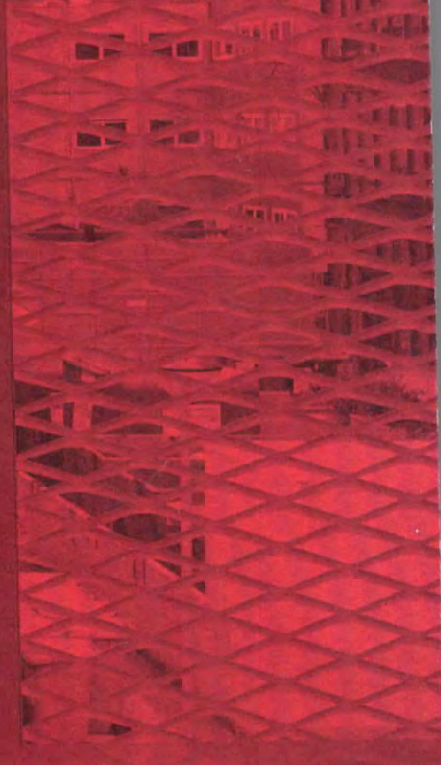
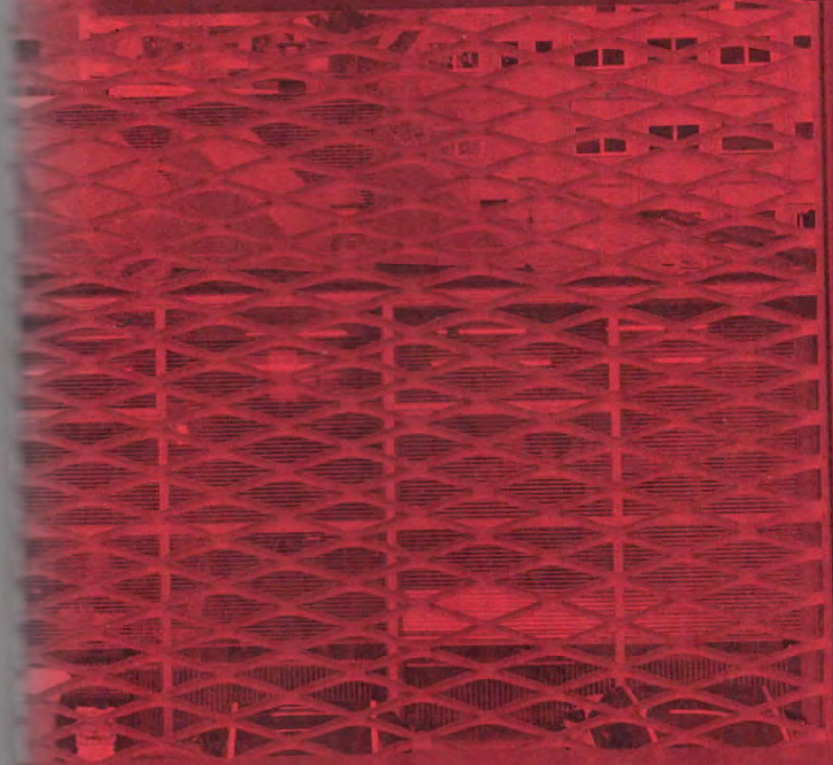


**Fellows in Print — Research Fellowships at the  
Gerrit Rietveld Academie and Sandberg Instituut  
2020–2021**



a golden fire blanket, attempting to read the changing sentences printed on them.

