people and their decisions, even though it is possible to map the different kinds of influences we have on each other and that could result in gathering.

It is decomplexifying, but not accurate to understand togetherness only in terms of power relations, because power seems to be a much too generic term for the multitude of dependencies and influences, we have. Challenged through technology the modes we relate to each other diversify even more, dependent on the devices, software and access to it.

Through our own subjectivity we feel unique in creating relationships, but we are blind for the patterns of affection. We often can't see our personal history's impact on how we impact one another, or the history of greater collectives we are part of (we can't see how the promotion of the healthy body, disables us from loving the "unhealthy" body.). With this inability to describe relationships between single people and within groups, we struggle to accurately understand social change. Another factor in misunderstanding social change is the perception of a person as individual, prominently promoted by the global North and capitalism. The ideal subjectivity of the patriarchal, capitalist modernity is the subjectivity of the autonomous, authentic person, often the able-

bodied, white, educated cis male. Sovereign subjectivity creates a sense of disconnection and loneliness, that many people in the global North know.

And in addition to our social life, we entangle objects into our dividual subjectivities. But I won't even start talking about these modes of intimacy now. However, I think it is only relationships which overcome our systems (e.g. transnational romantic relationships, inter-abled friendships, professional friendships…)

**Working with groups / authorship and collaboration**

The program was promoting collaboration and focusing on communities and with that questions around group organization and methodology come up. It feels so redundant to say this, but the aforementioned individualized subjectivity is a driving force in individualized artistic production. The program still stressed an individualized researcher subject that stands at the "top" or in the "center" of his*her*their research.

**The body**

I have a very big butt; I am perceived as being fat and often I also feel fat. This statement would be found rarely in an academic research paper. However, my body is a big part of what I was doing and will be doing, I actually think that it was my butt, which finally got me somewhere, where I could start from. The research group consisted of very different bodies, where size, skin color, hair texture, ethnicity, age, gender and ability were read and interpreted. The movement of the body was part of the program, too, and where we put our bodies. The location of the basement, its smell, sound, temperature, design but mostly the lack of light had a big effect on our bodies and wallets (the ability to operate a bike is not a given in every corner of the world). The commuting to Rotterdam actually also was an unexpected difficulty in relation to my body's inability to synchronize with the ever-changing scenery.

The presence of the body to be seen and to see is the last context I would like to introduce before I move on to the problem. I am also writing that while the Corona Virus is rapidly spreading, exhibitions are being cancelled, people can't travel,

we are advised not to hug. Global movements of bodies and intimacy suddenly become an issue of the mainstream news.

**Deriving from the expectations of the program and my other contexts the following conflicts occured.**

**The desire to collaborate and the lack of agreement on collaboration**

One of the first struggles I encountered was my desire to collaborate within a group that I didn't know in how far they wanted to or were meant to collaborate. There was no consciousness on how to work together, what was going to take place or even could take place. It was also not useful that the facilitation of the University oscillated between requesting professional collaboration and the treatment of the researchers as students. The switching between positions and the mediation between these identities took unnecessary energy.

**Not being local / lack of knowledge of groups of people**

How to relate to a place that is not yours?

Not being local in neither Amsterdam nor Cairo brought up the question of how to approach the contexts of both cities. I neither know the local language of both places, nor the mentalities, social structures or city histories. Having lived in one place for ten years of my adult life, being engaged with different social communities of this city over time, I know how deep and far this knowledge can go and how superficial an impression can remain if I think back to my first years in this city. Arstist working with participative/socially engaged art, but e.g. also the always changing  staff of biennials often are asked to engage with communities of a certain place in a given period of time. We were in addition asked to identify relevant institutions and engage with them. How do you engage with a city that you don't know and that you don't feel connected to? How are you entitled to do so? I am actually to no context as relevant as to my local context. So which right do I have to "chose another context?

The assessment of how to approach a city and to understand my posiiton took also a lot of invisible energy.

**Combining the two places**

I found it very difficult to make a meaningful connection between those two locations. To me Amsterdam was kind of irrelevant, because the local urgencies aren't as pressing and require a much more long-term commitment to understand the differenciated powers at play. The European bureaucracy would make this an analysis of administrational power, and petrified governance models, which is of interest for me, but takes a lot of time, is done in multifaceted and relevant ways (e.g. through anti-colonial research) and the level I could have reached in this short time, even with a serious investment, would not differ very much from the analysis of any of any other European town. Of course, I found some interesting incidents in the European context, but through the development of the research, the relevant connections would require a much more in-depth research so that the choice was to either go superficial or not do it, so I decided for the latter one.

Grinding my head over possible connections and eventually taking the decision also took a lot of time.

**Lack of methodology in researching from an actively self-disempowered position**

Even though I know how to access people for a specific subject in the local context I come from, knowing the different economies which allow us to share conversations, it is not a given of how to look at a foreign city from the perspective of a white, able-bodied, cis, educated, young European woman. Regarding Cairo I have to take into account my position even more and the means I can use to understand a city/context. I have to confront the lack of entitlement I have to put my desires first, taking into account the privileges I am equipped with. I have to be considerate about whom I work with and how to mediate between their necessities and needs and my desires (e.g. to make relevant critique). My position as an artist is different from the position of an anthropologist, who might have tools and methodologies to use. As an artist is can chose my methods from

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a variety of contexts and even create new ones.

Earlier to this program the privileges I am equipped with have resulted in a relative muteness, since I didn't allow myself to have an opinion on anything that I wasn't sure on and able to speak about, which was actually a lot.

I became afraid of taking up space. As a person from a privileged background I can talk about the context I am familiar with, to render visible my privileges and create possibilities to share them, e.g. by creating a space for others.

Earlier in my work I turned to actively disempowering myself, which is the most politically consistent consequence of the assessment of my position. While I think this is a necessary step to derive from, I don't have methodologies to work from an actively disempowered position, especially with the methodology of the University of the Underground, which is more concerned with empowering oneself.

This referred also to the compilation of information. I don't have the methodology to work such a short time span with forms of research that I prefer. Towards the end of the physical phase of the University of the Underground, I had an argument with one of its facilitators, Fahmy Shahin, about how to aquire knowledge about a place.

I tentatively defend the hypothesis that it is a way of effective and valid knowledge production and analysis to establish very different relationships with different people in a context and to listen to their accounts of reality, physically experience their life, analyze their means of reasoning, synthesize it with the contexts I know about them and then to relate these totally biased and subjective perspectives to one another (including a thorough analysis of my own perspective and the group dynamics involved if it is a team of researchers).

At the moment I think that this would for sure not add up to a all-encompassing image of reality, but it would be clear in its gaps and influential forces, whereas the analysis of a conflict through evaluating different media and scholarly work would not lead to a better but different account of reality, with its own gaps. This stance does not allow me to have an opinion on something as long as I don't have made connection with different people of this context. Fahmy did not agree on that and insisted that it is laziness not to form an opinion, while all relevant sources where accessible (e.g. through the internet) and that one only has to find the divergent opinions. Unfortunately we could not continue this discussion as it was blocked by him, but the conflict, whether one can have an opinion under certain voluntary chosen limitations or not, remains unresolved and sums up the most basic trouble I had with the suggested research methodology.

