DESIGNING THE EMPATHIC EXPERIENCE

Suggestions from Art Practices

Alice Devecchi

D.I. FrancoAngeli
DESIGN INTERNATIONAL

The Design International series was launched in 2017 as a place for cultural exchange between the different design souls. Over the years, the series has consolidated its position as a point of reference for international research, outlining a continuously updated research map.
The Scientific Committee, consisting of experts in fashion, interiors, graphics, communication, product, service, social interaction, innovation and emotional design guarantees the level of the accepted texts. The Editorial Board, consisting of young experts in the different branches of design, supports the work of the scientific committee. After an initial evaluation by the two committees, the texts undergo international double revision.

 ISBN 9788835157236

Copyright © 2023 by FrancoAngeli s.r.l., Milano, Italy. ISBN 9788835157236

DESIGNING THE EMPATHIC EXPERIENCE

Suggestions from Art Practices

Alice Devecchi

D.I. FrancoAngeli DESIGN INTERNATIONAL

 ISBN 9788835157236

Acknowledgements

The book is based on my doctoral dissertation and reports the research journey started in that context and then continued independently. Along the journey a huge number of scholars and colleagues encouraged me to start the work, persevere with it, and finally to publish it.
Here I wish to acknowledge the extraordinary contribution of Luca Guerrini. First being supervisor of my PhD thesis, he became later on a point of reference and definitely a friend.
I wish to thank Carla Cipolla, who still shares with me long dialogues and intense discussions around the topic of empathy in design.
I am grateful to Valentina Auricchio for always providing me useful suggestions and orientation, and to Silvia Sfligiotti for her sharp feedback.
I really want to thank Teresa Franqueira, Satu Miettinen, Lorenzo Imbesi, Merav Perez, Marta Corubolo, Silvia Franceschini. Each in their own way, they contributed to achieve the book publication.
To my fellows Marta Scocco, Francesco Petrucci, Alessandra Tafaro, Claudia Pennacchietti, Cristiana Lauri and Francesco Camplani goes my gratitude for the last two years of research and team work.
Also I thank Francesca Gasparetto, dear friend and colleague, and Agnese Battistelli for an 'epiphanic' conversation.
Finally, I can't miss to acknowledge the importance of all the members of my family for their unconditional support.

Cover image AI generated by giving the following prompt to a text to image app:
"collaboration, human interdependence, diversity, cooperation, empathy, dialogue, human relationships".

ISBN e-book Open Access: 9788835157236

Date of first publication: November 2023

Copyright © 2023 by FrancoAngeli s.r.l., Milano, Italy. ISBN 9788835157236

A Corinna e Gabriele

 ISBN 9788835157236

 ISBN 9788835157236

Table of contents

 ISBN 9788835157236

Empathy between Art and Design

Luca Guerrini
Department of Design, Politecnico di Milano

In *Young Man Looking at Lorenzo Lotto* (1967), Giulio Paolini brilliantly overturns the relationship between the viewer and the artwork. We are not observing the portrait, but rather is the young man who casts his mesmerizing stare on us. The sudden identification between the viewer and the artist at work – Lorenzo Lotto, who painted the original portrait in 1506 – slowly shifts into a silent dialogue between two human beings through time and history. Therefore, broadening the meaning of this silent dialogue, we may say that Art looks at us, with its participatory gaze: «The role of Art – says Neri Oxman (2016, p. 5) – is to question human behavior and create awareness of the world around us».

The notion of *Einfühlung* (empathy) designates the traits of this silent dialogue. As an aesthetic principal, it was widely discussed at the turn of the 20th century by Art historians such as Robert Vischer, Heinrich Wölfflin and Wilhelm Worringer (Curtis and Koch, 2009). In this context, empathy fundamentally dealt with the link between the subject (the viewer) and the object (the artwork), but, as Paolini demonstrates, it could trigger much deeper implications. The philosopher Theodore Lipps was the first scholar focusing on its psychological role in the understanding of other humans (Pinotti, 2011), paving the way to the wider interpretation of empathy by Edmund Husserl as the condition that makes intersubjectivity possible (Jardine, 2014).

Early in our century, design researchers and practitioners began to focus on empathy as a potential tool for enriching users' experience of products and services (Leonard and Rayport, 1997; Koskinen, Battarbee and Mattelmäki, 2003; Postma *et al.*, 2012). Human-Centered Design

experts pointed out the value of empathy for a better understanding of the final users' needs, hopes, and aspirations (Brown, 2009).

Moreover, the emergence of the participatory approach to design, which involved many actors, experts, and non-experts in achieving a common goal (Sanders, 2002; Meroni, 2007; Sanders and Stappers, 2008; Jégou and Manzini, 2008), could have also benefited from a more profound knowledge of empathy as a key to interpersonal relations.

Therefore, delving into the notion of empathy seemed a promising task in 2014, when, in the PhD program of design at Politecnico di Milano, a research line was launched aiming at "rethinking the role of the Arts in design culture" (Guerrini and Trocchianesi, 2019). This book by Alice Devecchi – finally published in an updated and revised version – summarizes the outcomes of her doctoral research on the topic, conducted between 2014 and 2018. The author faced tough challenges in carrying out her work, since it was the first attempt to discover new connections between Art and design. She was capable, however, of responding to them successfully.

The careful and in-depth scrutiny of design literature allowed the author to draw up a significant distinction between "empathy as a skill" – an ability the designer develops and shows in his leading role of the design process – and "empathy as a dialogic experience" that enhances the potential of human interactions in collaborative design processes. The latter became the key topic of her research.

The theoretical foundation of Devecchi's work rests on Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology, especially his pupil Edith Stein's dissertation *On the Problem of Empathy* (1917). In this regard, the author, relying on her humanistic background, wisely leaves neuroscience in the background, particularly the recent discovery of mirror neurons (Gallese, 2009), which would have forced the entire dissertation toward a science-based approach.

Building the research on the phenomenological approach, on the contrary, is a strategic choice to investigate interpersonal relationship established in co-design processes. In fact, «within the phenomenological tradition […] empathy is a basic, irreducible form of intentionality directed towards the experience of the Other». In this reading, however, «empathy is the condition of a connection rather than a fusion self-other. [It] entails by necessity a difference between the subject of empathic experience and the subject of the empathized experi-

ence» (Devecchi and Guerrini, 2017, p. S4361). Therefore, according to Devecchi, «empathy becomes a way of highlighting and giving value to otherness within interpersonal encounters». In this respect «understanding differences is far more enriching than acknowledging similarities, because otherness extends one's own horizon».

Considering the complex interaction of collaborative design processes and based on Richard Sennett's interpretation, the author attributes a significant *dialogic* connotation to empathy as an experience. A dialogue is not just a conversation. As Sennett points out (2012, pp. 18-20), conversations may be *dialectic* or *dialogic*: the first seeks to resolve oppositions into a new, synthetic agreement; the latter seeks to form a relationship between the participants. According to Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), a dialogic discussion typically does not succeed by finding "common ground" regarding what is claimed but by allowing the participants to understand one another. Dialogue is not about winning an argument or establishing the truth (a temporary, fragile, and often deceptive one). It is about looking at different opinions, letting them interact and cross-fertilize. Dialogues have the extraordinary capacity to draw energy from people's differences and channel it towards something new. «Though – states Sennett (2012, p. 19) – no shared agreements may be reached, through the process of exchange people may become more aware of their own views» (Guerrini and Volonté, 2018).

Therefore, in Devecchi's view, empathy is an essential prerequisite of any fruitful human interaction. Moreover, as a dialogic experience, is a genuine and free human disposition that does not allow interest, calculation, or efficiency. In this respect, the author drifts away from market-oriented approaches that initially supported an empathetic attitude, such as experience design and user-centered design, and takes a stand for creative communities, collaborative practices, and socially committed design. This first research outcome certainly takes advantage of the lively debate Ezio Manzini and his PhD students sparked off in the Milan design community (Manzini, 2015).

Empathy is an interpersonal relation we cannot design. We can, however – and this is Alice Devecchi's task – «intervene on contextual elements that allow the empathic experience to take place». She defines these elements as *enablers*, paying tribute – again – to Ezio Manzini and his school (Meroni, 2008; Manzini, 2015).

To design these *enablers*, Alice Devecchi draws upon the Art. Certainly not the kind of Art still dealing with objects, such as paintings, sculptures, or bas-reliefs, that originated the notion of *Einfühlung* more than a century ago. Many contemporary Art practices shift from physical forms to processes, increasingly casting their critical gaze on social and political issues (Trione, 2022). They invade the public space, triggering collective actions in which the audience participates and performs (Perelli, 2006; 2017). Significantly, by investigating socially engaged Art (Kester, 2004; Bishop, 2006), the author identifies «signals of a common ground» with the design community committed to promoting social innovation (Mulgan, 2007), creative communities (Meroni, 2007), and collaborative design culture (Manzini, 2016a). The two sides «herald an ethical turn in producing the material culture we are merged into and an activist approach». Therefore, we may already envision «a shared area to find new ties across the disciplines», which is undoubtedly a remarkable outcome in the aims of our research line.

It is no coincidence that keywords and concepts such as participation, collaboration, dialogue, social change, community-based projects, and relational approaches resonate in all the Arts-based practices selected to identify the *enablers* of empathy as a dialogic experience. Empathizing with the other is a demanding task, for it involves our body – the *somatosensory* apparatus stresses the author – as a whole. Nevertheless, the author chooses the six case-studies with a light – somehow playful – touch, which facilitates our endeavor in reading, analyzing and potentially put her proposals into practice. The clumsy movements of the people forced to cooperate not to collapse upon the floating transparent membrane of *On Space Time Foam* by Tomás Saraceno (2012). The total obscurity of *Dialogue in the dark* by Dialogue Social Enterprise (from 1989), which turn everyone into an unsteady walker playing blindman's buff. The joyful interweaving of bodies with the rubber bands knotted together of *Rede de élasticos* by Lygia Clark (1973). The industrious collaboration of refugees and citizens carefully building their modular lamps in *Green Light* by Olafur Eliasson (2017). All of these Art practices communicate energy, commitment, and trust. Indeed, they go beyond the distinction between "antagonism" (rivalry, competitiveness) and "agonism" (team spirit) (Mouffe, 2005).

Eye Contact Experiment by Liberators International (2017) and *Portals* by Shared Studios (from 2014) imply a more intimate, one-to-

one relationship triggered by eye contact. Once again, the gaze between two humans draws a subtle line connecting the old *Einfühlung* to the contemporary empathic experience.

In the *Eye Contact Experiment*, the colorful invasion of the public space by seated couples facing each other, sometimes silently staring at each other or chatting or even hugging each other, may also recall a joyful event. The gold-painted shipping container of *Portals,* however, discloses a much more challenging task. Its gray interior shows on a screen the encounter with the stranger with all his unsolved questions. Empathy as an embodied experience seems to reject any online conversation. Therefore, after the pandemic, we may think the whole value of this research has been de-potentized. On the contrary, *Portals* demonstrates that, under carefully designed circumstances, online empathic experience may be not only possible but valuable.

A careful analysis of the six case studies helped the author draft a tentative list of nine potential *enablers* of the empathic experience, subdivided into "contextual" (Art box, Tricky space, Bracketing place, Suspended time) and "relational" ones (Body to body, In your shoes, Common goal, Foreign face, In the same boat). They show many conditions related to space, place, time, and action, which may trigger empathy as a dialogic experience in its multifaceted complexity.

These *enablers* were tested with a survey among participants of the artistic interventions and a workshop involving researchers and PhD students working in different design areas, such as collaborative practices, social innovation, and experience design. Communication issues and the need for a substantial critical mass of respondents in some case studies weakened the survey outcomes. The workshop itself produced results below expectations fundamentally for an incorrect phase-timing. Therefore, the author is doubtful about attributing scientific value to these tests. They contributed, however, to share the first results achieved and to corroborate the effectiveness of the research approach.

Alice Devecchi, identifies seven basic principles for the empathic experience to happen after further review of the enablers. Some of them are simply renamed, and some others are adjusted or merged. The final research outcome comprises seven guidelines translating these principles into careful instructions. They are: Safe zone, Never mind the clock, Somatic engagement, Multi-subjectivity, Diversity as value, Interdependence, and Role change.

We always see a self-ironic game in the author's choice of names, almost as if to exorcise the complexity of the topic, the weight of the research, and the value of the outcomes. Alice Devecchi undoubtedly builds her research work better on the theoretical-analytical approach, which she fully masters. However, her effort to face the challenges of design processes and practices is commendable.

She focuses on guidelines instead of tools or a method because she acknowledges the elusive complexity of empathy. Guidelines are not prescriptive by definition; therefore, we can always adjust them to specific contexts, teams or goals. Similarly, we can improve them or increase their number according to further applications. The final set, however, covers all facets of the empathic experience, clearly tackling the fundamental issues of collaborative design practices. «The guidelines – states the author with a theatrical metaphor – address the setting up of the scene and managing a possible choreography of the actors on stage».

The outcomes of Alice Devecchi's research are offered as such to the design community for implementation and development. No time for further testing was devoted before the final discussion. Substantial corroboration for the validity of the guidelines, however, was provided by *Design in the Middle* (MAXXI Museum, Rome, 2017), a workshop in which 30 designers invited from the Middle East/Euro-Med region co-designed possible responses to critical issues arising from their territory (Perez and Tarazi, 2017). A careful scrutiny of the design process demonstrated the efficacy of some of the principles underpinning the guidelines (Devecchi and Guerrini, 2019).

During the thesis development, we co-authored two essays that are still highly ranked on Academia and Research Gate (Devecchi and Guerrini, 2017; 2019). With this book, Alice Devecchi finally shares with the design community her comprehensive work. Beyond comments and evaluations that will follow, the author's effort to shed light on the role of empathy as a dialogic experience in social and collaborative design practices – and we may say in society at large – deserves full consideration. Especially in a dark hour in which humans seem to neglect both dialogue and empathy dramatically.

References (not in the book list)

Bakhtin M.M. (1981), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, University of Texas Press, Austin.

Brown T. (2009), *Change by Design: How Design Thinking Transforms Organizations and Inspires Innovation*, Harper Collins, New York.

Curtis R. and Koch G., eds. (2009), *Einfühlung. Zu Geschichte und Gegenwart eines ästhetischen Konzepts*, Wilhelm Fink, Munich. Partially translated into English in *Art in Translation* (December 2014), 6, 4: 349-352.

Guerrini L. and Trocchianesi R. (2019), "Ridisegnare mappe tra arte e design/ Redesigning Maps, amid Art and Design", *Diid Disegno industriale/ industrial design*, 17, 68: 118-125.

Guerrini L. and Volonté P., eds. (2018), *Dialogues on Design. Notes on Doctoral Research in Design 2018*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.

Jardine J. (2014), "Husserl and Stein on the Phenomenology of Empathy: Perception and Explication", *Synthesis Philosophica*, 58, 2: 273-288.

Oxman N. (2016), "Age of Entanglement", *Journal of Design and Science*. Available at https:// doi.org/10.21428/7e0583ad. [Accessed November 6, 2023].

Perelli L. (2006), *Public art. Arte, interazione e progetto urbano*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.

Trione V. (2022), *Artivismo. Arte, politica impegno*, Einaudi, Torino.

 ISBN 9788835157236

Introduction

In 2008 Pixar Animation Studios released WALL.E, a movie about a cute little robot stranded alone on a desolate Planet Earth 700 years in the future. The acronym WALL.E stands for Waste Allocation Load Lifter Earth. His task is to collect waste and transform it into compressed cubes that he piles one onto the other, building skyscrapers of garbage. He tidies up each and every day a planet where he is the only one left, all humans having abandoned it to travel on a giant spaceship, the *Axiom*. After generations spent in the zero gravity environment of space living on the Axiom, humans have transformed into near invertebrate beings. They live their lives resting on comfortable hovercrafts that run on pre-defined paths, chatting with the other "guests" of the *Axiom* only via mobile screens floating in front of them. They can't walk. They never look each other in the eyes, they never encounter each other.

In this horrifying scenario of non-physical relation with other humans and with embodied space, the most "human" character seems to be WALL.E. Day after day, on the sidelines of his job routine, he rescues tiny "treasures" from the junk: forks, spoons, a Rubik's Cube, Christmas lights, a bulb, a lighter, all traces of a lost humankind he knows only by its waste. Despite his artificial nature, WALL.E proves to be capable of emotions and feelings when he meets EVE (Extraterrestrial Vegetation Evaluator), a smooth, white egg-shaped robot, sent to Earth by *Buy-N-Large* – the same big corporation that provides the aerospace accommodation to human beings on the *Axiom*. EVE's mission is to find plant life on Earth, if any.

Needless to say, WALL.E falls in love with EVE. He tries to win her heart by showing her all the marvelous and mysterious things he has collected. Yet, the core of their encounter is the moment they recognize they are similar despite their differences. They are both endowed with very large and expressive eyes and they have a pair of "hands". Eyes and hands offer them a kind of physical contact. Through eyes they talk and discover each other. Their mutual acknowledgment is firstly embodied in their eyes and afterward in their hands.

WALL.E and EVE's encounter gives origin to all the other relationships that in the end will give the Earth back to human beings. Indeed, EVE's name is not a random choice. So, humans will re-gain the ability to physically relate to one another, but only when WALL.E, following EVE into the outer space, eventfully lands on the *Axiom*. On the giant spaceship, WALL.E finds human beings. He is capable of recognizing them because, among the relics he has collected the one he loves the most is an old VHS of *Hello, Dolly!*, the 1969 Gene Kelly film that he watches over and over again. Still, the individuals on the *Axiom* can barely be considered humans. They are more alienated than the worst prophecies of the effects of automatisation could have suggested. They are even unable to remember their names, they are almost unaware of their own identity. After all, why strive to remember something about you when you don't have to tell it to anyone else? On the *Axiom*, humans have lost all physical contact with one another, they spend their time chitchatting through a screen. They sit on hovercrafts that follow parallel tracks preventing them from any physical encounter. They cannot move independently. They all wear the same suit, blue for men, red for women. They eat pre-packed food selected and administered by the *Axiom* organization. It's *Buy-N-Large* that provides access to this can't-miss service, otherwise you can return to the uninhabitable Planet Earth.

Indeed, the Big corp didn't plan WALL.E's arrival. In the attempt to find EVE, WALL.E awkwardly crosses a line where hovercrafts run fluidly and he disrupts the flow. A man falls down, but he isn't able to get up by himself and no one else helps him back to his seat because no one notices him. WALL.E is the only one who stops, goes back and tends him a "hand". After a moment of surprise and confusion, the man remembers his name – George – and together with it,

his self-consciousness. Something similar happens to Mary. Forced to cut off her virtual conversation when WALL.E gets caught between her and the screen, she struggles to remember her name in response to WALL.E's breaching.

Once WALL.E breaks the tacit rules of *Axiom*, one by one the humans awaken from their *anesthetised* condition, namely a state of absence of *aisthesis*, that is embodied perception. Deprived of the somaesthetic dimension, without physical contact with one another humans have lost the knowledge of the world around them and any sense of deep interpersonal relations.