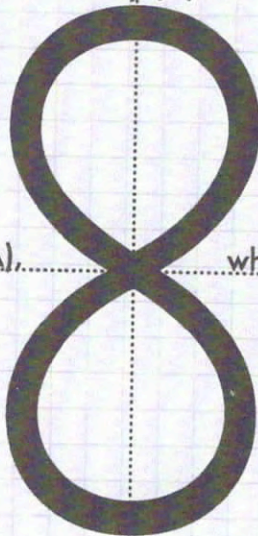
Bodies are also working together in the way artist Nina Glockner learns about “inner body movement.” She lets workshop participants carry matter in such a way that it is neither choreography nor work. What is it then? These somatic practices explore the perception of the individual body in relation to other bodies, the mind, space, time, movement, and matter. By providing collective experimental exercises, Glockner wants to challenge and lay bare the various ways in which we are conditioned to move and think. The collective dynamics or fabrics of bodies to which these collaborative practices of moving matters lead in her research, could, according to her, restore one’s contact with themselves, their surroundings, and everything in it. They can reanimate and bring to the surface what we humans have lost in transition from *being* in the world to just *functioning* in it. It is a way of worldmaking not through intervening in Earthly structures but by deconditioning bodies that inhabit Earth.

**Mind the Body, Move Matter:  
A Performative-Somatic Research**  
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Nina Glockner  
Nina Glockner  
Nina Glockner  
Nina Glockner  
Nina Glockner

mind the body,  
move matter

body (A)



.....If you are body (A),

.....where is your mind (M)?

Are (A) and (M) in one state of flow?

We have very little experience of bodily self. Although we receive a constant flow of information about our body [through internal and external perception], we are most of the time barely aware of our body, let alone of our body as our own. The fact is that our body never leaves us and it can thus become almost transparent.

—Frédérique de Vignemont <sup>1</sup>

Since perception—which is always bodily—is primary, the only way to change thought is to alter perception by transforming the conditions that make it possible.

—Richard Serra <sup>2</sup>

1.  
Frédérique de Vignemont, *Mind the Body. An Exploration of Bodily Self-Awareness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), p. 20.

2.  
Richard Serra, *Torqued Ellipses* (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1997), p. 50.

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**What was the starting point for your research project?**

Art and design schools often target the development of mental capacities, by, for instance, largely devoting attention to art history, the cognitive perception of things, and methods of analytical thinking. As with society in general, wisdom of embodied knowledges, alertness to our body-mind-relation, spatial awareness, and the importance of the multitude of senses are far too often undervalued. I therefore have always felt the urge to develop a methodology of embodied somatic practices that could be practically integrated within art academies and beyond: universities, governmental institutes, care organizations, and such—basically at all places in which human and non-human beings are involved in the processes of creativity, production, and decision-making.

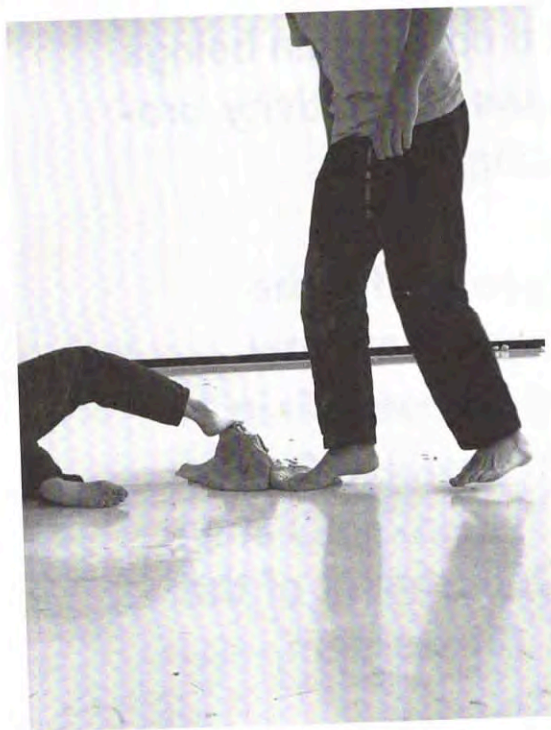
**What has been your approach for the Research Fellowship project and how does it relate to the role of research in your practice?**