## Mode of thinking about groups might be inherently colonial

I can't exclude the possibility that my thinking about groups and collective agency is colonial and I don't know how to dismantle it in the timeframe given (the primate of democracy and anti-hierarchy as morally superior e.g.). I might have to redefine collective agency and oppression, which I felt I didn't have time to. I think it would only be morally correct if I actually question the modes I am thinking about groups more.

## Timeframe possibly too short

As mentioned the timeframe was 3 months only, including a short excursion of 10 days to Cairo. Most of the group's participants had to work in addition to that, including me. Originally we were asked to spend 60%-70% of our time for the University of the Underground. It is possible to create meaningful encounter in a short time, but what needs to be done to create a solid context for a research? How long does it take to make connections and to orientate in a city? It is not set, nor clear by what means to approach a place.

How can I make this part of a longer sustainable project?

Through my total awareness of my lack of knowledge I could not successfully identify audiences or influential stakeholders to a degree it would fit my own standards. The inability to gather the necessary information quickly, without giving up the methodology almost made it impossible to make a choice. And I couldn't invest myself in a fight that I don't fully support. I have to be modest about statements I make and can't support making bold statements unless I can be sure and it is backed up.

In my research proposal I tried to combine all expectations, the short time given and artistic production. Since I could not minimize the general scope of my research, I used the trick of referring to everything, but then slicing only a part of it into the timeframe given.

*Tides are the rise and fall of sea levels caused by the combined effects of the gravitational forces exerted by the Moon and the Sun, and the rotation of the Earth.
Tidal phenomena are not limited to the oceans, but can occur in other systems whenever a gravitational field that varies in time and space is present.
Tides vary on timescales ranging from hours to years due to a number of factors, which determine the lunitidal interval.
This project is about the influential factors that create social change.

# Tides* in the swimming pool –

**How to ethically identify groups, methodologies and frameworks for transnational artistic action (with European participation) in order to induce sustainable and inclusive social change?**

The aim of this research is to explore and render visible methodologies and roles of movement making, collective agency, and the deconstruction of the power/marginalization dualism in order to find collaborative artistic gestures. The overall scope is set to find out who needs to listen to whom for planning collective action in order to create sustainable revolutions (or at least social change) and how to create these necessary encounters through artistic means, in this specific case through setting the swimming pool as a central, yet not broadly researched global architectural, political, ecological and social actor. By speaking with and through the swimming pool, both the socio-economic and the physical are taken into account to ask profound questions about how we act on our relationships emotionally, physically and politically, but also how we construct ourselves through others in context of different geographies.

**The strands of this project will expand on:**
1. Mapping constructions of the public and private space (and the personal/political) in a European and MENA context by focusing on the swimming pool.

2. Dismantling relevant institutions, groups and positions involved in social change through a cartography of family and class histories to understand structural bias and the identification of interface-positions, with the aim of unpacking the secret potential of the so-called marginalized or irrelevant.

3. The description of a clear methodology of artistic research that includes the physical immersion in a specific context, its documentation and reflection. Including a thorough tool of self-examination to support the external access of artists and other researchers when entering new contexts, like the complexity of an entire city and reflections on relationship making.

4. The fostering and facilitations of unlikely alliances: A clear methodology of how to bring people together with an evaluation of case studies of different experiments.

Since this scope is not to be reached within the 1,5 months in Amsterdam, I will focus on a small chapter of this research.

**Amsterdam context**
In the 1,5 months in Amsterdam I will be concentrating on sharpening my artistic methodology by reflecting on the field trip to Cairo (by editing the gathered audio.visual material), by doing field trips to the different swimming pools in Amsterdam (evaluating their psychogeographic identities), by developing a format that aims to bring together disabled dutch activists and academic/artistic change makers, since I am well experienced in this field of action and am confident to be able to identify local actors and facilitate a conversation on equal footing and by identifying more relevant persons.

I will document my process in order to render visible how an artistic process can help identifying the relevant forces in social change and how this is to be accomplished through the case study of attempts of creating video proposals to various social entities and emerging questions out of this process (e.g.: who am I to make these proposals?). Identified groups I want to direct my video proposals to: mothers, small pool building companies in Egypt, first generation academics, and the city planners of new cairo and the new capiutal of Egypt, international peace building initiatives. Parallelly I would like to establish and maintain a relationship with some persons I have met in Cairo in order to reflect on possible collective action in the future (and draft a project proposal for funding entities)

**Intellectual Context**
Discourse on post/de-/coloniality
City planning (togetherness)
Private/public debates (personal/official)
Multiplicity/hydrofeminism in the formation of subjectivities
Critique towards post-humanism
Art world publishing
Research on social movements

**Methods and approach**
Using my experience as artist, organizer, and sociologist:

Observing and experiencing: Bathing, immersive "individual" and collective action

Interviews with members of institutions about their personal backgrounds.

Documentation (video, sound, protocol).

Organization and participative design of event

Making video proposals, identifying gaps in knowledge, info, addressing.

Documenting failure if possible. Shifting from an obsession of content, to the experience and practice of togetherness

Creating accessibility for research findings.

## RESEARCH PROCESS

## BILIOGRAPHY

I started compiling a bibliography as it helps me to understand the scope of my research and helps me to identify gaps. This Bibliography is crap, I would have to rework it, but I know how to navigate my literature a little through it. It is also not exhaustive, as part of the books I refer to is in another bibliography and as I also have printed books, that are not in the List now (especially some of the Books I purchased at the AUC Bookstore in Cairo). I want to give access to my way of gathering, categorizing and reading text sources.

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**RESEARCH PROCESS**

**ESTABLISHING/MAINTAINING/FAILING RELATIONSHIPS - LEARNING FROM RELATIONSHIPS**

| | |
|---|---|
| Lama | Before Christmas I tried to make remote relationships to Egypt by calling up all people from Egypt involved in the program at that time. They helped me to set my focus point, because I had two main interests, one to explore the revolutionary potential of mothers when making narrative accounts about reality towards their children and the second one was about swimming pools, which was instantly picked up by Lama and the others, saying it would be a good way to talk about class without referring to it too directly, which is always difficult in the political circumstances. Lama was super important, because she offered help right away and when I came to Egypt, she helped me to have an independent research. She was also so generous in letting me see the way she lives, and this experience in reflection of her warmth was just so important to the whole endeavor. |
| Aida | Aida was also in that call, but struggled herself so much, that I knew I didn't want to stretch her attention too much. Since she was with us in Amsterdam, the many conversations we had, helped me to understand growing up and being a young adult in Egypt, from language, pop culture, gender and class differences, to privilege, economy and many other topics. Her personal accounts of her life opened up so many strands of thinking, e.g. about family dynamics and gender, that I can't possibly acknowledge enough her presence. |
| Huda | I met Huda at Studio Khana through the program, as she runs the program there and she immediately picked up my idea about motherhood and I felt an immediate connection. Since she felt it too, we met on a video call and since then discuss many topics that similarly to Aida circle around privilege, but also about how to think art differently, how to share knowledge, how to interact with a local context. We talk about education, language, mental health, city planning, group methods... Since she went to a public university, her perspective is different from Aida's and Lama's, but in reflection I kind of get an idea of a variety. Also I think her perspective is very unique, as she really tries to organizationally change something. |
| E. | E. is the absolute counterpart to everything. I met him in a steamy encounter in Cairo and physically we became intimate. We continued being in conversation, but these conversations are very different, as I almost don't share any of his perspectives. His life is so much more remote from me, that knowing him is a continuous reminder of my limited means of understanding and being understood on a verbal level (even though his English is very good). Through him I can reflect on demarcations in Egypt, that would remain very virtual, if I wasn't confronted with it. |
| Honey | Honey was my flat mate in Rotterdam, where I lived throughout February (commuting to Amsterdam) and through her, as she is part of an art world, in which social interaction is a valid artistic work, I learnt to understand emotionally, |