My intention is not to review this movie. Indeed, apart from its romantic aspects, the movie embeds several issues which are currently up for debate. It introduces the topic of climate change and its extreme consequences. It questions market monopolisation by a few big corporations along with the underpinning socio-technical system and calls a reflection upon the effect of robotization. Among such crucial issues, I take WALL.E as a metaphor of the risky condition of isolation and atomisation and, together, of a possible antidote for such a crisis of affectivity. WALL.E, as a thoughtful technological device – a smart device, since he's able to learn and improve his skills – is the one in charge of re-educating humans on their capacity to relate to one another. WALL.E is an *enabler* of interpersonal encounters, as he – albeit unwillingly – creates the conditions for humans to look again at each other beyond screens. It's also worth noting that the very first step towards the humans' awakening involves a sudden interruption in the flow of their standardised lives, a break in the wall of their comforting habits.

WALL.E is the antidote, not merely because he is capable of love, but rather because he draws back humanity's attention to the importance of each one's own identity, and to what extent it is built on and influenced by relational experiences with others. WALL.E offers to humans the opportunity of re-discovering each other beyond the standardisation that made them all alike and erased their differences.

Metaphors aside, WALL.E is saying that we require time and space for embodied relational experiences in which different identities can unfold and emerge, preventing us from drowning in an undifferentiated mass. Situations for testing the dynamics of similarities and differences that bind us as humans need to be constructed, given that they

are dramatically reducing. We need «practices of empathy» – in the words of Laura Boella (2018b) – real contexts of interaction that enable complexity rather than avoiding it. We need empathic experiences, in tangible contexts and with real people.

The issue of empathy as an embodied, dialogic experience that potentially enhances the value of human relationships, constitutes the core of this book, which is mainly addressed to explore whether empathy is *designable* and how. Back to the metaphor, this book explores the question: how can we transfer WALL.E's impact into design processes?

The empathic experience – in the account drawn from phenomenology – consists of a particular dialectic between sameness and otherness by which the others are caught in their unique identity. The other is a subject of experience, autonomous and different from myself. As other from myself, she/he emerges on my experiential horizon. Empathy enables such emergence, and by doing so opens up the opportunity to rehearse the relational dynamics involved in the construction of self (Boella, 2018a, 2018b). This book investigates the conditions that facilitate this particular kind of meaningful, intense, interpersonal experience in order to make it *designable*.

A premise is due: this book results from my doctoral research. It's been quite a few years since I concluded my PhD and picking up the thread of that work has been pretty challenging. Still, the effort of updating the information and references of the issue at stake – empathy, design and arts – provided to me the opportunity of immersing myself again into a research line I had – for a while – set aside. I found that empathy-related topics in design are still up to debate, even if the discourse has meantime gained maturity and requires a different approach. However, I found also that my research can be considered still valid and relevant to design in some of its propositions. For this reason, I saved the majority of its contents trying to sew them up into a slightly changed context.

The first chapter builds a panorama of those design approaches that someway rely on human relationships, particularly service design and design for social innovation. The focus progressively narrows onto collaborative processes, in view of the fact that cooperation and dialogic skills (Sennett, 2012) could benefit the most from defined replicable strategies to facilitate their emergence. Relational issues including the

ability to be in dialogue with others, to share common resources with them and to work together towards solutions for more sustainable lifestyles have become increasingly diffused concerns for design theory and practice. Several scholars and studies, particularly in the area of service design (Cipolla, 2004, 2008, 2012; Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011; Menichinelli, 2016) are investigating the implications of dealing with communities and groups of different stakeholders in both spontaneous or planned collaborative processes. From a variety of viewpoints, they all stress the need of "enabling solutions" (Manzini and Jegou, 2008) for organising, supporting, managing and scaling collaborative networks and activities. In this line of investigation, this book aspires to add a small contribution, reflecting upon the contexts that may enable and facilitate collaboration.

To this aim, a first part of the book intends to shed light on the theoretical concepts involved in reasoning. The second chapter describes and clarifies the meaning given in this context to the expression "empathic experience" and to what extent it differs from the well-known – and often misunderstood – concept of empathy. Empathy in the last decades has become a *buzz word*, a popular concept that catalyzed much debate in several scientific and non-scientific contexts. For instance, within the political scene, empathy's popularity grew as a follow up effect of Barack Obama speaking out on the need to tackle the "empathy deficit" to overcome the crisis facing democratic systems[1]. Whereas, in academia, neuroscientific studies have led to the discovery of mirror neurons at the end of the 1990's, drawing attention to the primary empathic mechanism we are wired with. As a matter of fact, there has been a growing interest in empathy over the last two decades from independent thinkers and organizations around the world, to the point where a centuries-old concept with a philosophical origin has become an overused and misused word.

Empathy, as the ability to put yourself in another person's shoes, is often pointed to as a panacea for societal problems, a vessel of universal love supporting prosocial attitudes and behaviours. Nevertheless, empathy is a far more complicated concept with important philosophical implications that deserve to be highlighted. Laura

1. Obama B. (2006), *Xavier University Commencement Address.* Available at http://obamaspeeches.com/087-Xavier-University-Commencement-Address-Obama-Speech.htm (consulted 20/02/2023).

Boella – acknowledged scholar who studies the ethical implications of empathy – argues that empathy is a «laboratory of different experiences» (Boella, 2018a), and as such it would be more correct to speak of *empathies*, a plural declination for a multifaceted phenomenon involving the discovery of the other (Boella, 2018b).

To have a glimpse of the wide-ranging definitions and uses of the term *empathy* within its original context, it's sufficient to review the corresponding entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Stueber, 2017) that outlines the roots of the concept in aesthetics, its following heavy usage in the human sciences, psychology and neurology in particular. It was definitely adopted by phenomenologists, who, in the 1920's, started to investigate empathy's specific role in acknowledging other minds. The phenomenological perspective on empathy has been recently reconsidered and refined in the attempt to bring out its complexity. Some scholars – Dan Zahavi and the already mentioned Laura Boella, among others – refrain from the pretence of defining empathy and have instead begun work on defining what empathy is not. Their approach, clearly shaped by phenomenology, assumes that empathy is not merely a skill addressed to understanding and reading another's inner state. Rather, it involves a face-to-face, embodied and lived encounter with the other, who is perceived for his/her uniqueness and otherness. Empathy is analysed as a phenomenon depending on the relation between two subjects, rather than as a cognitive or affective ability. The lens of phenomenology served a theoretical backdrop for drawing out a perspective on empathy different from the one usually accounted in design culture.

The third chapter takes into consideration the existing studies and stances about empathy in design. Out of this work, evidence emerged to support that empathy in design is mainly considered as the skill of reading and interpreting another's feelings, wishes, tacit needs and states of mind. It is considered as an ability the designer should possess and train in order to achieve knowledge of the hidden sides of users. An ability made of personal sensitivity, affective resonance and imagination which allows designers to identify with others taking their perspective.

This book argues that empathy can be otherwise understood as an interpersonal experience, unfolding within human encounters, which enables the discovery of the other as other. The main inspiring author

for this experiential account of empathy is Edith Stein, a phenomenologist who discussed her PhD in 1917 *On the problem of empathy,* supervised by Edmund Husserl. Stein's take can be particularly relevant to design issues dealing with interpersonal relations. In fact, it focuses on the possibility of knowing the others by experiencing them in their whole otherness.

The experience of perceiving the other lays the groundwork for dialogic exchanges and cooperation (Sennett, 2012), which may prove useful for supporting and facilitating collaborative processes. Stein's propositions – filtered by recent exegesis, which make them easier to understand (Boella, 2006, 2018; Zahavi, 2008; Meneses and Larkin, 2014) – provide cues for an alternative model of empathy that brings out its multiple facets of an experiential act connected to intersubjectivity and to a dialogue-based understanding within face-to-face encounters. The need for strategies aimed at designing "situations" for empathy to occur has been stressed in recent studies (Battarbee *et al.*, 2014; Mattelmäki *et al.*, 2014), which highlight that the designer's empathic attitude alone is no more suitable for dealing with complex systems of stakeholders and/or with groups of participants who bear different social, cultural and economic identities.

The account of empathy adopted in this book could be relevant to the issues discussed above precisely because it shifts the role of empathy from just a way of acknowledging similarities to a way of highlighting and giving value to otherness within interpersonal encounters. The core assumption is that understanding differences is far more enriching than acknowledging similarities, because otherness extends one's own horizon. Emerging collaborative approaches to design, where «dialogic cooperation» (Sennett, 2012) based on the exchange of different viewpoints, on «agonism» (Mouffe, 2005) and conflict management (Benayasag and Rey, 2018) are crucial, could take advantage of such a perspective.

From this assumption, a research question emerged: How can we introduce into design a model of empathy as a dialogic experience, rather than a skill? From this point on, a personal inclination for the arts came into play. I trained as an art historian, with particular interest in participatory and collaborative practices, often midway between art and design. Another – connected – question then emerged: Can the empathic experience be a common ground between two disciplines – art

and design – that are increasingly engaged in developing collaborative approaches?

This book argues the case of a possible role for the arts in suggesting strategies and providing models for design processes, on the basis of a common concern for empathy. In fact, going deep into the issue of participation, collaboration, relational goods, dialogic cooperation and their connections with the empathic experience, a research thread appeared, I followed along my PhD journey. That thread is to study some art practices in which empathy can be acknowledged as a key to the participants' experience, exploring the strategies used to make the experience unfold in these particular cultural contexts.

So, the fourth chapter opens the discussion about the relationship between art and design today, trying to identify their common ground by following the lineage for socially collaborative practices on both sides. Against this theoretical backdrop, chapter 5 focuses on a selection of six cases of immersive, participatory and collaborative interventions that have been studied and analysed, aimed at circumscribing the elements which enable an empathic experience within the activity or situation. *On Space Time Foam* (Tomás Saraceno, 2012), *Dialogue in the dark*, *Portals* (Shared Studios), *Eye Contact Experiment*, *Rede de élasticos* (Lygia Clark, 1973), *Green Light* (Olafur Eliasson, 2016-ongoing) have provided examples of «empathy in practice» (Boella, 2018b), though in different ways and with varying results.

Out of the case studies came nine *enablers,* i.e. contextual and relational conditions that in each case can be recognised as triggers for the empathic experience. In chapter 6, all the *enablers* are featured and their action outlined in each case. To further assess and foster the observations and hypothesis resulting from the preliminary study, primary sources were probed. By developing and disseminating (online and offline) a questionnaire addressed to the participants of the selected practices, I gained insights about their experience and the opinions about its connections with empathy. The research took advantage of such a survey as a further step towards the refinement of the *enablers*. Chapter 7 presents the survey's results together with the report of a workshop that worked out as a testing ground for the *enablers'* system for discussing its possible impact on design practice. As a result of an intense discussion in the last part of the workshop, we – I was involved in the debate as well – pointed out the next step, asking ourselves the

question: What if we transform the *enablers* drawn from art practices into guidelines for designers, aimed at opening spaces for interconnection and «oiling cooperation» (Sennett, 2012) among participants of collaborative processes?

Hence, the last chapter discusses the *Guidelines for designing the empathic experience*, developed by weaving together evidence from the case studies, survey feedback and propositions from the workshop. The seven guidelines are intended as meta-design tools for collaborative processes (Giaccardi, 2003; Menichinelli, 2016), addressed to the setting up of spatial and relational contexts that enable dialogic cooperation (Sennett, 2012). They may be used to prepare and support design processes that rely on collaboration and people participation.

The journey of this book ends at this point, leaving room for a number of other research perspectives. First of all, the *Guidelines* must be tested over and over in real processes in order to assess their relevance and usefulness. Indeed, they could be refined and would benefit from further discussion within a design arena. The journey followed a path from theory to practice. In particular, the first part is rooted in theoretical inquiry, the second in empirical observation, while the third develops a proposition for putting both into practice. Actually, I am more confident with managing theoretical positions, from philosophy to art history, for I am trained in such disciplines. However, I endeavoured to transfer theory into practical proposals.

For this reason, the tangible outcomes – the guidelines for designing the empathic experience – indeed contain numerous shortcomings, and require revision from both design theorists and practitioners. However, the contribution brought by this book coming from a research with its roots into arts disciplines, bears a specific perspective on design. Relying on this specificity, I attempted to shed a light onto the contemporary design discourse, in particular bringing to the current debate on collaborative approaches a point of view from another discipline. In so doing, I sought to balance the strengths and weaknesses of an outsider educational background. Without claiming to achieve solutions, I rather have aimed to lay down a first brick for building bridges between contemporary art practices and design issues.

 ISBN 9788835157236

1. Collaborative, relational and dialogic. Keywords for designing in our era

The journey of this book is part of the book itself and it's worth to be spoken. I am an outsider of the design field. I have been trained as an art historian, hence my cultural and theoretical horizon is much closer to the art world than to design.

Art and design share a long-time relationship. As mirrors and sensible receptors of transformations, both art and design have a crucial role in finding strategies to tackle our current socio-cultural challenges. In particular, a large part of contemporary art practices show several touchpoints with emerging design approaches. Participative practices experimented by artists from the late 60s onwards (Bishop, 2006), dialogical strategies adopted in the 90s particularly in socially engaged art (Kester, 2004), a growing attention for relational aspects as the artists' horizon for action (Bourriaud, 2002), represent as many approaches as you can find today both in art and design.

Being quite familiar with contemporary art, otherwise I felt the need to spend a significant effort to delve into an hitherto unexplored field of study for me: design in general, service design and design for social innovation in particular. So, this first chapter tells the story of an art historian's journey into the current design discourse.

Along the journey, the area of exploration progressively narrowed from the broad field of design for services to a range of approaches to social innovation embedding participative, collaborative, relational and dialogical practices. My attention focused on design processes where relational abilities play a central role in accomplishing a given outcome, whatever that final goal might be. Among these practices and processes, those that are more dependent on human interactions and dialogue

raised my interest, such as Relational Services (Cipolla and Manzini, 2009), for which human relations are an important asset.

After this exploration of design related issues, the next stop of the journey has been a reflection upon how current art practices might contribute to this kind of design culture. Indeed, such an effort makes sense to me, due to my educational background. Nevertheless, I believe that a redefinition of the traditional relation between art and design is a wide-reaching matter that's worth discussing. The concepts at stake in this book – participation, empathy, dialogue – have already been working for a long time in art practices and are still explored by artists in different forms. Can art practices bring into design useful suggestions and inspirational insights in terms of processes, rather than just in terms of aesthetics?

Of course my answer is yes, they can. From the times when design became an autonomous discipline based on established principles and characterized by advancing knowledge and practice, for decades an utilitarian perspective on its contribution to human activities has prevailed. Popular thinking attributes to designer the capacity of giving nice and enjoyable shapes to useful commodities. By contrast, art is devoted to Beauty; artist can ignore use. Needless to say, this is an over semplification and purposedly neglect the ongoing transformation of art as well as of design. Still, it justify the mainstream view of the connection between art and design, i.e. art can inspire tasty formal solutions to designers. Things get complicated with services, and much more with social innovation. If designers' task is to create the better conditions for whatever interaction, if processes are at stake, not products, may art still contribute to design?

On the matters of empathy and dialogue, art and design can find today a new common ground, common goals and a fertile cross-contamination of practices.

1. Design practices and the issue of human relationships

While a broad topic, the role of human relationships in design involves a number of current and emerging design practices, especially service-oriented ones. In the words of Manzini (2011, p. 1) services are "permeated by human activity" and by the interconnection between people and things.

The ongoing transformation of design theory and practice proves increasingly concerned about processes, rather than objects. Design is growing similarly to a set of competencies for supporting the collaboration and sharing of resources that people are spontaneously taking at stake during this transition era, which is characterized by the crisis of our current model of economic growth.

In 2016 Manzini stated that emerging design is people-centred, rather than product-centred (2016a). It requires people coming into relation with one each other, because its outcomes rely on human interactions and the way they happen (Sanders, 2002; 2013). Today, in 2023, we've got used to associate the two terms "relational" and "design".

The urgent call for sustainability in many fields, from economics to ecology, has affected design theory and practice as well, generating multiple answers that often have in common the key factor of sharing. Services like car sharing, bike sharing, even home sharing are just few of the possibilities that the sharing economy offers. Sharing economy services have exploded in popularity over recent years with many expecting this trend to continue, with the total value of the global sharing economy predicted to increase to 600 billion U.S. dollars by 2027[2]. Be it sharing spaces, properties, resources, ideas or anything else, the possibility of using something in common with others requires a context of functional relations between people. That's even more true as respect to collaborative initiatives such as, for instance, co-housing or home nurseries that require a first person engagement and mutual trust among those involved. The *sharing economy* still relies on the interaction user-provider, whereas collaborative services works on the basis of the direct personal relation between citizens. While *sharing economy* runs through digital platforms and regardless to the place, in the collaborative model the network of relationships embedded in a physical space play a decisive role (Ripamonti, 2018).

Funnily enough, the natural sociability of human beings, so acutely needed right now, is going through a deep crisis as never before. The growing level of connectivity enabled by the development of communication technologies has paradoxically led to reduced relational abilities

2. Source www.statista.com/statistics/830986/value-of-the-global-sharing-economy/ consulted 12/01/2023.

(Turkle, 2011, 2015; Bauman, 2017). We are all immersed in a «world of connected solitude» (Manzini, 2019, p. 5). The risk of losing meaningfulness and complexity of the social experience worries many and calls for reflections and actions addressing this phenomenon. In this context, many design theorists and practitioners feel urged to find solutions by putting in place their capacity to create favorable conditions for new behaviours to emerge. Also, design disciplines are called upon to support the adoption of more sustainable ways of living, facilitate innovative strategies of producing and consuming and sustain creative communities (Jégou and Manzini, 2008) by leveraging collaborative projects that can steer the transformation towards a more inclusive society and a fairer economy.

These challenging tasks are almost matter of the wide field of service design – even though not exclusively. Indeed, the wide-ranging services based on *sharing-something* must be designed. Also, collaborative services invented by creative communities for answering to actual needs, still require designed *platforms* to start up and more importantly to be continued.

As a general consideration to introduce the topic, I can say that the rising service-based economy since the 90's onward has drawn the focus of design disciplines to developing a specific area of study and practice devoted to the interface of services, that is «the area, ambit, and scene where the interactions between the service and the user take place» (Pacenti, 1998, n.p.). According to this main aim, service design has constantly moved forward in the effort to keep up with the societal, economic and technological changes that have occurred in the last decades.

More relevant to the present argument, is Meroni and Sangiorgi's (2011) perspective, the merit of which is to operate a subtle, yet meaningful, shift from service design to design *for* services. This shift

> encapsulates the idea of the transformation in progress (a transformation that affects the entire design world, but the impact of which is most evident in service design). […] What is in effect being designed is not the end result (the interaction between people) but an *action platform* [original italics]. This means a system that makes a multiplicity of interactions possible. It does so by fixing use modes, making certain kinds of behaviour more difficult and others more probable while leaving opportunities for action and interpretation open (Manzini, 2011, p. 3).

Such a perspective is crucial to the present study because it acknowledges the value of the human relational component in both the service design process and its actualization. Design for services tasks design with creating «better conditions for possible behaviours to emerge» (Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011, p. 21). Indeed, human behaviours are unpredictable and undesignable. For handling them a high level of open-mindedness and flexibility of thought is required to all actors engaged in the process, including the designer. It is worth noting that the designer is the first one who must admit the impossibility to plan in advance and foresee all users' behaviours, instead focussing on the context around a service experience.

Within this framework, service design moved «from designing intangible experiences to designing the tangible elements that enable the desired experiences to occur in a coherent way» (Sangiorgi, 2009, p. 416). The attention is drawn on enabling conditions.