**Invited by the Ceramics Department of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam,**

## The Absence of Touch

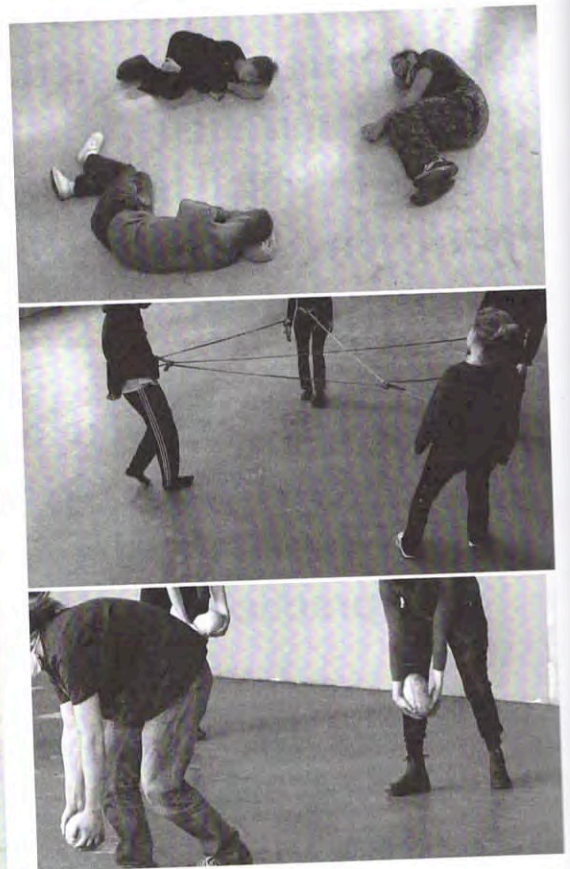
Working under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic made my research more challenging, yet it somehow brought a new kind of relevance to the practice of somatic, embodied work. For a long time, people could not meet in person, let alone touch each other. The shift toward predominantly digital encounters—and thus dis-embodiment—which was caused by the pandemic, increased the urgency of creating a bodily-focused, collective playground.

At a certain moment, regulations allowed for students of Dutch art academies to continue their activities within the school building. This enabled me to work with a group of people within a shared space, while respecting the ever-changing Covid-19 measures—1.5m social distancing, wearing masks, etc. Despite sensing the underlying hardships, tensions, and struggles that they were experiencing because of the pandemic restrictions, I could also feel the renewed energy and the joy that accompanied moments of communal practices in a shared physical space. I could feel the pleasure of moving together, while productively working with the limitations that were still in place.



## Moving as One Body: Guiding, Moving, and Synchronizing

As art and design education is often still very individualistic—each person working on their own development and the materialization of their ideas—I focused on facilitating spaces for togetherness, commonality, and playful openness within the creative process.





## Sculpting Hands, Sensing Hands: Material as Body-Feedback Device

The main aim of my workshops was to create an increased awareness of the body and space by using various materials and objects. Through physical engagement with the involved materials, respectively with the objects, there was not only an expanding bodily awareness but also a growing understanding of the nature of, for example, clay, a rope, a wooden stick. Objects offer feedback to the body and vice versa; through an increased awareness of the person, the experience of the materiality of things is altered.

To me the interrelatedness between the processing subject and the processed material is a relevant aspect of a creative process in general: to which degree can a change in the subject's intention, attention, and perceptiveness lead to a change in the artistic process, action, and outcome?

For instance, when I lift something, I have a different experience of my body. Carrying the weight reveals my own muscle strength or tonus, basically giving hints to understand my entire body structure as one. And holding a stick straight into the air influences my body's direction and thus how I experience my body and the space while standing or walking, bending over or kneeling down.

As a continuation of my research, I see great potential in a deeper exploration of the material qualities of things, a discovery of what a material is, and what the establishment of a physical relationship with it can reveal, both about that material itself and about me as subject.

Gaining access to a material does not happen by merely looking at it, or reflecting on it, and not even by merely touching it; gaining access to a material entails that one needs to deal with a material with one's whole body. Only then one reaches an open state of mind in which one can let go of assumptions of what the material is or what the material should or could do.



## No Hands, Please!

The feedback quality of a material becomes especially obvious when working with clay—an ideal material for my sessions as it is flexible, records each touch and carries an imprint of every physical interaction with it. Clay captures and saves traces of human interventions, creating a direct feedback loop between the material, the “sculptor,” and their shared environment. In my sessions I often ask people to choose specific body parts to interact with clay, while the hands, which are usually our first option for interactions with materials and others, cannot be used. Such limitations lead to alternative options of involvement and stimulate the development of new types of bodily material awareness.