## ESTABLISHING/MAINTAINING/FAILING RELATIONSHIPS - LEARNING FROM RELATIONSHIPS

|  |  |
|---|---|
|  | that I am entitled to frame my artistic work the way I now try to do it. Her presence gave me confidence, which is a big part of research I think. Through her I actually also met other artists concerned with issues such as „place-making" and it gave me an insight in the actual lack of contextualization of this praxis in this specific context and the confidence that a community can give without proper contextualization. |
| Sabine | Sabine is my long-time collaborator on inclusivity (she is severely disabled herself) and speaking to her on the phone had a big impact on what I was thinking about. We currently try to encourage the documenta 15 curatorial team to think mor inclusively for the next edition and were scheduled to have a presentation during the period of the UU residency, which eventually didn't take place due to corona. Since I needed to address Tokenism in relation to this program, as it was so short and therefore was really likely to use people as tokens, we had many conversations, revealing that she used to be a water therapist and taught non-sexual intimacy body work, water dance and giving birth in the water for many years. She fueled my desire to think about in which frameworks this could be useful and to experiment with it in relation to swimming pools. I recorded an interview on her work, which could be transcribed. |
| Theo | Theo is part of TAAK and commissions socially embedded artistic work. Sabine contacted him online and scheduled a meeting for us. This conversation addressed the difficulty of structurally implementing artistic work in processes of participative planning and was very insightful in relation to what is actually possible to fund and implement and under which circumstances. |
| Sandra | I met Sandra during the Womenx-March on the occasion of the international women's day indirectly through Staci, who works at CASCO and whom I met 2017 and whom I know addresses issues on inclusivity. Sandra is a disabled artist and activist and I decided to spend the rest of the afternoon with her and her friend. Through them I could understand the network of disabled activism in the Netherlands better and which role art institutions play. If I had been keen on realizing this workshop, she would have been a person I would have confidently asked for help without fearing tokenism (basically by addressing the issue right away) |
| Sabine P. | I can't make this list without referring to the huge importance of Sabine, who has made my life so much better in Amsterdam. Her confidence and embodied wisdom and the strength she invests in everything is just so mind-blowing and essential for my desire to continue working in this environment. Sabine helped me to reflect my position in the |

## ESTABLISHING/MAINTAINING/FAILING RELATIONSHIPS - LEARNING FROM RELATIONSHIPS

|  |  |
|---|---|
|  | group and was extremely supportive. She reminded me of how important our mission is to deconstruct colonialism and its thought patterns every day. I just felt so much love for her and she was willing to reciprocate affection without demands, which was just so important for me to be part of everything. |
| Researchers | My affection also goes out to my other fellow researchers, who have taught me so much! I have felt accepted and rewarded with their trust and support in so many dimensions. I could write a lot about what happened, but it is not possible to sum it up. I also want to acknowledge those who were excluded for various reasons and express that their contribution would have been very important. Working with you helped me again to think in practice and understand the moderation and maintenance of a group more and more as an artistic process, too. |
| Anonymous person | My attempt to build a relationship with *** was not successful, even though I would have been very happy to understand another embodied experience of masculinity in Egypt through him. Sometimes people don't let this happen for various reasons and it is ok. But I must say, this is a slightly sad note for me. |
| Nelly and Lauren | Since I feel I can't say that I made a relationship, but that it was also the institutional framework, I can't write about our relationships. It is too much shaped by the framework. But within the framework I learnt mostly about how they interacted with one another and the world. I am deeply thankful for the hints and encouragement that I always felt as well as the genuine dedication to make something happen. |
| Jolle Demmers | Jolle Demmers was the last person I contacted in an attempt to understand the field of conflict studies better. Throughout my research I gradually learnt, that what I want to do as an artist is to develop methodologies to analyze conflict and deal with it artistically together with those affected. it was already Corona-times so she did not come back to me initially but referred me to her book, which I have read since then. It is remarkable how conflict studies as a transdisciplinary field take into account the epistemological and ontological differences I experience and I hope I can establish a relationship with her for advancing further in this topic. |
| other: | I have written many e-mails in this process and had some phone calls. Encounters didn't lead anywhere, sometimes I didn't receive a response. Some encounters still wait to become meaningful, e.g.my conversation with the head of one of the four biggest pool building companies in Egypt to understand his account of the world, but I lacked time to expand on that. |

## RESEARCH PROCESS

## INITIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT POOLS IN GENERAL

In the very beginning I compiled a set of questions that could become interesting in the process.

Personal Aims:

Aim 1: Make unlikely connections – find the connections that are there, but not obvious.

Aim 2: Produce something that is aesthetically appealing, useful, substantial (possibly overcoming my subjectivity) and legitimate.

Aim 3: explore the Methodology of the UU

**Preliminary research questions-cluster**
1. What does the access to, the use of and the ownership of pools /swimming opportunities say about the structure of Egypt's/Dutch society?
2. Does the collective and communal use of bigger water reservoirs establish a communal connection/allow for relation across division lines?
3. Are there group methodologies that can create physical ways for communicating across division lines (schizms) - which kind of institutions prevent this?

**More specifically (minor questions):**

1. how do class/gender/ limit access?
2. how do class/gender influence produced "bodies"?
3. Who/ what are the most influential stakeholders in creating pools/giving access to swimming opportunities
4. What are the most prominent (contemporary) and marginalized (historic) narratives of spending time together in the water?
5. How does the relative scarcity of water relate to pools? Are there any restrictions made?
6. How are people learning to swim and for which purpose?
7. How has this changed throughout the last century?
8. What are the specific body politics of the different occasions for using a larger water together?
9. Which kinds of sports are carried out in the pools (aqua fitness, water polo, swimming, jumping, äesthetic group swimming,...)? Who is attending?
10. Are there any rituals that require the full immersion of one's body into water (historic, contemporary)?
11. What are the sites in which people collectively immerse themselves in water Egypt?
12. How do people spend time in the water/ around the water (leisure, sport ?)
13. Why do they spend their time like this?
14. What is the structure of people attending a swimming site?
15. How much is the water per $m^3$?
16. Can anybody fill a pool (acces to larger amounts of water)?
17. Where is fresh water stored? How is it produced? How is it surveilled?

**INITIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT POOLS IN GENERAL**

I was looking for a relevant institution, but when you come from the perspective of the pool, there are so many insitutions to be considered and very specific ones in each regard.
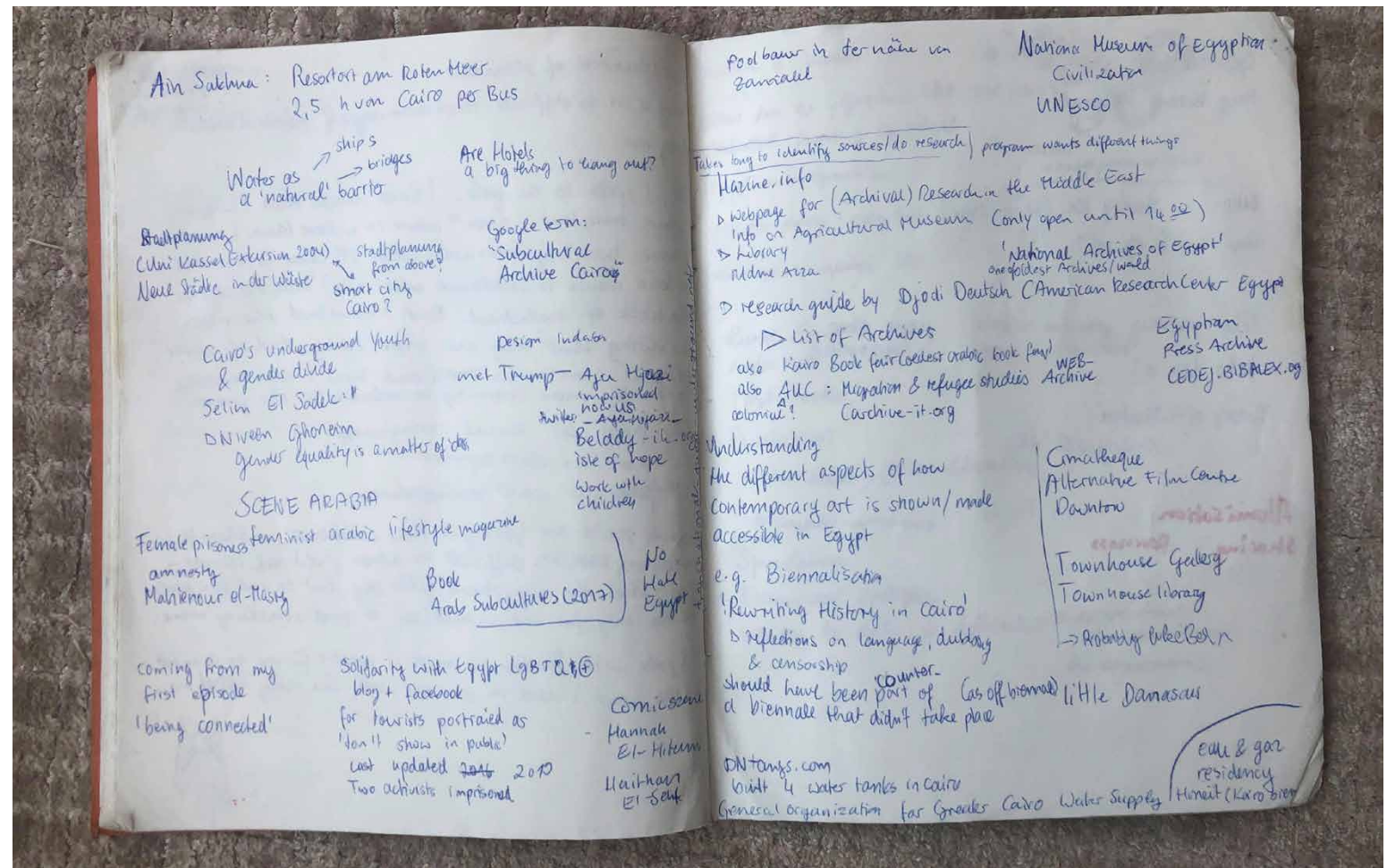
# RESEARCH PROCESS

## INITIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT POOLS IN GENERAL

Here are some visual entry points I collected.







Collective rituals involving water
Country Clubs
Synchonous swimming
Public river baths
Luxury pools
Water tank maintenance
Poold building profession
Ingo Niermann films on inclusivity

## RESEARCH PROCESS

## INITIAL QUESTIONS ABOUT POOLS IN GENERAL

Here are some exemplatory stills from my documetnation material. As I documented in video and audio (for reference read paragraph about my methodology above).

## RESEARCH PROCESS

## VIDEO PROPOSALS

Nelly encouraged me to think about the position of the pool as speaker, which didn't convince myself in the beginning, but which very soon became a great option to overcome my own subjectivity, or to at least reflect my subjectivity differently.

I quickly mapped out the coordinates of my four proposals and then started to engage in the production, which should inform my research further.

Due to Corona and my own megalomania, I could only finish a a raw cut of one proposal, because making it took much longer than expected. Not because of the actual work load, but because I was thinking in relation to everything which I mentioned before and because I was reading too much and a little bit aimlessly after the physical program had stopped, so my focus shifted away from production, to gaining more insight.

In the following pages I am going to introduce the insights that I gained.

Contribution to the publication
(written in past tense, due to the prospected end of the process and finishing also the works):

**How to ethically identify groups, methodologies and frameworks for transnational artistic action (with European participation) in order to induce sustainable and inclusive social change?**

The aim of my research is to explore and render visible methodologies and roles of movement making, collective agency, and the deconstruction of the power/marginalization dualism in order to find collaborative artistic gestures. The overall scope is set to find out who needs to listen to whom for planning collective action in order to create sustainable social change and how to facilitate the necessary encounters through artistic means. The experimental methodology explored within this bigger framework is centered around the swimming pool as a global architectural, political, ecological and social actor. By speaking through the swimming pool, both the socio-economic and the physical are taken into account in order to ask questions about how we act on our relationships emotionally, physically and politically, but also how we construct ourselves through each other in context of different geographies.

The specificity of a pool's location and the people and concepts connected to it, set the boundaries for affected groups but also brings to light the paradoxity of these relations across nations and through time (e.g. the American Ambassador and uber drivers). For this chapter I documented larger bodies of water in Egypt on video. I evaluated my documented material in relation to academic research, methodologies of allies (from waterdance to breathing with the head turned over), looking through the lens of personal relationships (e.g. with local disability activists) and the information I could gather from my memory. By doing so I closely assessed my colonizing subjectivity and gaps in knowledge which I tried to overcome in the poetic, personalized voice of the swimming pool in order to still invite a future dialogue.

This opportunity to research made it even more pressing for me to develop a bigger vocabulary and a precise methodology to name and shape our intimate and group relationships beyond simplifications of the individualized global North.