Things get more complex if we take into consideration collaborative design processes and collaborative services. In this case, human relationships play a crucial role for successful outcomes. Relationships, in this case, need to be facilitated, favored and managed, being them fundamental pieces of a puzzle that may fall apart pretty fast.

How can we create contextual and operational conditions, constructed situations that enable collaborative processes?

When speaking of designing the context in which processes – and experiences – may unfold in a desired direction, a reference to meta-design is owed. According to meta-design theories, the practice of designing is more about generating the seeds for the emergence of projects, rather than carefully and precisely planning all the features and specifications (Fischer, 2003). Meta-design is a broad concept, used in different contexts and with slightly different meanings, especially dealing with ICTs and the user-centredness they enable – not only in design. Fischer (2003) speculates about meta-design being more elaborate than user-centred design and participatory design because it shifts the control of the design process from designers to the hands of users, embedding the action of designing the design process. Giaccardi considers meta-design as a design culture generating at the intersection of interaction design and net art. She provides an overview of the concept identifying different possibilities of understanding the prefix *meta-* when joint to design: *meta-* as

- *behind* (or designing design): "Design of Design processes" / "Design of the generative principle of forms" / "Design of the Design tools";
- *with* (or designing together): "Design of media and environments that allow users to act as designers" / "Design of the organization of flows";
- *between/among* (or designing the "in- between"): "Designing the spaces of participation" / "Design of relational settings and affective bodies" (Giaccardi, 2003 p. 334).

Though developed as respect to computational environment, Giaccardi's approach is useful here to emphasise the shift from objects to processes and from contents to contexts, undergone by design disciplines. From this perspective, «design projects are not acts of planning of features and procedures to be implemented; they are instead the (creative) configuration of possibilities that will emerge from opening the mechanism of participation and manipulation» (Menichinelli and Valsecchi, 2016 p. 522).

1.1 Collaborative services and creative communities

As I have already said, the two main areas I've got through along this book's journey are service design and design for social innovation. I specified above why I account the interpretive model of design *for* services. As respect to design *for* social innovation, it identifies a specific sphere of action that involves cultural and societal transformations. In this case, design is intended as a way of thinking and acting, a set of methods and practices aimed at providing the better conditions for new sustainable lifestyles and behaviours to emerge and develop. The best considered definition of social innovation is owed to Murray, Caulier-Grice and Mulgan and reads as follows:

> We define social innovation as new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs (more effectively than alternatives) and create new social relationships or collaborations. In other words they are innovations that are both good for society and enhance society's capacity to act (Murray *et al*., 2010).

So, there is a close interconnection between social innovation and collaborative activities enacted by creative communities (Meroni, 2007). Creative communities are groups of people that imagine and

develop creative solutions because of a common need, managing them in a cooperative way. When the imagined solutions are actualized and start to work in a consolidate and organized way, it's appropriate to say that the creative community becomes a «diffused social enterprise» (Meroni, 2008). This special kind of enterprise is interwoven in the group's everyday life providing its components with practical benefits and, at the same time, social quality. Therefore, «through actively seeking to resolve their problems, the activities of these groups of people have the side effect of reinforcing the social fabric and improving environmental quality. In short they produce sociality» (Meroni, 2008, p. 32). The social services generated by these diffused social enterprises can be identified as collaborative services, i.e. «social services where final users are actively involved and assume the role of co-designers and co-producers» (Meroni, 2008, p. 32).

It's easy to note that collaborative activities for designing and producing these kind of services must rely on high quality interpersonal relationships. Co-designing and co-producing services for the community requires those involved to establish a peer-to-peer relationship based on mutual trust and intimacy, built upon open-mindedness and readiness to engage. «Peer-to-peer collaboration calls for trust, and trust calls for relational qualities: no relational qualities means no trust and no collaboration, and consequently non practical results from collaborative services» (Meroni, 2008, p. 33).

In short, for collaborative services to exist and perform at a high level, relational qualities must be enhanced through all the actors involved. For this reason, collaborative services are also accounted as relational services, and as such, they are often interpreted and analysed (Cipolla and Manzini, 2009; Cipolla, 2012; Cipolla and Bartholo, 2014).

The "social turn" of ICTs – on one hand – and people's will to find more sustainable lifestyles and behaviours – on the other (Manzini, 2015) triggered and boosted the wave of social innovation in the last decade. Within the broad domain of social innovation «"Relational innovations" are those specifically based on interpersonal encounters between two or more specific persons» (Cipolla, 2012, p. 151). They are a special kind of social innovations that require people to be truly engaged in a relationship in order to actually do something together with someone else.

To identify the fundamental elements at stake in a relational innovation process Ezio Manzini uses the expression "relational goods": trust, friendliness, empathy, mutual attention and care (Manzini, 2016b). Relational goods are both the pre-condition for these specific kind of innovations to emerge since they are essentially based on collaboration and sharing, as well as the product of the innovations themselves, since they are increasingly amplified by the collaborative activities that allow them to operate. As John Restakis writes in *Humanizing the Economy:*

> Unlike conventional goods relational goods cannot be enjoyed by an individual alone but only jointly with others. […] their nature requires that they be shared. As a consequence, participation in their consumption actually creates an additional benefit to others and increases the value of the good itself (2010, p. 101).

The type of services resulting in relational innovations and involving relational goods can be identified as relational services (Cipolla and Manzini, 2009). The main difference to standard services resides in the fact that in relational services, the *service performance* is co-acted by the participants, who collaboratively produce the solutions enabled by the service and share the resulting benefits. Some significant examples of relational services are home nurseries, organized by young mothers looking after two or three other children with her own at home; senior couples, whose children have moved out, hosting a student; or families organizing meals around receiving others, like a restaurant. Other examples include co-housing situations where gardens, child play spaces, dining facilities, recreational areas, guest bedrooms, laundry facilities and even cars and parking spaces are commonly shared and managed by the community itself (Jégou and Manzini, 2008).

In relational services, the standard roles of agents and clients are blurred and interchangeable. Consequently, service scripts are hardly applicable because the service "co-performance" is highly affected by the personal engagement of participants, their motivations and most of all their ability to relate to one another, in short by their "cooperation skills", to use Richard Sennett's formulation (2012). For this reason, «a relational service requires a high level of interpersonal qualities like intimacy and trust, more than any other kind of service» (Cipolla, 2009, p. 3). Participants need to be open to otherness and able to engage in a peer-to-peer dialogue; they are required to embrace alterity

and to acknowledge it as an asset. In short, sociability is at stake in relational services.

The concept of sociability is often misused as it was the same of conviviality, i.e. the social skill of being friendly. Richard Sennett states «"social skills" suggests people good at cocktail party talk or adapt at selling you things you don't need» (2012, p. 6). According to this view, conviviality produces nothing more than a superficial relationship, though being a promising start. Otherwise, sociability is the capacity of interacting well with others, of getting in actual contact with them. Sociability, indeed, is a key factor in relational innovations. Still, it is more difficult to cultivate than conviviality.

Producing «moments of constructed conviviality» (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 83) is not a sufficient strategy to capitalise on human relationships within collaborative processes. I will return extensively on Bourriaud and relational aesthetics later on in the text; here it's enough to say that introducing people to one another is something else entirely from providing them with an opportunity to do something together and to then share that accomplishment for a lasting basis. If the spontaneous will to collaborate and share can rely on a high level of sociability in the development of a relational service, the same sociability is likely to reduce when the service is well established. Nevertheless, relational services require sociability both during the start up phase and then to be continued through their maturity. They need favorable contexts to sprout and flourish, and they need care for growing up and reproduce.

> At this stage sociality [or sociability] is produced if the preconditions for sociality have been designed, meaning if the enabling solution allows for and cultivates opportunities for socially rich interactions (Manzini, 2015, p. 170).

When speaking of socially rich interactions, it is worth questioning how socially rich interactions would look like. What is the profound sense of sociality? What is the specific nature of human relations at stake in collaborative contexts? Indeed, it is a philosophical and anthropological issue, but designers as well have investigated these questions in relation to their practical application.

Amongst service design scholars, an effort to deepen this topic was made by Carla Cipolla in some essays about relational services (Cipolla, 2007; 2008; 2009; 2012; Cipolla and Manzini, 2009; Cipolla and Bartholo, 2014). Cipolla proposes an interpretative framework for rela-

tional services based on Martin Buber's concept of life as an encounter. Buber accounts that we humans are immersed in a dense network of relationships of two different kinds, i.e. «I-It» or «I-Thou». The encounter between "I" and "It" is an experience in which "I" relates to "It" by bringing about previous preconceptions and classifications. Otherwise, the «I-Thou» relation happens in an immediate way without the intervention of any prior knowledge. In other words, «I-It» defines the ambit of superficial or instrumental relationships with otherness, while «I-Thou» is a profound dialogical dimension of authentic relation.

In this perspective, Cipolla analyses collaborative services in the effort to open up a debate about the possibilities and limitations of design in enabling high quality interpersonal relationships that would make relational services successful and effective.

The topic is relevant to the service design discourse, since relational services can operate and flourish only when participants are able to relate to each other in an «I-Thou» way, acknowledging each other as peers, being open to otherness without preconceptions and engaging in a fair and actually communicative dialogue.

Furthermore, considering that the emerging model of service is based on sharing, it requires that participants are – or become – able to share.

> The relational approach have potential to contribute in the promotion of sustainable lifestyles. Be able to share is one of the prior interpersonal requirement for sustainable solutions. Sharing is not only about "programming" a time schedule to use some objects, but the act of sharing requires the ability to be convivial, to be close to other people and relate (Cipolla, 2009, p. 3).

The relational services model challenges designers by calling them to ease interpersonal relationships between participants and find strategies for nurturing them over the long-term. It's evident that human relationships cannot be designed, and so relational services cannot be programmed. Still, they can be enabled. As a matter of fact, «it is only possible to design meta-services oriented to stimulate and facilitate interpersonal encounters» (Cipolla, 2008, p. 153).

From the point of view of Manzini (2019, p. 28)

> it is not possible to design interactions between people directly and bring them unto being. Instead, conditions can be made more favorable for them to emerge by creating artifacts dedicated to making them possible and probable. This can

be done in two ways: by creating support systems for well-defined activities (in technical terms, by creating enabling systems) or by making the whole environment more favorable to an unspecified variety of encounters, conversations, and actions (technically, by creating infrastructure, i.e. by infrastucturing).

1.2 Relational services, relational aesthetics and the importance of otherness

When speaking of a relational approach in design, the theory of relational aesthetics by Nicolas Bourriaud (2002) has been often recalled. The French critic's renown theory, elaborated in the late 90's with respect to the contemporary art practices of the time, has been borrowed by design theorists and practitioners in order to develop a relational approach to design processes. Among them, some useful insights are provided by Eun Ji Cho (2013). Pivoting her argument on the possibility of adopting the theory of relational aesthetics as a potential theoretical foundation for a service design approach, she claims that sociability as a goal of design for services could be achieved by adopting Bourriaud's perspective. It could be used as an operative model for design activities addressing ways of being together and living in a shared word. Cho's observation of a collaborative service case study – "Scarsellini vicini più vicini" a project involving residents of an apartment block accommodating around one hundred flats in Milan – highlights the sociability produced by a series of design interventions aimed at facilitating social interactions and creating opportunities for convivial encounters, in short, prompting «arenas of exchange» – to borrow Bourriaud's expression (2002, p. 17) – among the service participants.

It is relevant here to point out that Bourriaud's theory was harshly criticised by art theorists precisely about the argument on social interactions. Among them, Claire Bishop stands out with her paper *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics* (2004). Bishop focuses on one important issue that Bourriaud avoids handling, i.e. the quality of social relationships produced by relational artworks. She argues that for Bourriaud:

all relations that permit "dialogue" are automatically assumed to be democratic and therefore good. But what does "democracy" really mean in this context? If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical

question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why? (Bishop, 2004, p. 65).

Bishop's observation is particularly relevant to the present work because it reflects a similar concern regarding relational services and, in general, collaborative projects. In my view, the shortcomings highlighted in Bourriaud's theory are likely to also be found in the strategies for sociability identified by Cho. Creating opportunities for convivial encounters and facilitating social interactions reminds the «moments of constructed conviviality» that Bourriaud pinpoints as the typical form of relational artworks.

If we account for the collaborative and relational approach as capable of generating a model of services giving a voice to bottom-up initiatives, managed by peers, so as to initiate more sustainable lifestyles, I am afraid that conviviality is not a sufficient condition to allow them to be effective. As mentioned above, conviviality is often misinterpreted as sociability, when in fact the two words connote different degrees of depth in the skill of being in relation with others.

Going back to Bishop's argument, she advocates the concept of antagonism, borrowed from political theory, to figure out a possible answer to the issue of the quality of relationships at stake in relational artworks. She makes reference to the political theorists Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe who argue that «a fully functioning democratic society is not one in which all antagonisms have disappeared […] – a democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are sustained, not erased» (Bishop, 2004, p. 66). According to Bishop, the relational artists presented by Bourriaud provide opportunities for merely convivial encounters inside art institutions (e.g. galleries, museums, biennials, etc) and between gallery-goers and art-lovers, that is people who already have something in common. In short, she claims that relational artworks are not likely to trigger debates and discussions, nor sustain antagonistic relations, thus revealing their inadequacy in heralding an emancipatory and democratic model of socially engaged art.

Conviviality allows no space for antagonism, and, consequently, no opportunity for effective dialogue. Conviviality as a strategy, reflects a water downed version of real social interactions. Therefore, adopting a theoretical framework for designing collaborative services centred on the convivial side of social interactions is likely to be misleading.

It would be appropriate, instead, to reflect upon what takes sociability beyond convivial relations, which is the goal of the present work.

Mouffe returns to the issue of antagonism some years later (2005) and recognizes that the antagonistic dimension of conflict in democratic politics could be tamed, rather than erased, by shifting to "agonism". Her reasoning stems from the re-known notion of the "constitutive outside", according to which «every identity is relational and […] the affirmation of a difference is a precondition for the existence of any identity, i.e. the perception of something 'other' that constitutes its 'exterior'» (Mouffe, 2005, p. 155).

Are there possibilities to tackle this inevitable antagonism? According to Mouffe, supporting "agonistic" relations might be a solution.

> While antagonism is a 'we/them' relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a 'we/them' relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognise the legitimacy of their opponents (Mouffe, 2005, p. 157).

To summarize, Bishop claims that the quality of relations enabled by relational artworks is never considered. In her view, relational artworks create just the right conditions for human encounters, no matter how much they are potential change makers. According to the art critic, relational artworks lack the essential antagonism brought about by human diversity, because they are typically addressed towards art lovers and gallery-goers, that is people who already share common interests. The lack of antagonism generates superficial relationships that erase the possibility to actually think and act democratically through a constructive dialogic approach.

As already said, Bishop borrows the concept of antagonism from Mouffe and Laclau. In 2005, Mouffe herself reconsiders her proposal using the term "agonism" instead of "antagonism". Agonism is intended as a healthy encounter of differences where the otherness of each party involved becomes an asset for a high quality relationship. This theory assumes that otherness (or alterity) is a valuable element in human relationships, because it is crucial for identity and the intersubjective construction of self-consciousness in relation to what is outside oneself.

By integrating Mouffe's viewpoint, I may argue that agonism is the essential ingredient for dialogical exchanges. Richard Sennett points out the difference between dialogic and dialectic, as follows:

> In dialectic the verbal play of opposites should gradually build up to synthesis; […] the aim is to come eventually to a common understanding. Skill in practising dialectic lies in detecting what might establish that common ground. […] 'Dialogic' is a word coined by the Russian literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin to name a discussion which does not resolve itself by finding common ground. Though no shared agreements may be reached, through the process of exchange people may become more aware of their own views and expand their understanding of one another (Sennett, 2012, p. 19).

It might be important then to understand which strategies can be enacted in order to enhance otherness rather than minimising it, to keep agonism alive, rather than erasing it, and to rehearse dialogic skills instead of dialectics. Collaboration is not a perfect and linear process. Instead, it should incorporate a vision of conflict that aims at transforming its disruptive stances in constructive energy. Conflicts are embedded in collaboration and – when strategically managed – can represent opportunities for generating «la connessione dell'eterogeneo e non l'omogeneizzazione del contraddittorio» (Benasayag and Del Rey, 2018, p. 139).

Following this line of reasoning, this book contributes to the discussion about the kind of meta-services (Cipolla, 2008) that can be designed to enable high quality interpersonal relationships, in which otherness is accounted, agonism sustained and dialogue made possible going beyond conviviality. In this specific role, art practices – especially those engaged socially – can contribute while they are also concerned with providing neutral spaces for "agonism" to unfold and flourish.

2. The experience of empathy and its role in human relationships

In the previous chapter a set of keywords for our topic were defined, the most relevant being relational, otherness – or alterity – agonism, collaboration and dialogue. Addressing solutions that enable high quality relational encounters, and which considers otherness as a crucial value for keeping agonism alive, requires a theoretical framework that binds all these issues together. I choose to focus on philosophy, precisely on the phenomenological approach to the experience of alterity. Drawing specific attention to the concept of intersubjectivity, phenomenology proved to be of some support to my effort of going deep into the folds of human relationships.

According to Edmund Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, intersubjectivity is the way of experiencing the other as other. This experience is also instrumental in shaping aspects of self-consciousness precisely as one begins to experience themselves as an other to someone else. In phenomenological terms, directly related to intersubjectivity is the notion of empathy. Phenomenological analyses can vary from taking empathy to disclose intersubjectivity or to establishing it, in all cases accounting for empathy as «a specific mode of consciousness […] that allow us to experience and understand the feelings, desires, and beliefs of others in a more-or-less direct manner» (Zahavi, 2001, p. 153).

Hence, the following sections review the notion of empathy, without claiming to cover the complexity of the concept, rather trying to clarify its meaning in relation to the main topic at stake. This clarification is important mostly because empathy is often pointed out as a universal remedy for societal problems and as crucial in promoting prosocial

attitudes. Such a perspective has been recently countered by arguments aganist empathy (Bloom, 2016). As a matter of fact, the expectations placed in the "empathic civilization" (Rifkin, 2009) clashed with an increasingly individualistic society permeated with anger and resentment (Mishra, 2017). Even form these few considerations, it's evident that a simplistic reduction of such a multifaceted phenomenon results in a wrong and only partial interpretation, with the risk of taking empathy as a way of erasing differences via the acknowledgment of what makes us similar. From a phenomenological perspective, empathy is a crucial experience for recognizing the irreducible difference between the self and the other. According to Laura Boella (2018) empathy unveils the experience of the alterity. As such, it could be accounted for as a means of nurturing agonism, laying the ground to dialogical exchanges that may result in enhanced cooperation and collaboration (Sennett, 2012). That's the reason why scrutinizing the phenomenological perspective of empathy could be relevant to the argument of this book.

1. Theories of empathy

Within common usage, empathy is an umbrella term for identifying a personal attitude of feeling what another person feels. It is used interchangeably to denote the understanding of one's behaviour and emotions, intentional perspective taking, unintentional emotional contagion and a fusion self-other that allows to deeply share other's mental states. Empathy is often misinterpreted to be associated with compassion and sympathy or with inner imitation. This ductility of meaning is on one side the reason for empathy's success, while generating – on the other – its misuse.