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the Fellowship program allowed me to dive deeper—and in a consistent manner—into various elements of my practice that focus on the relevance of embodied, process-based experiences. As planned, I have set up cross-disciplinary workshops with students, staff, and invited guests to explore and develop a range of somatic, material-based exercises. During the course of the fellowship I have invited participants to take part in a collective journey to discover—or discover for the first time—balance, flexibility, coordination, and spatial and social awareness, by guiding them through a series of scores that focus on the “who,” “where,” “what” and “how,” instead of the “why.” By moving, playing, observing, and listening, we obtained more accurate images of ourselves in relation to others, the space we were in, and the materials we were dealing with.

Generally, I follow a methodology that creates a lot of space for flexibility and social porosity: set up as “open scores,” my sessions enable a multitude of variations within the process. Over the course of time, I have developed, refined, and systematized my way of working by reusing exercises and tools.

Each time the loose structure of my workshop allows me to adapt to the particular situation of a specific group of participants and the flow in time and space.

Also my artistic practice is characterized by this “open score” approach, and is intensively linked to my ongoing somatic research and my body-based, collective workshops. In almost all of my performative works I engage the audience: instead of remaining passive spectators, the audience becomes part of the situation and are gently forced to engage with the objects I use within a given site. In a way, during the process, all elements become *words*—by completing the “open score” of the performance, an abstract text comes out of the people and the things and the spatial or architectural elements of a specific site appears.

Both in my performances and in the research sessions, I’m the one who sets things in motion, but the audience, the participants, the materials, the objects, and the space—all of them—also hold power. I want people to become aware of this power and the existing patterns of relationships: nobody is

## (Dis)Embodiment

One of the main things I stress from the beginning of each workshop or session is the idea that each person's actions have an influence on the experiences of the whole group. Art and design education is about perceiving, observing, and reflecting. It's about expression, context, and understanding what has been made by others *and* understanding one's own work. Most parts of that education appeal to our cognitive capacities, and mainly to our visual senses, rather than the multitude of senses. In many ways, education thus creates a distance between the work and its maker. What's needed, in my view, is to be able to connect the maker to both the work and the context in which the work is created or will be perceived and interacted with.

Embodiment—first and foremost becoming aware of one's body, i.e., self-location, body ownership, and agency—is an excellent way of creating such connections as it withdraws people from a mere cognitive relation to the world. Mind you, I don't suggest we should abstain from our rational capacities. I merely propose to embrace a different primary focus: on the body and from within the body, as this opens relevant perspectives and a new awareness of how the body relates to its spatial context. This new relationship with the physical context, in turn, will influence the cognitive processes and lead to a different kind of knowledge.

When I enter a space, I'm not merely perceiving it through my eyes, I'm experiencing it with my whole being. Once I become aware of that experience and become sensitive to how my body relates to its surroundings, overall attentiveness starts to increase, which in turn influences *what* I make and *how* I behave. The body is always a source of our experiences, whether one is conscious of it or not. Increasing one's awareness of the body, and the body-mind-relationship, will increase one's capacity to translate experiences and insights into artistic projects, and thus literally connect in a new way to the surrounding world.

To be able to reimagine people's relationships with their surroundings and the things

they encounter there, I believe it's wise to start understanding the body in a more profound and versatile manner: understanding how the body feels and works and behaves; and understanding the body's structure, the bones, the joints, the connective tissue, and the interrelatedness of it all. This brings with it an ability to let go, relate to, and connect in new ways with, for instance, a piece of wood, a stick, a rope, a chair, a table, a space, or a building. Let's take for instance designers brooding on new chair designs. Their reflections will benefit from not merely thinking about the technicalities, the aesthetic shapes, and the intended ergonomics, but will for sure benefit from daring to start from scratch, time and again, by focusing on a diversity of bodies of makers and potential users. What does it mean to sit? What does sitting literally do and mean with respect to the sitting body-structure and with respect to the other bodies—people and things—within the same space? When designers become sensitive to how their bodies relate to their changing surroundings, this awareness influences the kind of products they make.