**RESEARCH PROCESS**

**VIDEO PROPOSALS - MIVIDA COMMUNITY CLUB POOL**

As mentioned above, frameworks of distribution must be considered. When thinking about the proposals I also considered a strategy of how to get the proposal to my desired conversation partners. This is a set-up for promoting a campaign in which invitations with the video proposal would be distributed amongst the households of the Mivida gated communities with the aim of reaching out to the desired group of first generation academics.



INVITATION
دعوة

FOR FEMALE IDENTIFYING FIRST GENERATION
ACADEMICS LIVING IN NEW CAIRO.

POOL MONOLOG I
THE MIVIDA MIVIDA COMMUNITY CLUB
SWIMMING POOL IS SPEAKING ABOUT
USEFUL FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

**VIDEO PROPOSALS - MIVIDA COMMUNITY CLUB POOL**

**Tentative questions:**

Who is responsible for it?
Who goes there? Who is connected to it?

Wasthis group in my proposed list ? (small pool building companies in Egypt, first generation academics, and the city planners of new cairo and the new capiutal of Egypt, international peace building initiatives).

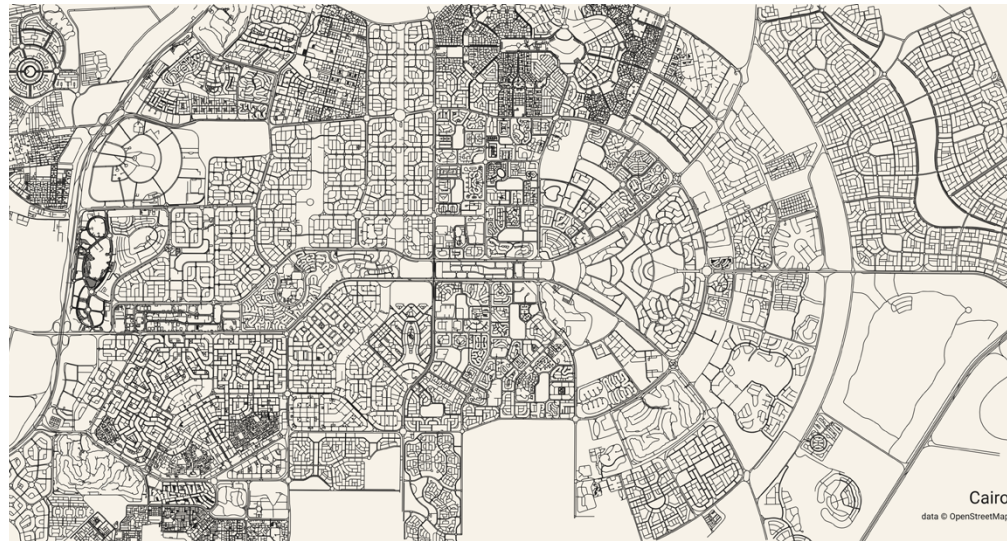What is these people's revolutionary potential?

What would the pool say to them, what could be the agenda of the pool and why?

Why can the pool say it and not me?

How does the pool feel?

What are the underlying needs?

(What would the pool say in Amsterdam?)



Cairo
data © OpenStreetMap

**Where is the pool?**

The pool is located in the gated Community „Mivida" in New Cairo, a desert city developed from the early 2000s.

**Who is it for?**

I identified that I wanted to address the women I met, but only projected a potential in making social change in women who do have an experience of translation of reality in their life, which I attributed to their experience in having class upwards mobility in their family (this is highly contingent, I could have also addressed gay people, or trans people, or people with a migration background from a less reputational nation). I think that the experience of two different modes of reality makes it more easy to empathize with people who don't have the same privileges and therefore creates a bigger sense of responsibility of thinking more inclusively, furthermore it creates a bigger sensibility for how things are communicated towards different stakeholders.

**What does the pool want to say?**

The pool in this case wants to address this sense of responsibility and suggest a way of implementing social change, which it does by suggesting collectivizing and finding their own way of imagining a future (disregarding architecturally pre-shaped environments)

How does it feel and what is the tone it would chose and what would be the tone most effective?

The pool hates its existence because it feels its own artificiality and knows about the ecologic damage the water system creates when sustaining greenery and his existence.

**What is the most relevant context?**

Mivida is a pre-planned endeavor of EMAAR Misr, a branch of Emaar Properties is a real estate development company located in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It is a public joint-stock company, listed on the Dubai Financial Market, and

**VIDEO PROPOSALS - MIVIDA COMMUNITY CLUB POOL**

has a valuation of US$9.7 billion as of June 2018. The company operates internationally providing property development and management services. With six business segments and 60 active companies, Emaar has collective presence in 36 markets across the Middle East, North Africa, Pan-Asia, Europe and North America.

In the 1990s, Sheikh Mohammed created the cornerstone of the rapid urban growth of the following decade by instigating the establishment of large real estate companies to develop freehold properties for sale to non-UAE nationals.

In cooperation with other investors, the joint stock company Emaar was founded in 1997 with an equity capital of 2.65 billion dirhams. Because of the allocation of land for the development of real estate, the Maktoum family became the key shareholder with 33 per cent of the stock.

The kind of urbanism promised by these large real estate companies, which are strongly influenced by dictators is not only difficult in terms

of global power balances, it also creates imagery from their planners that strongly influences what people believe to be a „good life" (which they promise across all media, including large billboards and posters that decorate the streets of Cairo). It is difficult to escape these polished renders of 3D-software and walking in the streets of  New Cairo one must realize that these plans largely become reality.

It was not possible for me to find out how the actual planning takes place, or what EMAAR understands as „community care", because this is also something they use to promote their gated communities with. The organization of EMAAR Misr is relatively intransparent and I could only get a remote understanding through job offers and professional titles of employees.

I tried to contact several community managers of EMAAR Misr through linked in, but  couldn't invest time to create a profile that would make me seem more trustworthy or in some way allow me to hijack this circle.



But I think it would be interesting to find out, how the planning takes place, what they consider and which way they are limited through exterior forces.

In Dubai the delimitation created misplanning, which is already visible in the desert cities around Cairo, too. The population can not afford the prices of the townhouses, villas and apartments, the infrastructure is not good enough to allow the freedom promised and generally the impressions vary between ghost town and permanent construction site. I also considered the pool to suggest

squatting campaigns, but then I was unsure if that was not too catchy as an idea with no likelihood of it to happen, as one needs a car to live in these places.

**Why do I think that the suggestion the pool makes is a good idea?**

I think there must be a process of building up collective consciousness before doing anything else. I believe that the proposal itself could help (if it was more professional and better researched in depth together with people affected) to build this consciousness. I also think that

## VIDEO PROPOSALS - MIVIDA COMMUNITY CLUB POOL

initiating is a very important phase in group building, but problematically, the initiator is often then awarded a central position to the group, not being able to step away from this position, so I think it could be way of overcoming this concentration on the initiator as the core figure and put more focus on the actual idea and the group process.