Antonio Pinotti – one of the most committed scholars in the study of the idea of empathy – pinpoints 4 "seasons" in empathy's usage, the first being *Einfühlung*, referred to as empathy from 1909 onward (Pinotti, 2011). The word *Einfühlung* – which joins the prefix *ein*, i.e. inside, with *fühlung,* i.e. feeling – is usually associated with the 19th century German philosophical investigations into aesthetics. The first two "seasons" concern the speculation inaugurated by Robert Vischer then developed by Theodor Lipps about perceptual issues. Both of the German philosophers' aim was to explain how we perceive and experi-

ence art objects. Later on, Lipps attempted also to give *Einfühlung* a psychological role in the understanding of other humans.

Stemming from the critiques of Lipps' account of *Einfühlung,* phenomenologists docked to the debate about the modes of intersubjectivity. The phenomenological investigations of *Einfühlung* then went through a series of ups and downs throughout the 20th century, during which *Einfühlung* changed in *Empathy.*

According to Pinotti, as soon as Edward Titchner (1909) translated *Einfühlung* to *Empathy*, the third "season" started, being characterized by a growing interest by Psychology and Psychosociology, especially in the anglo-saxon world.

By the mid-1990's, the discovery of the mirror neurons system brought about the fourth "season", i.e. the neuroscientific one, which is constantly evolving as long as technological developments provide more and more precise instruments to explore the brain's behaviour.

In the last decade, empathy has gone beyond the borders of philosophical, psychological and neuroscience and spread into the common debate, making headlines in diverse areas at very different levels.

Empathy became a buzzword especially since in 2006 Barack Obama[1] started to speak about the often-quoted «empathy deficit» and supported empathy related initiatives as President of the United States. Since then a constant growth in the trust for empathy has excelled over the last 15 years, to such an extent that economist Jeremy Rifkin theorizes that we are living in an *Empathic Civilization* (2009), where the *homo empathicus* has replaced the *homo homini lupus* as a result of connectivity scaled up to the global level. A fast and easy research on Google Trends[2] it's enough to show that the interest in empathy related topic has been climbing steadily from 2006 onwards.

Such a global attention led, for example, to the foundation of Empathy Museum conceived in 2015 by philosopher Roman Krznaric together with artist Clare Patey. Empathy Museum consists in a series of projects and installations travelling to international locations with the purpose of helping people viewing the world form the perspective

1. Obama B. (2006), Xavier University Commencement Address, Retrieved at http://obamaspeeches.com/087-Xavier-University-Commencement-Address-Obama-Speech.htm (consulted 19/01/2023).

2. https://trends.google.it/trends/explore?date=all&q=Empathy (consulted 14/01/2023).

of others[3]. Another similar initiative is Fondazione Milano Empatia, founded in 2017 with the aim of promoting empathy through innovative cultural activities based on listening stories from foreigners, encountering and embracing differences with open mindedness[4].

As a side effect, the popularity of empathy has transformed a complex object of investigation into a kind of vacuous slogan. Being empathic has become a must for psychical and mental wellness – at an individual and a collective level – for a harmonious societal development. While empathy might be a key to interpersonal relationships, this does not automatically imply that such relations correspond to universal love or acceptance (Boella, 2018).

Therefore, the following sections highlight the complexity of the concept of empathy. In order to not be exhaustive, it rather aims at summarizing the different theories of empathy. Leaving aside the neuroscientific discovery of mirror neurons, and the huge step forward that this discovery provided for understanding the biological basis of empathy, I will focus on two different perspectives, identified by reading transversely the various approaches to this issue, i.e. empathy as a skill – cognitive and emotional – on one side, and empathy as an experience, on the other. This distinction – skill vs experience – will serve the argumentation about the relationship between empathy and design, stemming from the observation that design has hitherto accounted for empathy mainly as a skill, and rarely as an experience.

1.1 Empathy as a skill

The discovery of the mirror neurons system in the mid-90's revealed that we are biologically wired with a base neural mechanism of empathy. «Mirror neurons are premotor neurons that fire both when an action is executed and when it is observed being performed by someone else» (Gallese, 2009, p. 520). The neuroscientific finding of this mimicry ability, embedded in our brain, has been understood as an empirical evidence of Lipps' take on empathy as inner imitation. Lipps was the first to adopt the notion of *Einfühlung* to explain social under-

3. For more info about Empathy Museum see the official website www.empathymuseum.com/ (consulted 14/01/2023).

4. www.fondazioneempatiamilano.com/ (consulted 14/01/2023).

standing. In his *Ästhetik* (1903-1906), he extends the role of *Einfühlung* beyond the aesthetic appreciation of objects to the perception of another embodied person as a minded creature (Steuber, 2017), thus introducing a socio-psychological reading of *Einfühlung*. «Lipps conceives of empathy as a psychological resonance phenomenon that is triggered in our perceptual encounter with external objects» (Steuber, 2017). As such, empathy – coined in English by Edward Titchener in 1909 – has been accounted for in the psychological tradition as a way of responding to another's mental state.

On the basis of the acknowledgment of the innate disposition to such a mirroring system, a multiplicity of training programs flourished in the last decades, which have explored the possibilities of cultivating our empathic ability towards enhancing prosocial behaviour. Programs for empathy training have been multiplying especially in the educational and business fields.

In the domain of education, the *Empathy Training Program* developed by Norma and Feymour Feshbach (1983) or Mary Gordon's *Roots of Empathy* founded in 1996 are still foundational for an array of courses and approaches adopted for teaching in schools of all levels. Since then, empathy education aims to unveil and improve the natural empathic attitude in children in the belief that bringing out an empathic sociability might be key to developing prosocial behaviour that can contribute in the long term to creating social change towards a more cohesive and harmonious society (Krznaric, 2009).

Developing the skill of empathy is considered a crucial asset also for a better workplace culture, trusting relationships among employees and mindful customer services. In 2022 «Empathy is a business skill» according to a blog article by the London School of Economics. The author writes: «Empathy is a hard business skill that affects an organisation's bottom line by increasing productivity, creativity and employee engagement»[5]. Recently, Sarantou and Miettinen in *Empathy and business transformation* (2023) collecting case studies with the purpose of discussing how to use empathy to create innovation within organisations.

At the basis of the above mentioned perspectives there is the assumption that empathy is a particular skill that can be discovered,

5. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2022/02/07/empathy-is-a-business-skill/ (consulted 16/01/2023).

improved and nurtrured thanks to proper training. Such an account is mostly connected to psychological and behavioural sciences.

Psychological studies (Davis, 1983; Duan and Hill, 1996; Eisenberg and Eggum, 2009) attempted to distinguish the different ways of responding to another's mental state or external condition. Basically, they draw a binomial distinction between cognitive and affective empathic phenomena. *Cognitive empathy* is sometimes also called intellectual, simulative, cold and deliberate; *affective empathy* is often associated with sympathetic, emotional, "hot" or automatic reactions.

Another relevant addition to the present discussion is Mark Davis' individuation (1983) of subscale phenomena for the two formerly identified groups. Davis refers to *cognitive empathy* as perspective taking (assuming another's perspective) and fantasy (projecting onto the experience of fictional characters). He distinguishes *affective empathy* as empathic concern (sympathy for someone) and personal distress (emotional reactive distress at the sight of another's distress).

It's evident that intellectual abilities are more likely to be taught on one side and improved on the other, because they result from deliberated acts and an active engagement; whereas emotions are not so controllable, even though in recent years, much has been said about the intelligence of emotions (Bauman, 2003; Goleman 1995, 2007; Nussbaum, 2001). The majority of the methods developed to bring out empathic abilities – included those adopted in the ambit of design – are based on perspective taking exercises and fantasy activation, such as role playing sessions.

To summarize, in this perspective, empathy is accounted for as an individual skill that we all share at a mental level, but, as with other mental abilities, can be enhanced through specific exercises and training. It has become one of those 'soft skills' which should be embedded in common education (Krznaric, 2009; Boella, 2018). It's also worth noting that in this case, empathy involves a projection of the self onto another from a first person perspective, not necessarily implying an interpersonal relationship following the encounter, or even not implying an in-person encounter. The self-projection, be it cognitive or affective, results in a moment of total identification of self and other rather than in a dialogic exchange. For this reason, the psychological interpretation of empathy has been criticized by phenomenologists, who

instead consider empathy as an intersubjective act *sui generis* (Stein, 1921), that is to say, as an experience of connection between self and other in which each party remains well separated.

1.2 Empathy as experience

In order to speak of empathy as an experience, different from the ability of being empathic, I drew the focus on philosophy zooming into a phenomenological perspective. Phenomenologists understand empathy as an object of investigation that involves an intersubjective way of knowing. A very short introduction of phenomenology will outline the main assumptions that form the basis of this different perspective on empathy.

The Stanford Encycopedia of Philosophy online[6] provides the following definition of phenomenology:

> The discipline of phenomenology may be defined initially as the study of structures of experience, or consciousness. Literally, phenomenology is the study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience. Phenomenology studies conscious experience as experienced from the subjective or first person point of view (Smith, 2016).

Phenomenology, as defined above, was launched by Edmund Husserl firstly in his *Logical Investigations* (1900-1901) as a new theory of knowledge, and later developed in *Ideas I* (1913) as a structured discipline with a specific method to study an array of conscious experiences from the point of view of the subject living through or performing them. In other words, phenomenology «tries to describe precisely what happens when someone is conscious of something» (Horner and Westacott, 2000). The types of conscious experience that can be studied through a phenomenological reasoning range from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire to bodily awareness, embodied action and social activity. Further forms of experience can involve spatial awareness, temporal awareness, self-awareness

6. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/phenomenology/ (consulted 16/01/2023).

and awareness of other persons. In short, anything that has content is experienced through an intentional act, an act of consciousness directed toward or referenced to an object in the world.

One of the main concerns of phenomenology is intersubjectivity, postulated as establishing the objectivity of things in the world. Intersubjectivity aids in the construction of a shared meaning of the outer world, as we acknowledge that the other is not only an object to be experienced, but rather another subject who also come across experiences. For phenomenologists, intersubjectivity is crucial also for recognizing ourselves as objectively existing subjects with self-awareness as well as the awareness of others.

The phenomenological investigation on intersubjectivity closely relates to empathy. The fact that we attribute to another subject the same intentionality of conscious acts as our own, occurs if we undergo acts of empathy. Depending on the author, the empathic experience establishes or discloses intersubjectivity (Zahavi, 2001). Empathy unfolds as an experiential act directed by a subject in acknowledging another subject. According to Husserl (1913; 1929-1935), the empathic act is itself the condition that makes intersubjectivity possible. For Edith Stein (Stein, 1917), as will be discussed in the following section, empathy itself is an intersubjective experience, and as such it deserves a rigorous phenomenological inquiry to identify its distinctive quality.

It's worth going deeper into Stein's account since it provides a clarification of empathy as a complex and multi-layered experience that occurs within an intersubjective relation, in straight opposition to the vision of empathy as a projective and simulative skill. Stein's fine phenomenological methodology dispels any doubt whatsoever about what empathy is not, ruling out from her account «those simulacra of empathy which without close examination might be mistaken for empathy itself» (Meneses and Larkin, 2014, p. 153). For her clarity of thought and rigorous inquiry on the essence of empathy, the present argument takes Stein as an authority relying heavily on her works in the challenging task of achieving a perspective on empathy useful for design theory and practice today.

1.2.1 The phenomenological perspective of Edith Stein

Wikipedia's entry about Edith Stein[7] begins as follows:

> Edith Stein (religious name Teresa Benedicta a Cruce; also known as St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross; 12 October 1891 – 9 August 1942), was a German Jewish philosopher who converted to Roman Catholicism and became a Discalced Carmelite nun.
> She is canonized as a martyr and saint of the Catholic Church.

The fact that the most popular and consulted online encyclopedia begins as cited above means that Stein's conversion to Catholicism, her life ending at the hands of the Gestapo in Auschwitz and her later canonization have overshadowed her notable contributions to philosophy and psychology. Indeed, her conversion to Catholicism in the 1920s resulted from an increasingly theological focus within her late work; yet, her declaration of atheism in the period she was assistant to Husserl in Göttingen and wrote her doctoral thesis *On the Problem of Empathy* – discussed in 1917 – ring true considering her distance to any mysticism in applying the orthodox phenomenological method to the close analysis of the experience of empathy.

Indeed, as Meneses says (2011, p. 117)

> as a writer of her time, Stein was not alone in having to address, and reflect upon, the relationship between her ideas and the concept of God; the concept of God was central to the concerns of her readership and peers. This does not transform her early work into theology: in the work discussed here [*On the Problem of Empathy*], the concept of God, in itself, is never used to explain the essence of the phenomenon of empathy, or of human beings.

Hence, even though a misunderstanding on this point exists (see Boulanger and Lançon, 2006, p. 505), it's important to declare that the present reasoning takes Stein's work on empathy as a reference in its purely philosophical significance.

In outlining Edith Stein's perspective on empathy, some secondary sources have been be taken into consideration that unpack the dense

7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edith_Stein (consulted 17/01/2013).

philosophical text of her doctoral thesis, almost inaccessible to most. The key authors referenced here are Laura Boella, Rita W. Meneses and Dan Zahavi. They are all committed to the study of empathy, intersubjectivity and the relation of self-other from slightly different viewpoints. Meneses is interested in the contribution of Stein's inquiry towards phsychology. Whereas Boella and Zahavi share a common ground in phenomenology, they deal with different areas of philosophy: the possibility of an ethical practice of empathy, on one hand; social cognition and self-consciousness, on the other. In any case, all the three draw their attention to the crucial role played by Edith Stein in the debate about the empathic experience.

To introduce Stein's conception of empathy, it's useful to summarize the main assumptions of her reasoning that belongs to the phenomenological tradition founded by Husserl. Meneses (2011, p. 118-119) effectively circumscribes 4 key points in her doctoral thesis on Stein:

> The first of these is that people are embodied, minded and embedded in the world. Secondly, the world is objectively 'out there' to be perceived, in the sense that it is not merely a subjective representation inside the mind. Thirdly, people relate to the world by means of an intentional act of consciousness. This intentional act is what brings the world and its objects into consciousness, as phenomena. Consciousness is always intentional – it connects in consciousness a self to an object, wordly or other – and it is always relational – in the sense that it places a self and an object in relation to one another, by means of an intentional act. Fourthly, phenomena (objects as appearing in consciousness) bear in themselves essential qualities of the given object. Finally, through phenomenology, it is possible to inspect these phenomena and identify an object's essential qualities.

So, empathy for Stein is a phenomenon to inspect through phenomenological inquiry, in search of its essential qualities. This kind of inquiry would lead Stein to conclude that empathy is an intentional act *sui generis* (Stein, 1917, p. 21), meaning that the object it addresses is the experience of another taking place there-and-then. Empathy is an act of consciousness that allows the immediate experience of what another one is experiencing, thus being a way of acknowledging otherness in its own right. In fact, according to Stein, the empathic experience involves always at least two perspectives, self and other. In that, empathy is an interpersonal experience by means of which personal and foreign experiences connect through an intentional act.

Self and other never overlap throughout the empathic process. Stein sharply criticised Lipp's claim of a unity between self and other at higher levels of empathizing, that kind of «*oneness*» (Stein, 1917, p. 16) that abolishes the distinction between empathizer and empathee. It is worth recalling the example – used by Lipps and discussed by Stein – of the novice acrobat rehearsing wire-walking. According to Lipps, when I see the acrobat balancing on the wire I identify with him projecting myself into his experience. Otherwise, according to Stein I don't become him, rather being beside him on the wire. To be more precise «I am not with the acrobat, but only "at" him» (Stein, 1917, p. 16).

Stein's rejection of empathy as a fusion self-object is consistent with her phenomenological background. As Husserl wrote, «had one had the same access to the other's consciousness as to one's own, the other would have ceased being an other, and would instead have become a part of oneself» (Husserl, 1973, p. 139). The otherness of the other, from a phenomenological perspective, is inaccessible and «it is exactly this inaccessibility, this limit, which I can experience» (Zahavi, 2001, p. 153).

This is a key point in Stein's account of empathy and the reason why she has been considered for this argumentation. Stepping away from the phenomenological reasoning for a moment and returning to the issue of otherness, agonism and dialogical exchanges, it's clear that a perspective on empathy which emphasizes its nature of interpersonal experience, enabled only by the irreducible difference between oneself and an other, is worth taking into serious consideration.

Again on this topic Zahavi writes (2001, p. 153):

> To claim that I would only have a real experience of the other if I experienced her feelings or thoughts in the same way as she herself does, is nonsensical. […] It would lead to an abolition of the difference between self and other, to a negation of the alterity of the other, of that which makes the other other.

The central role given to the other throghout the intersubjective experience is stressed by Stein consistently with her main concern of rehabilitating empathy in its own right, removing the ambiguous meaning of an emotional response to the other's mental state and lending it a dignity equal to any other act of consciousness by means of which we come to know the world (Boella, 2006). Therefore, empathy,

by connecting self and other within a relationship, becomes a crucial access point to reality, while strengthening the interdependence between people who live their life in a shared world and come to know it via their interpersonal relations.

According to Stein, empathy represents an asset to enhance the potentialities of sense making entrenched in human existence, basically disclosing the experience of discovering the other (Boella, 2018) and extending one's own horizon.

To understand what empathy is, Stein carefully discusses what empathy is not. One by one she rules out of her account the interpretations of empathy proposed until then. Empathy is not emotional contagion, inner imitation, nor sympathy, because it does not involve an emotional response and it cannot result in an identification of self-other, nor in that feeling of *oneness* identified by Lipps, which would remove any difference between self and other. It's not even an intellectual way of knowing, a projection or inference from analogy, a deductive process about the other; nor does it consist of memory, fantasy, simulation or perspective taking, being these all acts mediated by an intellectual activity and referenced to a past intentional object rather than to a there-and-then experience also experienced by another one.

By means of this progressive exclusion, Stein concludes that empathy is an interpersonal experience lived as an immediate coming-to-know another's experience. «Empathy is an intersubjective experience in the sense that it is an act of consciousness that does not exist in the absence of foreign experience» (Meneses, 2011 p. 146). The focus here is on the relation, on the transformative process triggered by the encounter with the other, in which empathy means first and foremost becoming aware of the other's embodied and minded existence (Boella, 2006). Being the basic condition for the connection with the other, empathy has the power to disclose the unfolding of meaningful human relationships.

1.3 Empathy as a dialogic process

Remaining in the phenomenological area of investigation, a notable position on empathy is that of Linda Finlay who combines different author's takes on empathy, including Merleau-Ponty, Thompson and

Rogers, to understand empathy as «a kind of openness to a relational embodied intersubjectivity» (Finlay, 2005, p. 272). Finlay's tenets are that empathy needs to be intended as a relational process, that involves the bodily intertwining between self and other. In this she explicitly refers to Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the human bodily commonalities as enablers of the possibility of real empathy, considering that «it is precisely my body which perceives the body of another person» (Merleau-Ponty, 1945, p. 354).

Another important reference for Finlay's proposition is Thompson's argument. He stresses the dialogical face-to-face experience underpinning empathy. «I experience myself as an inter- subjective being by empathetically grasping your empathetic experience of me. […] As we communicate in language and gesture, we interpret and understand each other dialogically» (Thompson, 2005, p. 11).