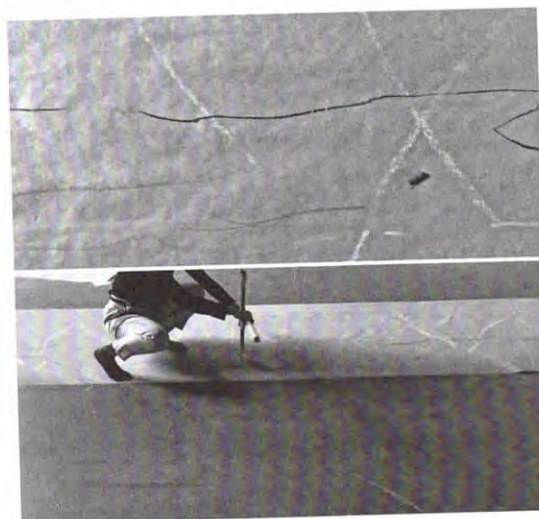
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## Traces of Movement, Process

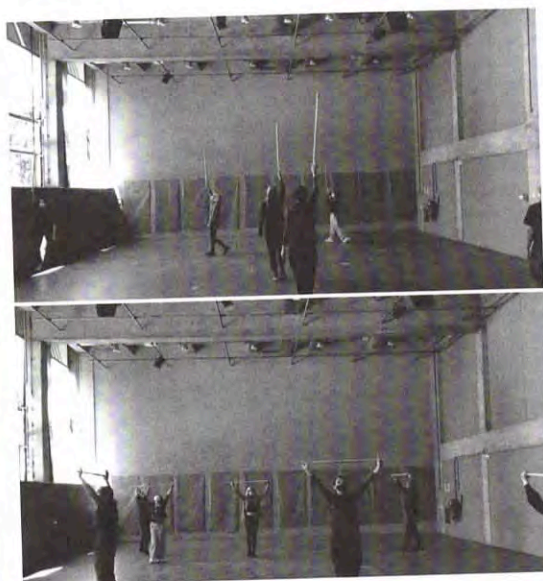
With my work, I plead for a process-oriented way of working. Students tend to spend a disproportionate amount of time in efforts to envision and predict a definite outcome. However, if they would focus on how they make, how they touch, how they sit, how they stand, the process of answering these questions would organically guide them to the result and provide them with endless material for further growth and development. Therefore, I want to reverse the perception of the process as merely a means to a result but consider the process as a result on its own—the rehearsal is the production. A focus on process can transform the usual way of working as it will most likely erase the prejudices and assumptions about what something is. If one abstains from the cultural values that are for instance linked to the object we tend to call "chair," new space opens up for reimagining what sitting can be.

I employ various tools for liberating people from prejudices and the deeply engrained conventional ways of categorizing, judging and working. When, for instance, working with ropes, I try to divert the group members away from the usual—symbolic and narrative—references they have, by inviting them to experience how the ropes relate to their own body and connect other bodies and space.



## Walking the Grid

How do I walk? Usually, I don't think about it, but after an accident, for instance, I need to start learning how to walk again, how to organize my body to move it from one point to another. I aim to create circumstances in which bodies are stripped of their usual movement patterns and can explore the potential of what walking is all about. I put participants into new situations, teach them to trust their gut feelings, and train them to observe themselves and the space as if for the first time. It's all about awareness and finding comfort within oneself: now, here, on this floor.



merely a passive bystander, and nothing is merely a dead object or neutral material, and no space is just a neutral background setting. Each person, thing and space can become the co-creator of a bodily and mental experiences.

You have tested your research with the people of the Ceramics Department. Based on your experiences, can you now draw conclusions about which kind of art and design practitioners will most likely benefit from your workshops? And related to this question: which departments of Gerrit Rietveld Academie and Sandberg Instituut, would you like to involve in your ongoing research?