**Which resources did I use?**

I only read academic journals and books (not really represented in my bibliography) and analyzed my footage, I also referred to the accounts of the women I know. I also collected images produced by EMAAR and tried to understand the kind of hopes it creates. I also referred back to an aesthetic reference one of the lecturers throughout the program

**Why did I use this narrative style?**

The first draft was a very melancholic version of the current text. I tried to think of the function which the text should have and thought that it

should rather be a motivational and inspirational tone. Unfortunately I didn't have time to research in depth speech analyses, but only researched inspirational speeches by women (as I didn't want to reproduce patriarchal ways of speaking), only to find disappointment. Because what people find inspirational is e.g. „I have a dream" of Martin Luther King, or random monologues in films by male protagonists, but on the female front it looks rather scarcely. Eventually I found the speech of Queen Elizabeth I to her troops on 9 August 1588, which became famous through its central role in many Hollywood films about Elisabeth I. I used parts of this speech to create a certain tone that would contrast the melancholic feelings of the pool to find out what it would do to the proposal.

Observation:
The tone of a speech limits drastically what you are able to say, you are forced to create easy dichotomies and simple scapegoats. Motivational speeches decomplexify the world, they give their desired audience a

sense of entitlement and value which is not mediated against the value of other people, as it serves the purpose of creating entitlement within the addressed group. All my attempts to put in vulnerability, uncertainness, openness limited the power of my speech, which I deliberately decided to accept in some parts, but refused to make true in other parts. In total, a more depressed and sensitive pool would be a more accurate describer and its account would fit the actual situation better, but I chose the voice of a commander (with certain modulations) to create a more impressive result, in complete consciousness of the reproduction of oppressive patterns of speech, sacrificing one moral ideal for another, which is the necessity to create collective agency in as many group formations as possible.

The pool as speaker ridicules its leadership somehow, which I hope is sufficient to question the position of a leader, without neglecting that initiating, pep talk and motivation is a task within a group dynamic, which is tremendously important and must



be thought through another lens than power.
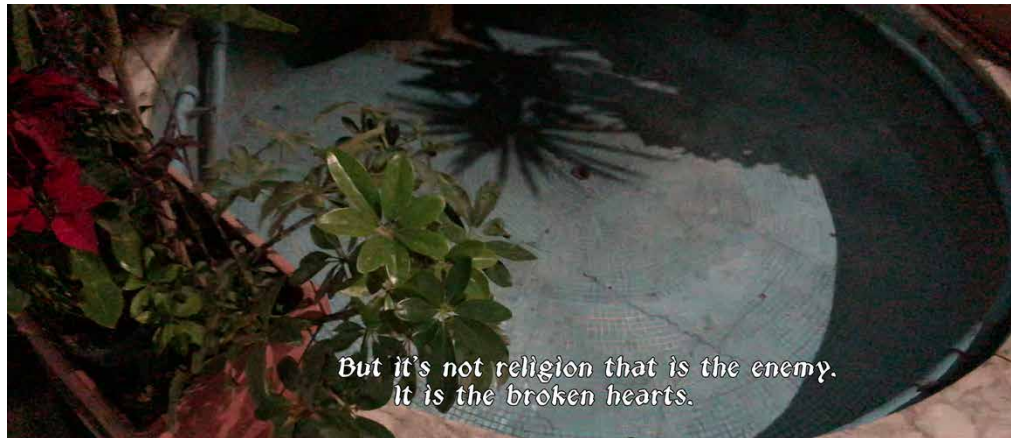
**Use of sound**

The rough cut is not sound edited. I tried to use water sounds as a means of creating dramaturgy, but the sound work is a whole other chapter, I could not satisfyingly solve

**VIDEO PROPOSALS - GARDEN CITY POOL**



People are used to seeing water here. In fact it is just a big road.



But it's not religion that is the enemy. It is the broken hearts.

**Where is the pool?**

The pool is located in the entrance of a building next to a central road between Garden City and Tahrir Square (Nile Corniche), which is a one-way street to Garden city. We walked past this pool at night and in retrospect I understood that we were passing it several times. It is located close to the Syrian, British and the American Embassy and the Egyptian Ministry for foreign Trade and Industry, and two streets further there is the Egyptian parliament.

**Who is it for?**

I wanted to address the American Embassy first and foremost and indirectly young men waiting in the traffic jams in the direction of Garden city.

**What does the pool want to say?**

The pool wants to show some empathy for the contradictory desires of young men for a capitalist notion of romantic love, based on choice and desire, an environment for many still informed by marriage rules that seem anachronistic but have worked in a system not infused by the desire for romantic love over centuries. It wants to show understanding for lack of orientation, anger and hedonism. It addresses the embassy to instead of offering career oriented courses, to revolutionize diplomatic work by offering relationship courses, innovative group methodology seminars, lectures on how to form meaningful bonds across genders and beyond the notion of the romantic couple and strong male brotherhood in the first and only public pool (yet to be built) in the garden of the embassy.

**How does it feel?**

The pool feels a lack of orientation himself, as it is empty. It is mostly concerned and alarmed with observing the discrepancies between the passerby (random diplomats) and the men in the cars and feels a strong desire to synthesize these realities.

**What is the most relevant context?**

The US American Embassy offers English courses and empowering career seminars for women (in fact when one looks at the curriculum it is almost feminist). I wanted to address US America 'ss role in exporting a certain idea of life (capitalism) and its current role in Egypt.

I haven't had time to address the British legacy and role of the Embassy  at all and since there's a direct link between British Semi-colonization and the introduction of

## VIDEO PROPOSALS - GARDEN CITY POOL



western models of relationships, this might be an even more insightful and relevant context.

I wanted to find out what diplomacy actually is, and how people become diplomats, suspecting only people from higher classes to become ambassadors. I wanted to find out through which seminars and career trajectories one becomes an ambassador, and which power these diplomats have in shaping narratives about nations, as well as how to use this power to explore new modes of relating.

I wanted to also find out how advisory boards work in this relation, and how to access them and win them as allies.

In relation to Islam, relationship models and masculinity I wanted to find out more about contemporary masculinities and the main struggles, as well as cars as safe spaces (for masculinity), possibility to make money and status symbol.

I found an interesting person, an American, convicted murderer,

who was accused to have inspired, with his anti-capitalist critique the killing of two KFC employees and motivated other terrorist action in 2015 (Shaheed King Bolsen), making international media wonder how he could islamify a discourse from the far left from so far away.

I would like to understand how Islamic groups work under Sisi, how they create identity now and how to produce a balanced, fact-checked, critique of capitalism without a strong and questionable leader personality supported by contemporary Muslim formations.

**Why do I think that the suggestion the pool makes is a good idea?**

Masculinity is a topic which must be addressed in its historic genesis and in relation to other gender concepts. This can't happen without negotiation and creating a space for experiments in which there are no sanctions. Creating spaces in which people of all genders can meet, in respect and with reference to respected structures, could be a task

of transcontinental communication, as the tensions created are also a result of this remote influence.

**Which resources did I use?**

Mostly academic text and an analysis of the web presence of the US embassy. I also analyzed the images and short sequences shared by my sole male Egyptian contact and his male friends.