The merit of Finlay's analysis is also in her focus on empathy as a process rather than a "state", which echoes Roger's absorbing take on empathy's multifaceted way of emerging within an encounter (Rogers, 1975). Importantly, Finlay also stresses the possibility that empathy arises to different degrees: «we inevitably move in, out and through different intensities of empathy and distance during different moments of every relational encounter» (Finlay, 2006, p. 8).

Similar to Finlay's, is Laura Boella's take on the role played by the bodily gestures and expressions in unveiling the other's world. She claims for empathy as the «detonator» (Boella, 2018, p. 124) of the other's actual embodied presence on one's own scene.

The above mentions perspective touch upon a crucial aspect of the empathic experience as a process that sets off from a dialogical exchange (be it verbal or somatic) between at least two persons. In this view, empathy requires a physical encounter, a bodily presence. The empathic experience may happen thanks to the presentness of people participating in a situation and mutually acknowledging their actual being there and then (Stein, 1917). It may unfold throughout a kind of "conversation" whether verbal or non-verbal.

Empathy as a dialogic experience, as an embodied process of encounter with and recognition of otherness is similar to kinaesthetic empathy. Kinaesthetic empathy is an interpretive model heralded by Reynolds and Reason (2012) in the field of performing arts. They define kinaesthetic empathy as a «key interdisciplinary concept in our

understanding of social action and communication in creative and cultural practices» (p. 18) based on the crucial role of movement in embodied knowledge. The authors focus on performative practices such as dancing and playing music considering them as «perfect setting for strong intersubjective interaction» (p. 115) that provide opportunities for «a common intercorporeality» (p. 54). Dance and group music are non-verbal dialogues, embodied encounters that spur empathic experiences.

To the aim of discussing the role of empathy in design, I acquaint the perspective proposed by Stein for its focus on the particular human relation established in the empathic process. Accordingly, I postulate the interpersonal encounter as a constitutive experience for empathy, in which otherness unfolds and plays a crucial role in both self-awareness and the acknowledgment of the other. Hence, it's important to bear in mind throughout the entire argumentation that I consider empathy not as a skill, but as a «laboratory of different experiences» (Boella, 2018) that take place at the scene of an interpersonal encounter and by means of a dialogic exchange.

Shifting from accounting of empathy as a skill, an ability to be developed and performed on the side of the designer, to conceiving instead of empathy as an experience that enhances the potentiality of human encounters in collaborative processes, seems to me the first step in reconsidering the traditional relationship between empathy and design, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

If we accept empathy as an experience, we must also accept that – as any other experience – it cannot be taught, nor designed, rather just enabled by designed conditions. According to Stein, the empathic happening can be either facilitated or blocked. Boella (2006, p. XXX) states that a crucial issue today is making more tangible and concrete the intersubjective experience by raising awareness of what the otherness represents in relational terms. Making the empathic experience happen in a less occasional way, could be a strategy for re-engaging the complex sphere of experience involved in feeling, acknowledging, understanding and dealing with the other.

3. Empathy and design. A love story?

In the previous chapters I narrowed the context of this book to a specific design realm – the collaborative approach to service design. Meanwhile, I have argued for a perspective on empathy as an experience and a dialogic process. The next step is deepening the existing relationship between empathy and design. Empathy is quite a usual reference in design communities, giving shape to different methodologies in design processes: to name few, design thinking, human-centred or user-centred design, inclusive design or design for all.

Empathy has gained momentum in both research and practice as design has begun to call for a higher level of user-centredness in the development of products and services. The growing focus on user experience required an effective method to study and interpret experience itself. Empathy provided an answer to that new need (Koskinen, 2003; Mattelmäki, 2003).

The adjective "empathic" was introduced to the design field in the late 1990's from business literature (Battarbee and Koskinen, 2005) when companies started to realise that customers' responses to market studies were not enough to develop successful products (Leonard and Rayport, 1997; Sanders and Dandavate, 1999). Empathic design has rapidly evolved in tandem as the popularity of designing for user experience has grown (Postma *et al.*, 2012). In this context, empathy has been seen as the key for understanding others' feelings and emotions and all those subjective aspects related to experience that data gathering, observation and traditional research methods failed to capture. Since then, designers have been pushed to develop their empathic abilities in order to make interpretations of what people think, feel and dream

while envisioning the experiences triggered by products and services. The *Human Centered Design toolkit*[1] developed by the well known design consultancy IDEO in 2009 provides procedures to empathise with communities' experiences in order to identify their unmet needs. Design thinking tools and methods strongly rely on the designer's ability to empathise.

Empathy is considered a crucial ability also for Socially Responsible Design and Design for social innovation, which rely on empathy between designers and communities in order to establish meaningful relationships that facilitate collaborative innovations (Manzini, 2018, 2019).

Methods and tools for building empathy with users have been increasingly adopted in many design practices, including participatory design and co-design (Ho and Lee, 2013; Mattelmäki and Battarbee, 2002).

Recently, scholars and practitioners have become increasingly critical regarding the consideration of empathy and started to probe its limits in design (Norman, 2019; Heylighen and Dong, 2019; Marsden and Wittwer, 2022). Surma-aho and Hölttä-Otto (2022) recently discuss empathy conceptualization by analysing a great number of papers published on design journals. Their thematic analysis results in 5 core concepts of empathy in design thus revealing how rich and complex the related debate has grown.

In this chapter, I move from empathic design towards exploring the role assigned at empathy in design thinking, design for services as well as collaborative and participatory approaches. Without claiming to be exhaustive, I rather aim at presenting an overview of the different accounts of empathy among some design disciplines meanwhile pointing out the challenges of considering empathy an asset or a limit to the design process.

1. www.ideo.com/post/design-kit (consulted 19/01/2023).

1. Empathic design

The very first scholars to discuss empathic design were Dorothy Leonard and Jeffrey Rayport in 1997. They published a paper in *Harvard Business Review* that focused on the shift to empathic techniques to develop new ideas for products. Leonard and Rayport argue that empathic design can stand alongside traditional market research methods to provide useful insights of the users' unarticulated needs and wishes, even those they don't realize themselves they have. Empathic techniques – they claim – should be applied in a five-step process focused on observation, as opposed to usual inquiry. The paper ends with a mention of role-playing techniques useful to simulate the user's behaviour.

On the wave of this seminal publication, empathic design became an important issue within design discourses, especially concerning user centred approaches to product and service development (Postma *et al.*, 2012). As a result, the literature about empathic design has grown very rich, ranging from theoretical investigations to practical applications.

A basic text for empathic design is the self-titled book edited by Koskinen, Battarbee and Mattelmäki in 2003 that provides an overall reflection on this issue, including case studies and examples. The authors agree in using an empathic understanding as a method for designers to study and interpret user experiences. Among the articles collected in the book, I have highlighted those that give a role to empathy in the design process and discuss how to include it.

Koskinen and Battarbee define empathy as the «imaginative projection into another person's situation. It represents an attempt to capture its emotional and motivational qualities» (2003, p. 45). The method suggested for gaining an empathic understanding of users' perspective is *role immersion*, which requires entering into the users' world as users rather than just as observers. It's worth noting Koskinen and Battarbee's placement of empathic design in the overall design process.

> Empathic design has its place in the fuzzy front end of the design process even if empathy is ubiquitous because designers think about users at all stages of the design process. However the best place for these methods is the early, conceptual part of the product development process (p. 47).

Fulton Suri focuses on human centred design as an approach that creates more useful and enjoyable things for people. In this context, empathy is given a crucial role to inspire new "things" by inferencing people's desires from observations of their behaviour. She defines empathy as «our ability to identify with other people's inner states based upon observation of their outward expressions» (Fulton Suri, 2003, p. 53). Empathic imagination fills in the gaps when grasping subjective phenomena – such as emotions and feelings related to experiencing objects – otherwise inaccessible.

Fulton Suri suggests a kind of recipe for empathy in designing «with real people […] in real contexts» (p. 57). The fundamental ingredients of this recipe are perspective-taking exercises, props and role playing, shadowing, interviewing, storytelling and experience prototyping.

The need for tools and a specific method is stressed by several authors (Koskinen, 2003; Mattelmäki, 2003; McDonagh, 2008; Kouprie and Visser, 2009; McDonagh *et al.*, 2011), confirming that empathy in this context is viewed as a mixed cognitive and affective ability to be developed, supported if necessary, and applied to the design process to achieve a «holistic understanding of the users» (Mattelmäki, 2003, p. 119).

Mattelmäki, Vaajakallio and Koskinen provide a useful viewpoint on the evolution of empathic design in the past few decades (2014). The authors stress a shift in empathic design from interpretative to situationist terms, thereby meaning that designers and researches began using empathy not only to understand users from a first-person perspective, but rather to engage other stakeholders in design situations.

> Research on empathic design started with the need to have a strong connection with product design practice in contextual, experience-driven user studies. […] Later, however, the attention shifted from explorations of everyday life toward social questions and services. The practice and the mindset remained the same, but research was geared to finding ways to inspire and sensitize not only designers, but also other stakeholders. During the past few years, the researchers' interest has been in finding methods for envisioning increasingly radical design vistas (Mattelmäki *et al.*, 2014, p. 76).

This «radical twist toward more imaginative research» (Mattelmäki *et al.*, 2014, p. 75) pushed the boundaries of empathic design towards experiments very close to the art world, borrowing «open-ended

communication formats able to trigger empathic responses for inspiring design openings» (Mattelmäki *et al.*, 2014, p. 74).

A sign of maturity of the empathy related debate in design is the concern for the quantitative evaluation of empathic methods and tools (Smeenk *et al.*, 2019; Drouet *et al.*, 2022). Efforts in this sense have been made by Chang-Arana together with other scholars (Chang-Arana *et al.*, 2020). In the light of the observed lack of quantitative approaches to measure the contribution of empathy in design outcomes, they set «a performance-based method for measuring the degree of understanding between two or more people interacting in a specific context in real time» (Chang-Arana *et al.*, 2020, p. 4). Admittedly, the issue of measuring the impact of empathic design means that it is no more a frontier research object. After decades of discussion, conceptualisation and studies, empathic design is now a well-established approach.

This is demonstrated also by the number of studies that provide systematic literature reviews and make comparisons between different approaches to the role of empathy in design (Smeenk *et al.*, 2016; Jiancaro, 2018; Chang-Arana *et al.*, 2022; Surma-aho and Hölttä-Otto, 2022).

Useful for grasping the panorama of empathic design today is Surma-aho and Hölttä-Otto (2022) study on the conceptualisation of empathy in design research. By applying keyword search and snowball sampling to empathy related papers on design journals, they point out 5 core concepts: empathic understanding; empathic design research; empathic design action; empathic orientation; empathic mental process. Empathic understanding refers to articles that account empathy as a specific type of knowledge. «*Empathic design research* comprises the conscious methods used to understand others. This concept is often discussed in conjunction with the term "empathic design"» (Surma-aho and Hölttä-Otto, 2022, p. 4). Empathic design action collects al those user-centred activities carried on by designers along the design process. «*Empathic orientation* is close to an epistemology that focuses on human-centered understanding as a powerful way of knowing and reasoning» (Surma-aho and Hölttä-Otto, 2022, p. 4). The empathic mental process involves combining cognitive and affective understanding, automatically mimicking other's states and understanding others by reflecting on oneself.

Also, the durability of the ongoing debate about empathy and design is evidenced by the proliferation of case studies showing an array of empathic approaches to the practice of design. A very rich collection of cases is edited by Sarantou and Miettinen in *Empathy and business transformation* (2023). It's worth mentioning this book here in particular because it includes an entire section about the correlation between empathic design and arts-based methods. Sarantou and Miettinen collect a good number of case studies that features the use of arts-based methodologies for enabling empathy generation within organisational and design contexts.

1.1 Empathy in design thinking

Having a closer look to design thinking methodologies, you find "empathise" as the first requirement in a design process. Empathy gains the pole position in the Human Centered Design (HCD) process. The *HCD toolkit,* launched by IDEO in 2009, identifies three main phases in the design process: *Hear, Create* and *Deliver.* The first phase – *Hear* – is essentially accomplished through empathic abilities. «Designing meaningful and innovative solutions that serve your constituents begins with understanding their needs, hopes and aspirations for the future» is stated in the toolkit (p. 29)[2]. The toolkit's section on hearing suggests methodologies and tips to tackle the challenge of deeply observing, listening and interpreting those one you are designing for.

In the *Create* phase, empathic design is outlined as a method for the design team to keep in mind the people they are designing for, and «to not just understand the problem mentally, but also to start creating solutions from a connection to deep thoughts and feelings» (p. 89).

In the IDEO *Field Guide to Human Centered Design*[3], empathy is one of the seven mindsets that human centered designers should embrace in order to keep focused on the people they are designing for. The three phases *hear, create* and *deliver* are converted to the three "I's" of *Inspiration, Ideation*, and *Implementation*. As before, empathy

2. www.ideo.com/post/design-kit (consulted 19/01/2023).

3. *Field Guide to Human Centered Design*. Retrieved from www.designkit.org/resources/1 (consulted 21/01/2023).

is required at the early stages of the process, especially during the *Inspiration* phase where it introduces knowledge and understanding of other people's hopes and desires.

> Empathy is the capacity to step into other people's shoes, to understand their lives, and start to solve problems from their perspectives. Human-centered design is premised on empathy, on the idea that the people you're designing for are your roadmap to innovative solutions. All you have to do is empathize, understand them, and bring them along with you in the design process (Kolawole, 2015, p. 22).

The suggested method to empathise with the constituents is to immerse it into their lives, within the contexts where they work and socialize; in short, to tune into empathy within the complex sphere of their own experiences.

As already stressed above, from a profit-driven business perspective empathy is considered crucial to design successful products or services developed on the basis of their desirability. «By responding to real, but unexpressed and unmet needs, design empathy promised to bring financial reward» (Battarbee *et al*., 2014, p. 2). In the global marketplace, it has become increasingly difficult to grasp the desires and needs of a multiplicity of clients and users from different parts of the world with different cultures and identities. As businesses worldwide are becoming more and more complex and involve a growing number of stakeholders, design consultancies could benefit from integrating into the design thinking process an empathic approach extended to «suppliers, buyers, and customers – the whole ecosystem of people and business involved» (p. 3).

On the basis of this premises, Battarbee *et al*. in 2014 argued that new challenges for designers would be *scaling* and *sustaining* empathy inside and outside of companies.

> To be most effective, empathy cannot remain the privilege of an individual, a design team, or even a tight group of highly involved stakeholders. Nor can it endure only for the course of a project. If design empathy is to sustain impact throughout an organization, it needs ongoing support from the overarching culture. An empathic attitude needs to be championed, nurtured, and practiced regularly (Battarbee *et al*., 2014, p. 6).

By *scaling empathy* greater numbers of people, of a greater diversity, might be involved in "out of ego" experiences. *Sustaining empathy*

would require cultivating within organizations «habitual awareness of the people who are affected by our decisions, beyond the life span of a specific project» (p. 6). To sustain empathy they propose a two-fold method. First, *empathic artifacts* should be designed «to deliver experiences that build empathy for what people are actually going through in the real world» (p. 11). After that it is crucial to foster an *empathic culture* to extend the awareness that empathy needs to be facilitated for others as well as for ourselves.

2. Empathy in service design

A similar concern of extending empathy's impact is acknowledged by Sustar and Mattelmäki in regards to designing complex systems of public services, that require systemic, context-oriented and holistic solutions. In *Whole in one: Designing for empathy in complex systems* (2017) they «reconsider the meaning of empathy and empathic design when dealing with complex systems» (p. 2) in which multidisciplinary actors and stakeholders share a stage.

Interestingly, they propose that

> rather than dealing with emotions and mental states, the empathic design approach aims to assist and scaffold people in a system, to understand how the system works from another perspective and to reflect their own viewpoints on a better whole (p. 2).

Furthermore, Sustar and Mattelmäki examine existing empathic design tools, arguing that they are too narrowly focused on emotions when dealing with service design and network systems that involve people of different cultural backgrounds. They propose in turn to shift from individual empathy to «intercultural empathy to better understand values, views and behaviours that are different from ours"» (p. 2). Discussing the case study reported in the paper – a one-year joint project between a governmental organisation and Aalto University related to designing for governmental immigration services – the authors stress that «although the scaffolding of *intercultural empathy* was predominant for empathising in individual and service levels between end-users and service providers, it also enabled better understanding of end-users' needs and wishes at the governmental level» (ivi, p. 6).

Needless to say, the issue of human behaviour and interactions is crucial for service design. So, it's worth to check out here the role of empathy specifically in the design of services. Empathic design and design thinking both provide methodologies that can be applied to design for services as well. As a matter of fact, in service design literature, the word "empathy" is quite recurring. Again, it is usually noted for its potential to provide insights regarding users' needs and wishes. «Design for services starts at the service interface, applying methodologies that augment the capacity to deeply understand (empathise with) users and service participants' needs and evaluate existing or imagine future interactions» (Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011, p. 19).

The quality of service interactions is a key issue for the design of services. Creating the conditions for service participants to empathise with one another is acknowledged as a way of enabling positive and cooperative behaviours, and consequently effective and qualitative interactions. Therefore, empathic attitudes would involve not only the designer or the design team in the early stages of the design process, but would extend to other actors – as service participants –spreading to the phase of service actualization and even to the interpretation of human experiences and behaviours unfolding during the service interactions.

In *Design for Services*, Meroni and Sangiorgi (2011) report on different projects based on an empathic attitude. The chapter dedicated to "Designing Interactions, Relations and Experiences" stresses the role of empathy as a key factor to understand the experience of people involved in a service interaction, «facilitate the engagement of the users in the redesign of experiences (co-design), and to generate service ideas consistent with existing behaviours» (p. 27). Consequently, in designing services, there's an urgent need for methods and tools to build and support "empathic conversations" with service participants. The reported projects are drawn by different approaches including Human Centered Design, Design for Experience and – particularly interesting – Co-experience (Forlizzi and Battarbee, 2004; Battarbee, 2005). Co-experience is intended as a «user experience in social contexts, where experiences are created together or shared with others» (Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011, p. 39). In this perspective, building empathic relationships might be useful to foster and support collaboration and co-creation.

3. Empathy in participatory and collaborative processes

Designing for services seems to move designers from user-centred to human-centred design, from designing for experience to designing for co-experience and from field study to enhancing empathy and co-creation (Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011, p. 41).

By becoming increasingly user and human-centred, most of design processes changed in co-design processes and started to demand strategies for handling the participants' involvement. Co-creation, co-design, collaboration and participation all ask for the setting of a fair and equal communicative space (Ho and Lee, 2012). In order to enable a truly qualitative communicative space, a respectful, open-minded and inclusive approach by the participants is required. «This raises the question of what circumstances render open communicative space possible» (Ho and Lee, 2012).

Ho and Lee propose to look through the phenomenological lens of intersubjectivity to examine participatory design processes. They claim to follow Husserl in accounting for intersubjectivity as the possible means of knowledge of an existing outer world. Furthermore, their suggestion is to «make use of practicing empathy in participatory design as the way of advancing the individual's knowledge and experience through a reciprocal reflection between a person and the other» (Ho and Lee, 2012, p. 74).

Ho and Lee's reflection on intersubjectivity and empathy is drawn from the experience of a design training laboratory – *Design.Lives Lab* – held in Hong Kong in 2009 in the form of a three-day workshop with 120 teenagers as part of their design introduction summer programme. In organizing and conducting the laboratory they:

incorporated the concept of "empathy" to enrich our understanding and practice of the inclusive design projects. This concept was drawn from our original version of the concept of intersubjectivity, which was intended to help participant designers to understand the inner and social lives of the active design partners (p. 75).