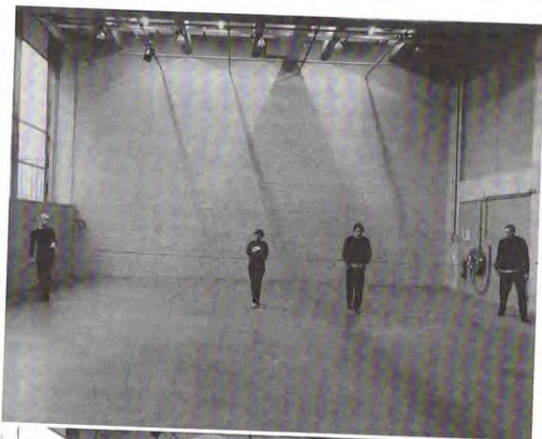
I consider this research year as a new chapter within an ongoing exploratory journey into the role of the body within artistic processes. I see it as an opportunity to develop a workflow that nurtures active somatic involvement. Working with the same group of students over an extended period of time has greatly influenced the evolution of my research and has enabled a more in-depth study of exercises, scores, and relationships

between people, space, and various materials. I could interweave my research and my artistic practice even more, and, moreover, I was able to develop new plans and identify new audiences to work with. In the future, I can imagine broadening the scope of my activities by offering body-space-material awareness sessions on a regular basis to all kinds of educational programs at both schools, or even develop an independent inter-disciplinary somatic-performative department.

After all, throughout my research, I've become more and more convinced of the idea that practitioners in *all* disciplines—also beyond the art academy—can greatly benefit from increasing bodily awareness and focusing on the process instead of blindly racing toward results.

## Crossing Space, Measuring Space

My work sessions could be called "gym classes for multi-sensory beings." A traditional gym class heightens people's awareness of themselves and the ground they're standing on. Apart from making people stronger, a traditional gym class increases people's bodily consciousness and mobility, and deals with group dynamics—yet often in a competitive way. In my sessions, I don't always know how the collective process will unfold. I initiate and offer exercises and I have the tools to guide the group through the process, but my actions are always informed by the responses of all the actors involved. I thus share my toolset and create a space in which each group member can find energy and the possibility to contribute in their own way. Whereas traditional gym classes are target-oriented, my somatic sessions are not focused on a specific result. Instead, learning to accept and respond to the circumstances, sensibly receiving signals, locating oneself in the environment and embracing ambiguity are the primary aims of my process-focused sessions.



## Unwrapping Body-Mind-Dualism

In western society, we are used to making a strict division between body and mind, which are treated as opposites. Any process thus becomes dialectical, which in fact contrasts to an experienced reality in which body is mind and mind is body; both interweave and form one inseparable whole. Thus, practicing accurate awareness of the inevitable interconnectedness of the body and mind drastically deepens one's experiences and creative and social abilities.

This text is based on a conversation with  
Louise Schouwenberg

Thanks to: Louise Schouwenberg who has been an inspiring research advisor; graphic designer Ayumi Higuchi, who played an important role in editing and presenting my visual material; the participating students of the Ceramics Department, especially Hanna Zorandy, Marlies Neugebauer, Hyewon Cho, Hanne Arends, Elle van Baaren, Max Onink, and Ivor Dabadie; Liza Prins; Eva Hoonhout; Eylem Aladogan; and all guest participants.







## Mapping and-Dualism

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(A) and (B) are in one space. If you are body (A), how do you sense body (X)? Do you share one state of flow? What does the separation feel like?

If you are body (A), where is the other body (X)?

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**Contributions by Marjan van Aubel;  
Nicola Baratto and Yiannis Mouravas;  
David Bennewith, Noha Ramadan,  
and Swan Vinton; Derrais Carter;  
Quincy Gario; Nina Glockner;  
Oskar Johanson; Jeroen Kramer;  
Esmā Moukhtar; Mika Perlmutter  
and Mo Veld; Amy Suo Wu**

**Gerrit Rietveld Academie, 2022**