**Why did I use this narrative style?**

Style is not yet decided. The current version is a first draft.

**Use of sound**

Not decided yet.

**Continuation:**

There's a lot of research not done yet in order to identify the actual problem more concretely and whether it would really make sense to as embassies to change their public program.

Above:
Images collected in my Instagram and Facebook research. (1) an all-male pool in Hurghada, (2) a couple paying together, (3) a screenshot of an extremely romantic scene (without kissing).

**VIDEO PROPOSALS - GARDEN CITY POOL - DRAFT EXCERPT**

I am not really a swimming pool. I just look like a mini-version of it. Maybe I was intended to hold Fish. The people are used to seeing water here. In fact it is just a big road, a boulevard that separates me from the Nile.
It is winter, but it is never freezing. I don't know if  that is the reason why I am empty.

I am located between Garden City and the Tahir Sqare. I don't know any of it, because I can't move. I decorate the entrance of a house. Next to me they sell traditional clothes and contemporary dresses for women – everything is made out of polyester. I am made of ceramics and concrete. Does the category of beauty apply to me?

I see and hear people passing and cars. They often stand there in queues. I hear their music playing loud, I smell their cigarettes. I feel the deep sounds of their motors, they vibrate the materials I consist of. It is this humming and the many feet that pass me, that stir up the thin layer of dust, which comes to lay in my sheltering walls. I am being cleaned regularly, so that the blue of my tiles can shine.

I am separated from the wetlands under me. The Nile pushes water upwards, but my foundation separates the nile water from the water, that was put inside of me. I separated the waters. The good and the bad water – can you imagine? I often imagine myself being a tank for emotions. Sometimes I think that the carbon monoxide that comes out of the cars temporarily hides inside of me and in the carbon monoxide there are the spirits of the emotions of the car drivers.

And I wish that these emotions could be read out. It is a lot of disappointment and defiant delusion of grandeur. Sometimes I see women and men in shiny shoes. Ambassadors maybe. I never fully understood the role of an ambassador – have you? Different countries do have houses in another country in which they represent the nation they are coming from.
I wonder if I am Egyptian. If I feel my body, I don't know. Where do the tiles come from? Is it Egyptian Marble that is framing my existence? Was I made by Egyptians? Where does the concept of my existence come from?
The US American Ambassy is not far away. They have all kinds of pools in the states. I don't know that. How should I?

I collect the emojis flying through the air into my empty stomach. Take care, it's a green heart and crossed swords. The emojis fly through the windows of the cars like invisible rosepetals. Allahu Akbar. They pass the Al-Quran in the front window. But it's not the religion that is the enemy. It's the broken hearts. A young man sits behind the driving wheel of a German car that told him to buckle up, so he buckled up. He is cueing in the line to Garden city. He's making money, driving uber and texting.

He has a thing for their faces, those tourists', like his friends. But he also gets furniture for his apartment in the 6th of October city, fuel and a phone. Hosni Mubarak is dead. Sisi has banned the Muslim Brotherhood, who else can give him purpose? He has been named after his religion, his fourth and fifth name is the Name of the first father of all people, Ibrahim, – only his second name, Omar, is free from the religious heritage. His brother is also called Ibrahim.

He wants to open a business, exactly like his brother, buy or rent two floors of a house close to the Pyramids where they build the new Museum. In Gizah, and when he says the "a" in Gizah it vibrates with love. Gizaaah…

Gizah is on the other side of the Nile. People can see it from here. In fact if I contained water, they could bathe inside of me and see the edge of Gizah. Apart from that I can't speak, I wouldn't be able to ask this young man about Gizah. He wouldn't be able to explain it. He can't talk about the revolution either. All he knows is that Allah will pay him back for the hardship, if he

**VIDEO PROPOSALS – GARDEN CITY POOL – DRAFT EXCERPT**

is patient. He knows he'll be happy. He doesn't know how to describe his feelings other than his longing for love and happiness.

How would he know that Sarah Ahmed, a feminist philosopher has dismantled his quest for love and happiness as an oppressive pattern by patriarchy and capitalism? How would I know that the longing for romantic recognition and the imagination of happiness is a desire that will deem the one longig for it as an eternally dissatisfied being? I am just a vessel for water that is empty. Does the American Ambassador Jonathan Cohen know about this?
This young man tries not to follow the footsteps of his brother, who has married multiple women from all continents in order to allow his family, including his brother, to live in luxury. His labor was a labor of love. He sold his body and his integrity to these women. On a global scale, funds were moved. An economy of pain.

How would the ambassador know that this young man is longing for love? And what could he offer? English courses?

He is on the phone with his wife's mother. He is his uncle. They are in trouble and only four months into their marriage. He wants to get divorced. Unlike his uncle, the young man does not intend to marry. In fact his heart was broken, because he wouldn't have penetrational sex with the woman he loved for the doubts of sealing his fate too early. Intercourse would have meant marriage. Instead his then girlfriend did it with his friend behind his back. He went into a four month depression in which he wouldn't leave his apartment in the new settlement. He posted 25 times in a row a black profile pic on facebook that only showed the glowing letters of the word "off".

I don't know how old I am. But I may have existed in the 1930ies already. Back then they spoke of a marriage crisis. And by them I mean those people who were literate, mostly people from higher classes. Young Egyptian men would remain bachelors. The media, and by media I mean those periodicals that were reaching the few people that were literate and those who listened to them reading it out loud in the streets, speculated about the reasons. On the one hand the requested marriage portions were too high, on the other hand it was the women's failure. They were either portrayed as bad mothers, not as elaborate or hygienic as the glorified European colonial image of the mother, or to be too uneducated to be a good companion.

But never, at no second, the vulnerability of the husbands was discussed. It has never been a topic of how being the provider, the sole decider of the fate of the family was an unbearable responsibility in a world that was getting more and more complex. And if it just was the introduction of more and more literacy, the colonial ideal of consciousness and information found its way, forking up options to be decided on. Without options, there's no decision to be taken. Decisions require attention, attention requires time and time began to become scarce.

I, as a pool, never had to take a decision, I never had to move, my fate completely lay in the hand of external forces, maybe Allah, maybe the owner of the house, maybe in the hands of the revolution. I always had time to be in the very here and now. Was I unhappy? I don't know – I never asked that question. But I also never had to talk about my own vulnerability.

...

Your eyes contain affection, coyness and delight,
But at times I glimpse through them a touch of reproach.

A fatal arrow I discern within,
That pierced my soul and left me insane

Let the past be; soften your heart,
Forgive my mistakes, and reward my good deeds.

In you, I have faith and what's destined is destined,
For every occurrence, a reason exists.

O sweetheart, we have shared profound emotions,
And through them, savoured the sweet torture of love.

We have an ailment that no medicine can cure,
No experts in herbs can remedy this.

I have tried and tried again to meet you,
But my efforts to approach were in vain.

You have met my undying fervor with silence,
Why would you respond, when you deny I exist?

Oh! The agony those avoiding eyes have caused
They stole my sound sleep and were gone.