In the interactive session of the *Design.Lives Lab*, they stressed the importance of dialogue and of an equal starting point for designers and participants, so to support inclusiveness in the participation. In this

context, they leveraged the concepts of intersubjectivity and empathy as key factors to foster a dialogical approach.

The issue of a dialogical approach is relevant also to Socially Responsible Design (SRD). Cipolla and Bartholo take Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue (Buber, 1921/1996; 1947/2006) as a reference in order to distinguish empathy from inclusion, in favour of the latter. They reference Buber when writing

> [Empathy is] the exclusion of one's own concreteness, the extinguishing of the actual situation in life, the absorption in the pure aestheticism of the reality in which one participates. Inclusion is the opposite of this. It is the extension of one's own concreteness, the fulfillment of the actual situation in life, the complete presence of the reality in which one participates. Its elements are, first, a relation, of no matter what kind, between two persons, second, an event experienced by them in common […] A relation between persons that is characterized in more or less degree by the element of inclusion may be termed as a dialogical relation (Cipolla and Bartholo, 2014, p. 115).

To be in dialogue means, in the buberian framework, to be in relation, which is to be alive. This interweaving of dialogue, relation and actual life is transferred by Cipolla and Bartholo into SRD processes as an approach to designing inclusive interventions rooted in the surrounding context. In fact, by applying a dialogical approach to traditional participatory design techniques, SRD aims at involving users more than just as participants, and designers in a greater role than just as facilitators. Inclusion should indeed concern users, but also designers themselves.

> In terms of the design process it means that each designer needs to perform both roles: as a facilitator guiding the design process, and simultaneously as one who is *included*, who enters into relations with others to pursue a solution to a shared problem felt by all those concerned, including the designer himself (p. 92).

The authors find inclusion in opposition to empathy, albeit acknowledged as a relevant approach to SRD. Empathy is considered an hostile act to actual dialogue, since – according to Buber – it would lead to a fusion self-other, a total identification, rather than supporting an authentic relation in which each one remains authentically himself, separate from the other. Actually, Stein's view on empathy more closely

resembles the buberian notion of "I-Thou", that is the authentic dialogical relation. After all, both Stein and Buber stress the value of alterity and of the irreducible difference between self and other that enriches and shapes an authentic human relationship.

As French and Teal write:

> effective listening and dialogue requires empathy and inclusion: these concepts are not mutually exclusive. It is important to be inclusive of differing perspectives and empathy is required to understand and identify differences and synergies in participants' needs and experiences towards collectively designing an outcome that is inclusive (French and Teal, 2016, n.p.).

The role of designers in participatory contexts is, according to the authors, to engender empathy in collaborative creativity so as to support a shift in the relationships between participants from "them and us" to a collective "we", which is required to build trust and develop more impactful ideas.

A collaborative approach is key to the development of design practices that can tackle the current and wide-ranging systemic, social, political, economic and environmental challenges. As already said, design is given a prominent role in the transition to a more sustainable future by virtue of its capacity to bridge technological research and innovation and their application to social practice. In this context, recent researches discuss the role of designers in developing and sustaining modes of action suitable for facing the "dark times"[4] we are living in (Staszowski and Tassinari, 2021). Novel approaches include for instance the attention towards other-than-human actors in the design process. The contribution of design thought and action is important also for handling with critical and complex situations such as the migration crisis (Bernagozzi, 2021). Raising awareness of human (and non-human) interdependence, shining a spotlight on the concept of togetherness, restoring the capacity of dialogue; each one of these actions is vital for coming over these times of overall crisis. And each one relates in a way or another to the establishment of meaningful relationships. Manzini

4. the expression "dark times" is used by philosopher Hanna Arendt (1995/1993) for describing her contemporaneity with respect to the atrocities of the twentieth century, but also to the darkness that «comes when the open, light spaces between people, the public spaces where people can reveal themselves, are shunned or avoided, the darkness is the hateful attitude toward the public realm, toward politics» (Young-Bruehl, 2006, p. 6).

uses the expression «meaningful encounters», as «the molecular elements from which to start building new communities» (2019, p. 28). Social innovations that put into action more sustainable ways of living and being are rooted in the initiative of people who decide to collaborate for achieving a desirable shared result. Collaboration and empathy have a two-way tie: on one side empathy – intended as the experience of acquainting otherness – lays the groundwork to conversations that make people form different backgrounds work together; on another side collaboration itself produces «as a kind of valuable by-product, relational goods, such as trust, empathy, friendliness, capability to listen to each other and do things» (Manzini, 2018, p. 164).

In this context, collaborative design practices have a double-sided value: they provide favorable conditions for building new communities within which empathic experiences are likely to unfold as well as they offer secure contexts for rehearsing negotiation with and adaptation to diversity.

For this reason, empathy and collaboration have been coupled within the widely debated issue of design and resilience.

> Dealing with different and not-previously-known cultural identities may be highly challenging. It requires the capacity of negotiating and reshaping our own identity within each encounter. Collaborative design processes play a crucial role in rehearsing this continuous negotiation, opening ourselves to change and adaptation (Devecchi and Guerrini, 2019, p. 595).

Great importance is given to collaboration and empathy also in the Systemic Design Framework[5], launched by the authoritative Design Council in 2021 as a tool to help designers tackling with major challenges that involve different disciplines and approaches. That's not the right place to go deep into the framework's analysis, yet I would like to note here that this set of principles and recommendations reflects the Design Council's effort to update their successful Double Diamond model providing it with a wider approach to systemic challenges. The pandemics by Covid-19, the climate change, the Ukrainian war and the energy crisis are just the most recent and urgent global challenges

5. The Systemic Design Framework is available for the download at this URL www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/skills-learning/tools-frameworks/beyond-net-zero-a-systemic-design-approach/ (consulted 01/02/2023).

that – due to their complexity – call for systemic solutions. With the Systemic Design Framework the Design Council acknowledges the need for new tools that «place our people and pur planet at the heart of design»[6]. Among the six principles included in the framework two are relevant here: one is about being inclusive and welcoming difference by «creating safe, shared spaces and language to bring in multiple and marginalized perspectives» (Design Council, 2021, p. 43); another is about collaborative ways of working which benefit from relational capabilities. A set of activities in particular are recommended for building empathy, trust and shared understanding along the design process in view of better connections and relationships among all the actors involved in the work.

4. Empathy critics

The topic of empathy in design has reached maturity in the last five years, as demonstrated by the decline of its enthusiastic uptake and the emergence of critical voices about the transformation of empathy in a kind of "design ideology" unquestioningly applied as guarantee of a high-quality design process.

Interestingly, Heylighen and Dong (2019) report the recent acknowledgment of the phenomenological vision of empathy in the design debate, making particular reference to Stein and her interpretation by Finlay (2005) focused on the need for the bodily presence (see chapter 2). They advance some doubts on the limits of this embodied empathy when adopted for "traditional" design processes that often involve displaced participants and unknown end-users. Also considering experiments with wearable devices that simulate bodily conditions different form our own, the limits of empathy shall be accounted as a lived experience is far more complex. Consistently, they ask how much empathy can make a difference in achieving actual outcomes.

To this regard, I may argue that whilst recognizing the existence of a phenomenological turn in the way design intends empathy, they fall into the trap of the cliché that interpret empathy as "walking in someone else's shoes". Put in this way, I agree that designers' empathic

6. *Ibidem*.

horizon cannot be extended beyond the limits of one's own bodily perception. Otherwise, going back to empathy as a dialogic experience where the difference between oneself and the other is a key asset for mutual knowledge and cooperation much more than for thoroughly understanding the other, it's clear that the incompleteness of empathy is not an issue. As a confirmation to my argument, the authors suggest in the conclusion to adopt participatory approaches complementary to empathy, as an invitation «to recognise and respect the "realm of interpersonal difference" among people through ongoing reflection on the eventual limits of knowing the experiences of others» (Kullman, 2016, p. 85 as cited in Heylighen and Dong, 2019, p. 119).

Don Norman, the one who coined the term "user-experience" says: «I approve of the spirit behind the introduction of empathy into design, but I believe the concept is impossible, and even if possible, wrong»[7]. Norman's position against empathic design derives from the consideration that designers work for millions of users and it's impossible as well as useless to understand each one of them. He too points out the limits of the empathic approach and instead the importance for designers of being with the communities they are designing for, becoming facilitators of conversations between experts and non-experts.

Marsden and Wittwer (2022) voices sound similar to Norman's in their being concerned by the superficiality of empathy's conceptualization in design that may lead to stereotypical evaluations and – consequently – exclusion and marginalization. They argue that

> the importance of empathy for user-centered designing has led to the development of practical techniques to support empathy – but these shortcut methods to "produce" empathy are often an oversimplification that does not do justice to the complexity of empathy (Marsden and Wittwer, 2022, p. 2).

Both stances recalls to my mind Cipolla and Bartholo uptake about inclusion of designers (above mentioned). Again I reaffirm that the kind of empathy that both stem from is that of a psychological kind, either affective or cognitive, and not the dialogic experience I stressed above which, instead, is much closer to the buberian "inclusion" proposed by Cipolla and Bartholo.

7. https://xd.adobe.com/ideas/perspectives/leadership-insights/why-i-dont-believe-in-empathic-design-don-norman/ (consulted 01/02/2023).

5. Discussion

Empathy has been given a prominent role in design, both of products and services, as a means to access the most intangible aspects of human experience. As such, empathy has typically been considered a skill, an ability to be applied when designing through specific methods, tools and techniques. In most cases, empathy is considered as a mix of cognitive and affective abilities, valuable precisely because it merges rational and emotional stances, thus including also the unspoken, the unseen and the invisible facets of human behaviour.

As a general observation, I noticed that in the design discourse there's a shared concern for developing new tools and methods for applying an the empathic approach in order to deal with the new challenges posed by increasingly complex systems of services, relational services and in general by the changing role of the designer in collaborative contexts.

In this perspective I may argue that empathy moved

- from the user-designer relationship to a broader group of participants, whether including designers themself or not;
- from a self-referential act of the designer understanding the end-users to a "soft skill" to be scaled and sustained within organizations and companies;
- from an individual ability to use when designing to an experience aimed for by designed "situations";
- from an approach adopted at the early stages of the design process to a process itself spreading along the entire design action.

As a direct consequence of these changes, great attention has been focused on empathy building strategies, especially in the design of services, since service encounters rely on human encounters and empathy is often acknowledged for its potential to enable high quality interactions. The recognized importance of sharpening empathy at different levels has resulted in the opening up of experiments more closely related to art and cultural practices, such as performances and exhibitions. In such a broadening perspective lies the opportunity to re-articulate the relationship between art practices and design, that is at the core of this book.

The phenomenological interpretation of empathy as a laboratory of different experiences (Boella, 2018), occurring in a relational frame between two (or more) different subjects who, by means of this experience, achieve an enriched knowledge both about the other and about themselves, has been quite neglected. Empathy is generally understood as its psychology-related meaning of cognitive/affective skill, i.e. as in the common phrase to 'walk in another's shoes', which entails a total identification with another person, a blurring of the self-other, even if transitory. Especially in the emerging collaborative approach to design, the role of human relationship is acknowledged as crucial. Since co-design has gained momentum, designers are no longer asked to merely understand their users; rather, they are themselves involved in a process in which everyone – expert or non-expert – plays a role in achieving a common goal (Sanders and Stappers, 2008; Manzini, 2015). Empathy as a skill, even though acquired with specific techniques, ultimately falls short of the demand for establishing a truly dialogic exchange aimed at encouraging cooperation among multiple actors (Meroni and Sangiorgi, 2011; Cipolla and Manzini, 2009). Given these premises, this book aims at shedding light on an alternative account of empathy – one in which embodied encounters and dialogue take the stage – and investigating the possibilities to suitably apply it to design practices.

4. Art as context provider

Creating favorable conditions for meaningful encounters (Manzini, 2019) can be considered a design task, especially in the context of social innovation and collaborative services. Empathy is included among the elements that enhance the intensity of human relationships.

Empathy is currently a "popular" concept in the design discourse. It has gone through a growing fortune as a universal solution for designing better. Nowadays, this enthusiastic uptake is declining and is leaving space to critical stances and reconsiderations of its mainstream interpretation as a skill. As an alternative, empathy can be conceptualised looking through the lens of phenomenology as a dialogic experience based on embodied encounters that gives value to otherness.

On this plan – i.e. the importance of otherness for meaningful relations and the role of empathic experiences in preserving and enhancing inclusive contexts – culture and the arts are usually given a leading role.

> Culture is the medium through which we communicate who we are, what is important to us, what has formed us and what aspects of ourselves we uphold as we move into the future. Identity is often defined in cultural terms, just as otherness is. It is therefore necessary and natural to move into the sphere of culture and the arts when there is a need to get to know the other, with the aim of forming an inclusive society, which can learn how to benefit from diversity[1].

1. European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, (2017). *How culture and the arts can promote intercultural dialogue in the context of the migratory and refugee crisis: report with case studies, by the working group of EU Member States' experts on intercultural dialogue in the context of the migratory and refugee crisis under the open method of coordination*, Publications Office, p. 15. Retrieved at https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/468525 (consulted 05/02/2023).

This statement by the European Commission stresses the quality of the arts as the sphere in which self and otherness are experienced and shaped. For this reason, in the context of this document, the arts are given a prominent role in enabling and enhancing the intercultural dialogue needed to tackle social challenges on a cultural level. It's worth to report the following citation from the same document:

> Experience shows that the arts and cultural projects in particular can create a level playing field to allow persons of different cultural backgrounds to interact, learn and experience on a par with each other.[2]

The present European cultural policies are grounded on the virtuous circle between supporting culture and the arts and a more inclusive society. Research and innovation priorities in Europe recently acknowledged arts and culture as crucial assets for its growth (Donato, 2021). The European framework programme for research and innovation – Horizon Europe – includes for the first time in its history a dedicated cluster of research topics specifically addressed to *Culture, Creativity and Inclusive Society*, as a result of the unquestioned relation between culture and inclusiveness, and the role of creativity in socio-economic ongoing transformations.

Arts – especially socially-collaborative art practices – are recognized for their potential to provide a neutral space for intercultural dialogue, thus empowering those who are usually excluded, giving them a voice and platform to be heard. Participatory and collaborative practices often give opportunities for shared learning and working in a team by offering the chance of identifying and capitalizing each individual's abilities.

Socially-oriented projects and the strategy of participation in art has a long history, with its origins in the Futurist and Dada performances of the early 20th century, followed later in the 1950's by the very first happenings. Umberto Eco's *Opera aperta* (1962) presents early participatory artworks, heralding art's openness between the 1960's and the 1970's in connection with the effort towards a democratic shift of the arts. Situationism in France, happenings in the USA and Neo-Concretism in Brazil constitute the most coherent and well-theo-

2. *Ibidem*.

rized movements of the emerging concern for participatory practices in socially engaged art. Participation undergoes a renaissance at the end of the 1990's, after an eve of individualistic withdrawal in the 80's. Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) and the *Social turn* (2006a) by Claire Bishop look acutely into the rediscovery of participation in art and its social dimension, discerning it from the mere «activation of the individual viewer in so-called 'interactive' art and installation» (Bishop, 2006b, p. 10). If the *Social Sculpture* theorised and practised by Joseph Beuys in the 1970's, or the focus of Fluxus movement on participatory processes, were at their time innovative approaches, almost isolated from the mainstream artworld, in the 1990's relational artworks pushed participation to the edge of the arts. Today, relational art extended to the point of involving society at large, the places in which daily life unfolds and the whole range of human relationships. Step by step, decade after decade, participation transformed the spectators' role, progressively blurring the boundaries between artist and public. Spectators became interacting subjects, at first and ultimately co-creators/co-producers. Simultaneously, the role of the artist himself has changed, moving from the privileged position of author to co-author and, more recently, facilitator. The artist's task in socially-collaborative practices is to construct "situations" aimed at producing «new social relationships and thus new social realities» (Bishop, 2006b, p. 13) The artwork, on its part, progressively «dematerialized» (Lippard, 1972) shifting from object to situation and/or process, increasingly merged into common life practices.

While a simplistic overview of a long-term transformation process of the arts begun with the Dadaist revolution, yet this is useful for drawing parallels to the change of the designer's role, of the user's engagement and of the design output, itself increasingly dematerialized as well in the shift to a growing service-based economy.

In reading Bishop's *The social turn* (2006) and Kester's *Conversation pieces* (2004) – two of the major theorists of socially-engaged art – it is hard not to notice that there are some recurring keywords that represent a kind of smallest common denominator for art and design. Words and concepts like participation, collaboration, dialogue, social change, community-based projects and relational approaches. These are all concerns shared by two disciplines that – each one in its own specificity – aim at pioneering change in socio-

economic terms. Both artists and designers today are willing to be «autonomous agents of social processes, partisans of the real» (Weibel, 2009, p. 57). They somehow address the reconstruction of broken social bonds or the opening up of a dialogue with and within local communities. In short, they herald an ethical turn in the production of the material culture we are merged into, and an activist approach.

It cannot be a coincidence that during nearly the same years of Bishop's and Kester's publications, the design community started to reflect upon the connection between social innovation (Mulgan, 2007), self-organizing creative communities and collaborative solutions for more sustainable ways of living (Meroni, 2007). It's all too easy to observe the proximity between dialogical art practices described by Grant Kester (2004) and the dialogic design framework underpinning the collaborative design culture (Manzini, 2016a). These are all signals of a common ground of social-relational engagement for artists and designers, a shared area in which to find new ties across the two disciplines.

The account of arts and culture drawn by the European Commission mentioned above echoes the brilliant definition of relational artworks as «social interstice» coined by Nicolas Bourriaud (2002, p. 11). According to this definition derived from a marxist concept, art is likely to provide a safe zone from which to elude the socio-cultural constraints and biases, a kind of training space for critical thinking where power relations are constantly renegotiated and people from different backgrounds work together and more closely. That reminds Bhabha's concept of «third space» (2004), a reflective space for otherness and dialogic exchanges to unfold freely. In this perspective, the contribution of art towards design – given the common ground outlined above – can be the one of a «context provider» (Kester, 2004, p. 1) where experimenting and cultivating human relationships based on "agonism" and the value of otherness. In a way similar to the one proposed by Manzini and Tassinari as respect to philosophy[3], looking into contemporary art may provide design with a fresh perspective on issues and topics of common interest. On a theoretical plan, observing relational, dialogical artworks/

3. In particular I refer to DESIS Philosophy Talks, an initiative by Ezio Manzini and Virginia Tassinari with the aim of nurturing the dialogue between design and philosophy both in theory and practice. For extensive information see www.desis-philosophytalks.org/about/ (consulted 06/02/2023).

practices and their declination of empathy as experience, may generate meaningful value added to design processes.

On a practical side, relational dialogical artworks/practices may stand as "prototypes" for high quality interpersonal experiences, enabled by means of recurring elements more or less designed by the authors. This kind of art practices provide examples of how to make meaningful encounters happen, how to nurture intersubjective processes that build mutual knowledge giving room for experimentation and negotiation between the self and the other. The observation of art practices based on empathic dialogical exchanges – being aware that dialogue can be verbal but also somatic when involves the entire body in its presentness – may offer insights into relational and behavioural patterns useful in terms of both design processes and results.

London Design Museum seems to have caught the opportunity given from establishing a dialogue with contemporary art. One of the upcoming exhibitions of this major British institution will be *Ai Wei Wei: Making Sense.* The exhibition runs from 7 April to 30 June 2023 and is focused on this widely recognised artist and activist, engaged about critical socio-political issues. What is interesting for my case is that this exhibition is the first to «present his work as a commentary on design and what it reveals about our changing values»[4].

Time has come to propose new possibilities of exchange and dialogue across disciplines. This book has such an ambition.

In the next chapter, I will focus on practices that in one way or another trigger empathy as an experience of the other as other, keeping otherness alive among the participants and triggering dialogue. The wide ranging positions on empathy in design reviewed in the previous chapters highlighted the increasing need for new strategies to scale and sustain empathy in design processes (Battarbee *et al.*, 2014), while also detailing the nearly absent account of empathy as a dialogic experience of the other. Shifting from a perspective on empathy as a skill, to one encompassing its experiential, intersubjective, embodied features means drawing attention to empathy as a goal rather than as a tool. It also means that empathy is not a one-way affective/cognitive endeavour concerning solely the designer's individual sensitivity; rather it is an interpersonal experience occuring exclusively in the presence of at least

4. https://designmuseum.org/exhibitions/ai-weiwei-making-sense (consulted 07/02/2023).

two subjects. It is independent from each one's personal attitude, yet demanding and 'expensive' for those involved.

As an experience, empathy can be facilitated and supported by setting up some conditions for enabling such a particular kind of interpersonal relation. Given that the empathic experience occurs within human interactions, it should be recognised that not all possible encounters are equal. Some are more superficial and meaningless, others still are conditioned by social constraints, time or place restrictions. In short, some contextual circumstances may prevent empathic experiences from taking place. It is precisely these contextual circumstances that makes it possible to intervene, working towards the best situation to enable a desired experience. It is necessary to again stress that empathy cannot be designed other than through an indirect way. As it is basically a type of interpersonal relation, it is uncontrollable and unexpected. It can only be enabled by some conditions that are better than others, which could hinder it (Cipolla, 2007). Needless to say, it's almost impossible to control whether empathy happens or not; therefore it is only possible to intervene on contextual elements that allow the possibility for the experience to take place.

In this respect the contribution of the arts may be crucial, as already suggested. Art as «context provider» (Kester, 2004) offers inspirational principles for building "constructed situations" aimed at activating the complex empathic circuit at stake in relational encounters.

5. Reading arts-based practices through the lens of empathy

To the aim of collecting suggestions for setting empathic context and processes, I took into consideration six case studies, selected among contemporary art practices and art-related initiatives, all of which can be summed up as participatory actions. Their goal is to offer participants – although in very different ways – a kind of experience that raises awareness of human interconnection and of otherness as an asset. They all set up situations in which embodied encounters take place and participants are asked to do something together.

1. Definitions

A general premise is that most of the case studies can be considered at art's edge – as often happens with contemporary art. In fact, they cover a cross-sectoral area between artistic, social, psychological and perceptual experiments, activists' initiatives and public events. Still, they are strongly related to traditional art formats (exhibitions, installations and performances) and/or have been conceived by artists. At the end of the 1990's artists already began to explore the possibilities of intertwining different disciplines and approaches in their works. In today art practices the experimentation of interdisciplinary formats is becoming a usual approach and the artistic research increasingly pertains to a crossover zone, where disciplines continuosly renegotiate their borders (Perelli, 2017).

The problem in isolating purely artistic practices reflects precisley this blurring of disciplinary borders in the contemporary artworld

which increasingly borrows tools, strategies and formats from other areas, just as other disciplines borrow from it. The big revolution of the arts, begun at the turn of the XXth Century with Duchamp's Fountain (1917) and the «transfiguration of the commonplace» (Danto, 1981), extends its effects to the present days. The problem of whether something can be recognised as art or not continues to challenge our judgment. Art practices which are merged with our life and the places in which it unfolds, «immersive life practices» (Tucker, 2014), aiming at producing transformative experiences, are increasingly undistinguishable from life itself. This is even more true for socially-collaborative art. Those artistic practices were born in the socio-cultural context of the 60's with the intention of bringing art closer to everyday life, by appropriating social forms.

> Intangible experiences such as dancing samba (Hélio Oiticica) or funk (Adrian Piper; drinking beer (Tom Marioni); discussing philosophy (Ian Wilson) or politics (Joseph Beuys); organizing a garage sale (Martha Rosler); running a café (Allen Ruppersberg; Daniel Spoerri; Gordon Matta-Clark), a hotel (Alighiero Boetti; Ruppersberg) or a travel agency (Christo and Jeanne-Claude); [these are all projects that strives] to collapse the distinction between performer and audience, professional and amatuer, production and reception. Their emphasis is on collaboration, and the collective dimension of social experience (Bishop, 2006b, p. 10).

In such a crossover zone the selected practices cover mainstream artworks recognised by the art system, as well as interventions that are more slightly related to existing cultural and artistic formats. Hence, the choice of studying works of mainstream artists along with emergent practices at the edge of contemporary art has been done to acknowledge the multifaceted panorama of the contemporary artistic discourse, precisely characterised by a radical pluralism of coexisting forms of expression (Perelli, 2017). To argue my case, I could borrow the expression «arts-based methods» from Mikkonen and Konttinen (2023) to indicate in the broadest way the category I delved into in search of inspirational practices.

I selected arts-based practices belonging to the most recent years, except for *Dialogue in the dark*, whose original concept dates back to the late 1980s and is still continues, as well as *Rede de elástico*s by Lygia Clark, which goes back to 1973, picked as a pioneering work in

participatory practices. Of course the list of selected case studies could be expanded; yet they provide a sufficient amount of information for building the main argument of this book.

Among the case studies, some 'indicators' of empathic experiences have been sought out. The interpretative framework adopted to read and analyse case studies was drawn from the account on empathy as a dialogic experience.

It could be useful to recall here the key points of this interpretive framework (Tab. 1), according to which empathy is an embodied, dialogic experience, rather than an affective or cognitive – or both – ability. In reviewing the case studies, these points are used as a checklist to assess the case's consistency to the framework.

Tab. 1 – Key features of empathy as a dialogic experience

	Empathy as a dialogic experience – key features
1	requires an embodied encounter between at least two subjects
2	is immediate, happening there-and-then through the means of a "bracketing" of one's own personal judgment
3	involves the body as a whole, i.e. the soma as a unity of body and mind
4	entails a connection between oneself and another
5	however, it does not entail a total identification of self and other
6	allows the acknowledgement of the other as irreducibly other, different, foreign from one self
7	enables the recognition of the basic interdependence binding human beings beyond any difference
8	is a demanding and "expensive" interpersonal relationship, in turn making it highly rewarding

2. Clustering

The miscellaneous selection of case studies has been organised by classifying the different actions they ask participants to perform. As a matter of fact, the selected case studies are all characterised by a call for action that puts them in the broad category of socially-collaborative practices, and they all require the actual engagement of people. The

engagement at stake is of a somatic kind, meaning that participants need to participate in both a bodily and mental way, thus participating with the whole unity of body-mind.

In some cases the action to perform is that of walking through space, switching on the *somatosensory* apparatus for moving in challenging environments, whether darkened or floating. In the second group of cases, it is about sharing something personal with a stranger, something that uncovers one's own vulnerability, such as eye contact or a one-on-one conversation. In others still, the requested action requires collaboratively making something together with someone else, such as knotting a net or assembling a lamp.

According to this perspective the selected case studies have been organised two by two in three categories identified based on the action they request: **walking through, sharing** and **making together**, with an increasing degree of personal engagement in the participation.

Most of the case studies are quite recent and have not yet been largely studied or considered worthy of historical analysis. For this reason the retrieval of reliable information has been a challenging task. To overcome this shortage of information, the study relied on some primary sources, such as interviews, surveys and informal dialogues with people involved at different levels in the cases. Social networks and online tools have been exploited to reach otherwise unattainable actors, such as members of artists' studios, collaborators, as well as participants. Secondary sources were probed as well, when they were available and considered reliable. Several of these secondary sources have been websites, online magazines and blogs. For their particular nature, a selection was made on the basis of their supposed reliability and accuracy.

Indeed, the Brazilian artist Lygia Clark (1920-1988) is an exception in terms of the retrieval of both primary and secondary sources. She has been studied by several acknowledged art critics – Yves-Alain Bois (1999), Guy Brett (1994) and Claire Bishop (2012), among others – and recently she has been the focus of an important solo retrospective at Moma[1]. In addition, Clark herself wrote many notes and letters to friends and colleagues, amongst all to fellow artist Hélio Oiticica.

1. Lygia Clark, *The abandonment of the art 1948-1988*, MOMA, New York (2014 May 10-August 24).

Therefore, as regards Lygia Clark's works there were no obstacles to retrieving the necessary information.

Starting from this premise, it is worth clarifying that the research path about the case studies concerned firstly the sources' selection, and secondly the hermeneutic endeavour of weaving together the information drawn from different kind of them. In the following, all the case studies will be introduced according to the three actions of **walking through, sharing** and **making together** and highlighting how they can be read through the lens of empathy as an experience.

2.1 Walking through

The act of **walking through** a space is a kinaesthetic experience allowing us to perceive and build our surrounding environment. An act as common as walking is crucial to our embodied outer and inner perception. Proprioception and the vestibular system work as partners to give us a sense of our position and movement in the space. Kinaesthetic awareness – i.e. the sense of movement – drives our movements building our ability of exploring a space. While walking, the sense of movement is highly elicited, in particular when something unusual challenges the repetitive motor scheme of regular walking. The sudden interruption of a usual pattern of movements creates the potential for an enhanced proprioception, followed by an increased self-awareness. From a phenomenological perspective, moving into a space is also a means of progressively building knowledge of space itself. Merleau-Ponty accounts for the body's typical mode of existence as «being-toward-the-world», meaning that the body is our primary source of perception (1945/2018). Its kinaesthetic sense establishes perceptual relations with space. «Bodily space is a multi-layered manner of relating to things, so that the body is not "in" space but lives or inhabits it» (Toadvine, 2016, s.p.).

From this perspective the act of walking through space is an embodied experience bringing embodied knowledge. As such, it is considered a key concept binding together the following two case studies.

2.1.1 On Space Time Foam, *Tomás Saraceno (2012)*

On Space Time Foam is an installation by Tomás Saraceno (San Miguel de Tucumán, 1973) presented in 2012 at Hangar Bicocca in Milan. Saraceno is an Argentinian artist who operates along the boundary line between art, architecture and engineering, with incursions in the natural sciences and astrophysics. He is primarily interested in developing new sustainable ways of inhabiting the planet Earth by creating immersive installations and community projects that explore novel possibilities of moving in the world and sensing the environment. To present a picture of Saraceno's activity, two long-term research projects are recalled here. One is *Cloud Cities* which, in a series of exhibitions from 2008 onwards, «aims to develop a modular and transnational city in the clouds that upon realization, may be understood as a model for sustainable and emancipatory building practices»[2]. Each of Saraceno's installation invites the user to consider alternative forms of knowledge, feelings and the awareness of our interrelation with others. His aim is to suggest strategies for coping positively with the changes of the world we live in.

Another notable work is *Aerocene*[3], a project that matches artistic and scientific approaches to reach a new era of environmental global consciousness. Besides the Anthropocene, *Aerocene* aims at a collaboratively learning how to float and live in the air in a sustainable way. It is conceived of as an open platform which hosts diverse activities, such as exhibitions, discussions and publications. *Aerocene* involves also the distribution of the *Aerocene Explorer open-source kit* for testing emissions-free floating sculptures that re-use plastic bags. *Aerocene* is a way of moving that takes advantage of warm air heated by the sun and the infrared radiations from the heart, but it also aims to be a way of living and being together. In fact, Saraceno's works convey the opportunity of going back to a symbiotic relationship with the Earth by means of the exploration of human interconnections enabled by a do-it-together device which flies in the air crossing geo-political borders.

The reason it's worth mentioning these two projects is that they reflect the ongoing research activities carried out by Saraceno, which *On Space*

2. https://studiotomassaraceno.org/cloud-cities-hamburger-bahnhof/ (consulted 07/02/2023).
3. https://studiotomassaraceno.org/aerocene/ (consulted 07/02/2023).

Time Foam is one piece of. Each of Saraceno's work represents a milestone on a larger roadmap. His installations develop from the previous ones, like prototypes of an iterative process of investigation about space-time, sound, movement, social dynamics and life on Earth at large.

On Space Time[4] Foam is particularly focused on making tangible the complex dynamic of interconnection binding together all the creatures living on Earth to raise awareness of the interdependence of people's actions. The installation is made up of three layers of transparent membranes floating from 14 to 20 metres above the ground of the Cubo exhibition space, a cubic barrel-vaulted building at the Hangar Bicocca in Milan. Each membrane is walkable and can hold up to 15 people. The membranes are inflated by a constant flow of air with amounts of pressure different one from the other. At their maximum inflation, the membranes take the shape of a dome. This takes place until someone opens the door of the Cubo and enters the exhibition space. In fact, as a consequence of the entering and exiting of people on the ground, the pressure and flow of air in the space changes. The membranes start to deflate and the dome shape collapses. People walking above in the airy bubble experience the soft floor bending under their feet and the space changing its shape as they cross it. In the words of Saraceno[5]:

> The structure allows you to be in one place or another until you come too close to someone else. I love this image of everyone collapsing in the same hole, because when you get too close, you make a mass, become heavier and heavier, and the side walls get steeper.

The steeper the side walls become, the more people are forced to co-operate to leave the structure. As the environment they are in is shaped by the spatial relationships between them, they must communicate with one another in order to balance the mechanism of action and reaction caused by their movements.

According to Claudia Melendez, an architect who worked directly on the realization of *On Space Time Foam* as a member of the Studio

4. https://studiotomassaraceno.org/on-space-time-foam/ (consulted 07/02/2023).

5. Interview to Argentinian artist Tomás Saraceno on our presence on earth and the possibility of an Aerocene age (2017). Retrieved from www.friendsoffriends.com/art/tomas-saraceno-wants-to-fly-while-keeping-his-feet-on-the-ground/ (consulted 07/02/2023).

Saraceno, it took 6 to 8 months to develop the installation, inspired by the unusual height of the Cubo exhibition space. It took numerous prototypes, mock-ups and models to define the number of layers – originally just 1, it ultimately became 3 – and the thickness of every membrane in order to achieve this cloud-like environment that continuously moves and changes.

Like a biosphere *On Space Time Foam* is an ecosystem, regulated by the network of interactions among people, as well as between people and the environment. Every action of the people involved in the system created a reaction, a change in the system itself. *On Space Time Foam* aims at making tangible this complex dynamic of interdependence – both physical and social – among humans, and between humankind and environment. «Saraceno is an activist and advocate for these atmospheric worlds, working to reveal them and to enhance our aesthetic awareness of their complexity because he knows that doing this is central to a renewal of ethical sensibilities across different spheres of life»[6].

By looking *On Space Time Foam* through the lens of empathy as a dialogic experience, I find most of its key features outlined above.

- It is an embodied relational experience. Participants are immersed in a space together with strangers who they must reach out to and interact with.
- It requires the presence of at least two people. One single person is not enough to trigger the transformation of the surrounding environment; it is essential to have at least one person on the membranes and one down on the ground in order to activate the difference of pressure. The more people that enter the installation, the better it functions.
- It is an immediate experience, happening there-and-then; it is a lived experience, related to the context set up.
- It involves the somatic perception. It calls perceptual certainties into question. By walking upon a floating floor our kinaesthetic dimension is highly stimulated and asked to intervene at first.
- It makes tangible the interdependence of people's actions. Each individual movement corresponds to a reaction of the whole envi-

6. McCormack D. (2015), *Piloting the Aerocene*. Retrieved at https://aerocene.org/newspaper-mccormack/ (consulted 07/02/2023).

ronment. One portion of the floor goes down and another goes up, according to people's movement.
- It is a very demanding experience in terms of active personal engagement. Although it sounds like a playful game, participants need to be in the right disposition to collaborate in overcoming such a challenging situation.

2.1.2 Dialogue in the dark *by Dialogue Social Enterprise*

Dialogue in the dark is a concept exhibition that adopts an artistic format to address the social inclusion of visually impaired people. The founder, Dr. Andreas Heinecke, developed the concept of *Dialogue in the dark* after having met a young journalist who had lost his sight in a car accident. Despite this unfortunate event, the journalist was very optimistic and was successfully coping with his condition. Heinecke began to think that blindness, against all current prejudices, contains an unexplored potential that unfortunately is not generally recognized, hence causing blind people to be discriminated against with unequal access to education and to the labour market.

With a mission in mind – to provide equal opportunities to the visual impaired – Heinecke began to experiment with the *Dialogue in the dark* exhibition format. His strategy stemmed from a simple proposition: «Why not turn off the light, darken a room, and invite blind and sighted people to meet under reverse conditions?»[7].

Heinecke began the experiment in Frankfurt (1989) with an exhibition format based on the use of ropes and sounds. It was conceived of as an immersive dark environment specially designed to trigger the senses left when sight is unavailable. After the first experimental event the network of *Dialogue in the dark* exhibitions around the world grew steadily and Heinecke developed new formats such as *Dinner in the dark* and business workshops in the dark.

The successful initiatives of Andreas Heinecke have since evolved into a social business model, not just producing events in 41 countries around the world but also offering job positions for visually impaired people. Other related projects joined the exhibition concept

7. www.dialogue-se.com/what-we-do/dialogue-in-the-dark/history (consulted 09/02/2023).

of *Dialogue in the dark*, such as Dialogue in silence and *Dialogue with time* thus covering the issue of social inclusion from different perspectives. In 2008 Heinecke founded a holding for all Dialogue concepts, i.e. the Dialogue Social Enterprise which operates as a limited liability company in Hamburg. Its mission is to enact strategies to overcome discrimination and experiences to break communication barriers. Dialogue Social Enterprise empowers marginalized people and transforms the general public perception of disabled people from one of "helpless" to "able". We do create platforms, which break down the barriers between "us" and "them" through creative means.

Three programs have been established which include exhibitions and business workshops:

- *Dialogue in the dark* invites visitors to explore the unseen in a pitch-dark exhibition. The public is led by blind people in a complete role reversal for both parties
- *Dialogue in silence*. Participants wear headphones which simulate the conditions of being deaf. The immersion in a completely silent world forces participants to rely on their deaf guides to communicate using body language or other alternative methods without sound.
- *Dialogue with time* is an exhibition about the art of aging. Visitors learn to see aging from a new perspective and enter into a profound exchange with seniors form the age of 70 years and up.

Dialogue in the dark – and the other formats as well – is built around a concept of empathy as a dialogic experience. In *Dialogue in the dark* blind guides lead small groups of people through a totally darkened exhibition, specially designed to convey the characteristics of urban indoor and outdoor environments, such as park, streets, squares or crowded interiors. Sounds, textures, scents and other sensorial stimuli drive participants in understanding the spaces.

Groups of eight people enters the exhibition every fifteen minutes, together with a blind guide. Exhibitions follow a standard structure which includes three different environments, a park, an urban environment, and a bar. The covered space is on average 200-300 m^2 including the dark installation, a lobby, staff rooms, and rooms for educational activities. The standard modules can be adapted according

to different locations and specific features of the hosting locations. Several *Dialogue in the dark* exhibitions are designed to integrate the local character and culture into the scenario, for instance a ride on a tuk tuk in Bangkok.