A very romantic poem from the book *Poems from the Desert* by Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and ruler of the Emirate of Dubai and shareholder of EMAAR (Misr). On 5 March 2020, a British court ruled that on the balance of probabilities, he had abducted daughters and threatened his wife.

## VIDEO PROPOSALS – GEZIRA SPORTING CLUB POOL

**Where is the pool?**

The pool is located in Zamalek, in the biggest and oldest country club in Cairo, the Gezira Sporting club. As a visitor you are not allowed to go inside the pool area, as it is exclusively for members.

**Who is it for?**

The proposal addresses the board members and the president of the club, as well as mothers (indirectly in talking about them).

**What does the pool want to say?**

The pool asks for a program for young mothers irrespective of being member or not to have special swimming lessons in which the mothers learn about their revolutionary potential. He also explains their extraordinary position in social change and which chance the pool offers to have deep impact on future societies. (He secretly wants the mothers to hijack the access to the pool.

**How does it feel?**

The pool feels altruistic and wants to give back, he's a bit naive, but very lovely, he wants to destroy the nuclear family as a social entity, but in a very loving way.

**(What is the most relevant context?)**

**(Why do I think that the suggestion the pool makes is a good idea?)**

**Which resources did I use?**

I have read a lot about motherhood, the demystification of it, how to deconstruct the nuclear family as the germ cell of capitalism. I also know a mother who lived in Cairo for seven years, before returning to Germany, who is currently writing an artistic PhD on Motherhood. In the trajectory of my research on dividual subjectivities, I discovered that the very act of telling children what you think of reality, creates the very first reality conveyed by the mother (or primary caregiver), whatever this person tells, becomes part of their identity, which is a great resource.



Images of the wall that sourrounds the Gezira sporting club.

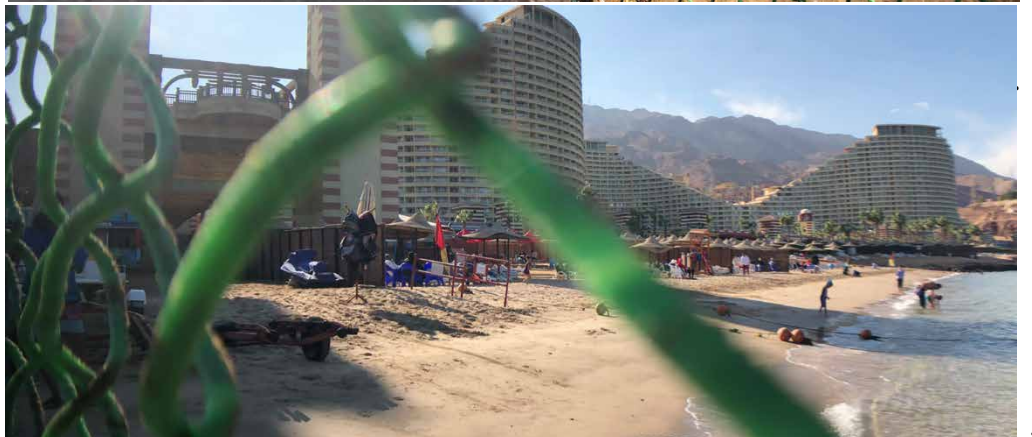**(Why did I use this narrative style?)**

**(Use of sound)**

**Continuation:**
Identify relevant organizations for mothers. Write the script

## VIDEO PROPOSALS - THE RED SEA

**VIDEO PROPOSALS - THE RED SEA**

**Where is the pool?**

The red sea is a seawater inlet of the Indian Ocean, lying between Africa and Asia. The connection to the ocean is in the south through the Bab el Mandeb strait and the Gulf of Aden. To the north lie the Sinai Peninsula, the Gulf of Aqaba, and the Gulf of Suez (leading to the Suez Canal).

**Who is it for?**

The proposal adresses tourists, or travelling agencies.

**What does the pool want to say?**

Not yet determined.

**How does it feel?**

urgent

**(What is the most relevant context?)**

**(Why do I think that the suggestion the pool makes is a good idea?)**

**(Which ressources did I use?)**

**(Why did I use this narrative style?)**

**(Use of sound)**

**Continuation:**
Write the script

## REFLECTION OF OUTCOMES

I end this process in the framework of the University of the Underground with a lot more clarity about what I think is necessary to do in this world as an artist, how to do it and maybe also with whom.

I have learnt so much and made a relationship to a new geographic contexts, which gives me a positive attitude towards the future.

Still I feel as if I have not fulfilled the expectations and I wonder why.

For the biggest part i think I worked on too many strands parallely, from group organisation, my wage job, but also within my research I felt as if I had to do everything at the same time to get to a point where I can at least make a little work.

And this point was the moment in which I would allow myself to utter a critique, after I had gathered enough information about a context. The UU however requires the critique much earlier. My approach puts identifying the accurate critique and the relevant insitution or entity the end product itself. Even my attempt of using the pool as a speaker (which should have relieved me from the moral pressure

I put myself under) in order to accept not-knowing as part of critisizing, only helped a little bit. But maybe enough for moving forward.

I think I have unconsciously never intended to produce a final result, as I am really understanding more and more that this is a continuous research process with interim results and limited validity and audience.

Unconsciously I also could not give in to collaborating with an institution before I identified it was absolutely relevant to my interest and the content. For me it has turned out that I can't concentrate on institutions per se, I really come from identfying a confllict first and then relevant stakeholders and I seem not to be able to overcome it or turn it around.

Looking at my documented material really helped me to relate to the contexts again and again, which allowed me to stay involved emotionally and give me unconscious hints which i could then render conscious and examine. This happened with more intensity when producing the interim results and I am sad that it took me so long to trust myself to do it. I just constantly felt I

wasn't ready yet and that I first needed to know more about this or that.

I needed to get more explicit about my methodology, to even make a connection with the UU's methodology. I also think that the moral expectations towards my working ethics made it extremely difficult to just improvise and be more experimental with everything.

However, now I know that this process of identifying conflicts is really at the core of what I need to do, so this insight gave me a direction of how to move on. Towards the end of the program I would have identified a person and institution I would have liked to collaborate with, which would have been the Conflict Studies and Human Rights Faculty of the Utrecht University and more specifically Jolle Demmers, who co-founded the Centre for Conflict Studies and played a key role in establishing the field of Conflict Studies at Utrecht University.

I hope I can progress with this trajectory.

In this reflection I have not included e.g. the development of the workshop for the next round of the research

bureau (on group ecision making), nor have I put in a reflection of the group process and how we dealt with conflict, which is the biggest gap in this reflection.

I also did not immerse myself into swimming pools, as I was so stressed by figuring out everything, that I couldn't allow myself to do it and I think I urgently have to catch up with that in order to explore this dimension of research.

In addition to finding links between artistic practice and conflict studies I would really like get back to Egypt and test my assumptions, before eventually really distributing the proposals.

I want to also think about the phase after the distribution of the proposals.

For me however this reflection answers (in parts) my research question:

**How to ethically identify groups, methodologies and frameworks for transnational artistic action (with European participation) in order to induce sustainable and inclusive social change?**