Besides the fact that a *Dialogue in the dark* exhibition raises awareness on how one would experience the loss of sight, the main point is that the inevitable role reversal between seeing and non-seeing persons in walking through the space forces both parties to closely relate one another. Only the sightless guide knows how to move through space, thus taking a guiding role usually played by those who would assist him or her. Furthermore, people in the dark are asked to maintain physical contact – for instance placing a hand on another's shoulder – and to trust one another in order to get through the space.

The experience allows you to discover how to find orientation and move in the dark, how to "see" the world through the other senses, how to interact by relying on alternative strategies of communication, how to generate trust and cope with challenging situations.

Similarly, *Dialogue in silence* generates a role reversal and the use of communicative strategies beyond speech, by relying on body language and the physical contact with others. Participants enter an area of complete silence wearing noise-cancelling headsets, and plunge into an environment that facilitates an enhanced concentration. Facilitators – deaf or hearing impaired – show participants how to hear, listen and "speak" in silence, helping them to change their mindset towards others. *Dialogue in Silence* enables a dialogue between hearing and non-hearing people while re-defining disability as ability[8].

Dialogue in time underpins the same concept but is less relevant here because it more so triggers the ability to empathise with elderly people by experimenting with what being old would mean, rather than enabling the experience of being with differently-abled people. The main difference resides in the human relationship resulting from the experience of being together, doing something together in a dark or silent context, that is an unusual situation. It is a relational experience, alongside an individual path, and it stems from a real dialogic encounter. It is

8. www.dialogue-se.com/what-we-do/dialogue-in-silence (consulted 09/02/2023).

more than walking in another person's shoes. Rather, it is an experience that requires a disposition to welcoming the other in his/her otherness (blindness or deafness), and recognising that his/her different condition is valuable in some context, as our own is in other ones. As the website reports, «the world without sight is not poorer, just different»[9].

On the basis of the previously outlined interpretive framework, *Dialogue in the dark* is worthy of analysis as an empathic experience.

- It is an embodied relational experience. Participants are immersed in a space together with someone else they do not know in advance and who they are required to be in physical contact with.
- It requires the presence of at least two people, one sightless or visually impaired guide and one seeing individual, who meet and walk along together.
- It is an immediate, first-hand experience, happening there-and-then in the moment.
- It involves the somatic perception. In walking through a dark environment all the remaining somatic receptors should be active at most in order to compensate for the lack of sight.
- It entails a deep connection between self and other to enable different strategies of communication beyond sight or speech.
- It enhance the value of otherness in reversing the usual roles.
- It is a very demanding experience in terms of active personal engagement. Participants need to accept that differently-abled people can help them in an unusual situation. That realization entails open-mindedness, trust and a spirit of collaboration.

Both the case studies included in **walking through** set up situations that question perceptual habits by designing particular spatial devices. Both *On Space Time Foam* and *Dialogue in the dark* exhibitions are immersive environments that can be walked through and both elicit a kinaesthetic awareness, i.e. the sense of movement. However they enact different strategies: *On Space Time Foam* aims directly at challenging the sense of movement by setting up a walkable surface that, in being almost un-walkable, forces participants to continuously renegotiate their balance.

9. www.dialogue-se.com/what-we-do/dialogue-in-the-dark (consulted 09/02/2023).

Dialogue in the dark instead, stems from a transitory privation of one sense – sight – pushing the remaining senses, including the sense of movement, to activate more in order to deal with an unusual environment.

2.2 Sharing

Sharing has become a very popular word today, immediately bringing to mind recent trends in economics or its use in social networks with meaning of posting – or re-posting – a content in your profile. Even if *sharing* on Facebook can be considered an instance of communication, sharing eye contact or a conversation face-to-face may communicate something far more in terms of personal stories, emotions, feelings, concerns, fears and experiences.

A short history of the term highlights that during the nineteenth century the word *sharing* started to assume a communicative meaning, alongside its distributive sense. At first, the metaphor of sharing problems was rooted in the sense of sharing as distribution: s*haring* the problem meant dividing it, and thus lightening the burden. It was only in the beginning of the twentieth century, however, that the talk itself came to be called sharing (John, 2017).

Sharing identifies one of the acts at the basis of interpersonal relationships. Cultivating meaningful relationships involves being open to the authentic communication of one's inner self with others. *Sharing* asks one to be vulnerable to otherness (Cipolla, 2009).

These two different case studies fall under the umbrella of sharing, as they both focus on exerting the ability to communicate with others, to be close to them, even if they are strangers, in short to relate with them.

2.2.1 Portals *by Shared Studios*

Launched in 2014 by Shared Studios, *Portals* are «gold-painted shipping containers, equipped with audio-visual technology which brings people from connecting locations face-to-face allowing them to converse with others in identical spaces around the world»[10].

10. www.sharedstudios.com (consulted 09/02/2023).

A *Portal* is namely a gateway to a neutral, "supranational", quasi-abstract place where people from distant countries can experience real-time, face-to-face, one-on-one encounters. Currently, *Portals* are in 25+ sites all over the world covering critical places, such as Gaza, Kabul or the US-Mexico border, as well as universities, impact hubs, libraries and festivals' locations across the five continents. The main goal of *Portals* is to provide opportunities of encounter and dialogue to people that would likely not otherwise meet. *Portals* is a project by Shared Studios, a multidisciplinary art, design and technology collective based in New York, founded by the artist Amar C. Bakshi. In 2014 he started with a «small art experiment between Teheran and New York that would have grown into a global public art initiative» (Bakshi, 2016, n.p.). Bakshi's starting point was to acknowledge the importance of having a conversation with a stranger for no particular purpose. He felt that current tools available online performed very well the function of allowing previously impossible connections; however, it was not yet facilitating casual encounters with strangers. The artist sought to create connections that let informal and purposeless conversations between people half a world apart take place, as if they were in the same room. He began to wonder what kind of device could allow such jumping to a distant place, meeting someone and starting to share personal stories just for the sake of doing it.

Bakshi and his first partner, the architect John Farrace, developed the idea deciding to use a standard shipping container as a *Portal*. They chose the containers considering that «they are relatively affordable, easily securable and uniform. They are also symbolically rich: etched in each old container are the markings of its movements across time through ports around the world» (Bakshi, 2016, n.p.). It seemed the ideal setting for the first *Portal*. Afterwards they decided to paint the container with gold, another highly symbolic choice that made the *Portal* a sort of sacred space. The interior was covered entirely with grey carpet – including the walls and ceiling – and behind the walls was hidden the audio-visual technology enabling a life size, live stream with another *Portal*.

The first paired locations were New York and Tehran in December 2014. The very first visitors to the *Portals* were asked to hold an 8-minute conversation with a stranger in the paired location on the basis of a simple prompt "What would make today a good day for you?".

Rapidly what had begun as an art experiment became a successful public event, hosting thousands of people in conversation, music and dance performances and debates. It escalated to the point that Bakshi began to receive requests from other countries to host *Portals* as well, like when a computer professor from the University of Herat, Afghanistan, strongly pushed to permanently install a *Portal* on the campus.

Location after location, the project gained wide coverage and its management became an issue. Bakshi built a team of partners who started to work in Shared Studios and they transformed the *Portals* project into a worldwide public initiative, providing it with a capillary organization relying on local human resources.

At the present time, each *Portal* hub connects with every other. They are managed by local curators who organize the activity, engage the local community and provide simultaneous translations and cultural mediation. At the end of each connection participants are asked to share their experience of the *Portal* in a gold book, leaving comments and stories which are usually quite enthusiastic[11].

Hence, in 25+ different places across the world it's likely to find a gold painted shipping container where stepping into and immersing yourself in a smooth grey space watching a live image of another identical space where someone else in a distant location has stepped in and is also ready to start a dialogue. It's worth mentioning here Bakshi's viewpoint about the purpose of his project.

> Dialogues across distance and without pre-determined ends are important for a number of reasons. First, they "create room" and puncture hardened stereotypes of the other. The puncture might not yield harmony or understanding. It may exacerbate disagreement. But at least it adds the vast complexity of a human face. Second, these conversations help us better understand ourselves. It breaks us out of habituated ways of thinking, and enables us to see a greater range of possibility for ourselves. And third, these types of dialogue create the values and narratives of our broader community. When people speak to another without hope of gain or fear of judgment, but to convey their own truth, authentically, and to listen someone else do the same, they create their own, unique meaning together, laying the groundwork for our shared societies (Bakshi, 2016, n.p.).

11. www.sharedstudios.com/reactions (consulted 09/02/2023).

Bakshi's words support an interpretation of *Portals* as devices that enable empathic experiences. They are «empathy infrastructures» (Anzillotti, 2017, n.p.). *Portals* experience:

- is an embodied relational experience. Despite the encounters of Portals being online connections – not offline – in no way the same as a real face-to-face meeting, visitors still report the feeling of an embodied experience, very close to reality, maybe due to the human-scale screen that transmits a whole bodily presence, with all the gestures and body language;
- requires the presence of at least two people as it is based on conversation between paired *Portals*;
- is an immediate, first-hand experience, happening there-and-then in each paired *Portal*;
- involves the somatic perception, for the same reasons that make *Portals*' experience one of an embodied kind;
- entails a deep connection of oneself to another, two subjects who meet for the very first time and discover their similarities and differences exiting for a while from their usual rhythm of life;
- enhances the value of otherness in allowing it to emerge from a purposeless conversation among strangers in distant locations;
- is a very demanding experience in terms of active personal engagement. By entering into a *Portal* one has to be in the right disposition to communicate with a complete stranger, one with a very different identity, viewpoint and opinions. A strong openness is then required to welcome these differences and transform them into a value. In turn a conversation into a *Portal* heralds itself the value of otherness, as already mentioned above.

2.2.2 Eye Contact Experiment *by Liberators International*

On September 23, 2017, during the UN International Week of Peace almost every country of the world participated in a global initiative supported by Liberators International: the world's biggest *Eye Contact Experiment*. As in the case presented in the previous section, what was initially a small local experiment by a socially concerned artist has become a global public event. In 2017, several cities and

towns across the world people shared one minute – or more – eye contact with a stranger.

Liberators International is a social movement founded by Peter Sharp, an Australian artist who is engaged in creating large-scale public events aimed at rediscovering the basic human connection by proposing collective experiences. Sharp developed an online platform – supported by social networks – in order to get people across the world to actively participate in the organization of these events. Sharp calls himself a social artist and he is based in Perth, Australia. From there, he develops projects together with other Liberators, who act as a huge family in which every member has a role in making the projects possible. Their mission is «to involve people in participatory acts of freedom that allow us to see that beyond our differences there is love and humanity»[12].

What sounds like just a playful entertainment for a group of "hippies" who imagine a future of global peace, is actually a successful format for public events very quickly spreading across the world countries, at which point the Liberators established several local organizations to keep the network of events well connected. Each country's activity is supervised and managed by local coordinators.

What essentially takes place during an *Eye Contact Experiment* is that a group of people gather in a public space and display a signboard with the question: "Where has the human connection gone?" Passers-by are invited to find it sharing one minute of eye contact with a complete stranger. The duration is just a suggestion, as a fundamental part of the experiment is the lack of instructions; the events are let free to flow and develop. The local staff initiates the eye contact session by inviting people to participate in a park, in a square – or in any other public place – and, after a previously planned amount of time (usually 2 or 3 hours, depending on participation) the event closes. During this timespan participants sit or stand one in front of the other trying to establish a connection looking in the eyes of a stranger.

The steps to follow within the experiment are, according to the organisers: 1. Engage: find someone to make eye contact with and introduce yourself; 2. Face: sit or stand in a comfortable position facing each other; 3. Connect: Share eye contact for as long as you are comfortable;

12. www.theliberators.org/ (consulted 09/02/2023).

4. Share (optional): share what you felt and what you thought of the experience[13].

While looking at one another, participants are free to end the contact if they don't feel comfortable. Yet, most of them, getting over the initial moment of awkwardness, start smiling or chatting and sharing personal stories. Someone else, without saying a word begins tearing up, overwhelmed by emotions, or feels the need to hug the other person. In some cases, participants can hardly bear to maintain the eye contact for even one minute and end the session by just shaking the other's hand. Whatever the individual reaction, the event can be considered successful when people accept to put themselves at risk, allowing their human vulnerability to emerge. In this collective sharing of our basic human condition through a plain and simple action – as eye contact is – resides at the very core of the *Eye Contact Experiment.*

Some local coordinators, members of the global network of *Eye Contact Experiment*, organise weekly eye contact meetings in private spaces with a small number of participants. In Munich, for instance, a group of eye contact "old hands" meet on a weekly basis to train their ability in establishing deeper and deeper connections, as a kind of exercise for cultivating relational attitudes. Especially given that eye contact is important and valuable precisely because it activates important emotional areas of the brain such as the amygdala and facilitates the release of the hormone oxytocin. When we share eye contact with another, greater levels of oxytocin circulate through our bodies. This hormone facilitates feelings of emotional closeness and connection with others (Lewis, 2017).

In light of the case presented above, it's possible to check the outlined features of the empathic experience and match them with the experience provided by the *Eye Contact Experiment.*

- It is an embodied relational experience;
- it requires the presence of at least two people staring in each other's eyes. Still, the more people participates in the experiment the better it works. According to the organisation, more people amplifies the experience for each and everyone involved;

13. www.theliberators.org/ (consulted 09/02/2023).

- it is an immediate, first-hand experience, happening there-and-then, when you stand in front of another and discover his/her eyes;
- it involves the somatic perception. Even if sight has a leading role in this case, actually the whole body is engaged in the arising of feelings, emotions and responses;
- it entails a deep connection of self-other. Actually, connection is the experiment's main goal;
- it enhances the value of otherness in facilitating a basic contact between strangers eventually resulting in the other's acknowledgement;
- it is a very demanding experience in asking one to overcome shyness and embarrassment, and to put one's vulnerability at stake. Moreover it is a cognitive challenge since – as researches demonstrate – «engaging in eye contact increases cognitive load. That is, it consumes the same mental resources that our minds use when we are trying to solve complex tasks or engage in logical reasoning» (Lewis, 2017).

Both Portals and *Eye Contact Experiment* are based on a one-on-one relation that engages two complete strangers. They are both conceived to create room for special moments of sharing that are embodied and meaningful. However, *Portals* is more focused on providing participants with the opportunity of talking to each other. Conversation, dialogue and debate are crucial in *Portals*, where sharing means telling stories, discussing opinions and viewpoints, establishing a relation based on a verbal exchange. It's no coincidence that the early *Portals* participants were given a precise prompt to start the conversation inside the container to avoid an eventual embarrassing silence during the connection.

On the other hand, *Eye Contact Experiment* focuses on the very first spark of a relationship, i.e. the discovery of someone else's glance, aiming at transforming that basic exchange in a prolonged exposure to another's gaze. The goal is to make vulnerability emerge and changing it into a value for human connection.

In *Eye Contact Experiment* sharing is silent, whereas in *Portals* it is full of voices.

2.3 *Making together*

Indeed, *making* itself requires a very high level of participation, a kind of participation with a tangible output, in addition to engaging an embodied presence and agency. *Making together* goes a step further, as it asks participants not only to put their skills at stake but also to put them towards the service of a common goal. It requires finding ways of weaving together one's different competencies in order to organise the work in a logical manner. *Making together* relies on the abilities of listening and observing one another, within an attitude of respect and trust. *Making together* is itself an ability – Sennett would say a "craft" (2012) – unfolding both along the process of collaboratively producing something and in the moment right after, when the output is there, in your hands, and you must admit that you could not have made it alone. Thus *making together* is a rehearsal of being together, «a category of experience which expands the capacity to communicate» (Sennett, 2012, p. 29).

Given these premises, the two cases featured in this section are instances of the eventual relationship of experiencing empathy while making something cooperatively.

2.3.1 Rede de élasticos, *Lygia Clark (1973)*

In 1973 the Brazilian artist Lygia Clark (1920-1988) wrote: «The only thing that matters is the act-in-progress» (Clark, 1998, p. 187) meaning that her artistic practice focused on the process enacted by the public, rather than on the object resulting from the process itself. Clark's artistic path pioneered contemporary participatory art practices and anticipated Relational Aesthetics (Foster, 2004; Bishop, 2012). She is also renown for having abandoned art [see the title of Clark's retrospective at Moma *The abandonment of Art* (2014)] to move to a sort of therapeutic journey held by means of participatory practices involving a "collective body". It is worth recalling her view on participation since it emphasises a very particular kind of agency, one which is indeed relational, but mainly somatic and collective. In a letter to her dear friend and fellow artist Hélio Oiticica she states (October 26, 1968): «In all that I do, there really is the necessity of human body, so

that it expresses itself or is revealed as in a first [primary] experience» (Figueiredo, 1996, p. 61).

By the early 1970s, over Clark's artistic research can be characterised by the series *Corpo Coletivo* (1972-1976) which *Rede de elásticos* (1973) is part of, representing a point of arrival of her transformative journey from artist to proposer. In 1968 she writes «Nós somos os propositores: nossa proposição é o diálogo»[14] [We are the proposers: our proposition is the dialogue]. *Proposições* are intended literally as proposals offered to the participants that actively, there and then, transform a proposition into a lived experience. Clark's role is just to provide some materials that participants, throughout a somatic engagement, manipulate together to build a collective propositional space (Schillig, 2015). The reason to discuss one of Clarks' work here is clearly expressed through the following sentiment: «Concerned with expanding the notion of collective production and gestural exchange, these propositions explored the intersections between embodiment, sensory knowledge, and intersubjective sociality» (Carter, 2017, p. 18).

Before discussing *Rede de élasticos* it's useful to quickly overview the context in which it was born: on the one hand, the Brazilian art of the period – the exterior context; and Clark's artistic journey – interior context – on the other. Of course, exterior and interior context are intertwined and make sense only when considered together.

As already mentioned *Rede de élasticos* is part of a series of *Proposições* – namely the series *Corpo coletivo* – which she experimented with between 1972 and 1976 as part of her teaching activity at the Sorbonne, in Paris. There she had studied between 1950 to 1952 with Fernand Léger, among others, and there she returned in the early 1970s to hold the course *The gesture of communication*, that gave her the opportunity to share part of her research with some thirty students of the Sorbonne. In the time-span between her two Parisian periods – coming and going from France to Brazil, from Paris to Rio de Janeiro – she moved from monochrome paintings, to neo constructivist sculptures, to the co-foundation of the Neo-Concrete Art Movement (1959). In the 1950s Brazil hosted the early São Paulo Biennials which brought

14. https://portal.lygiaclark.org.br/en/archive/65313/1968-nos-somos-os-propositores (consulted 09/02/2023).

about a renewal of the arts and was highly influenced by the pioneering generation of European abstract art, Bauhaus and some of the concrete artists, such as Max Bill and Josef Albers. The Neo-Concrete group responded to these European influences by proposing a more human, sensual and organic approach to art, closer to the Brazilian sensibility. For Clark, this approach is achieved only when viewers become participants, engaging their whole body in the co-creative process. As Guy Brett writes «she moved from a visual language in the purest sense to a "language of the body", not performed or spectated but lived by the participant» (Brett, 1994, p. 58).

With this goal in mind, and after having discovered a keen interest in psychoanalysis, Clark started to propose some *Objetos relacionais* in the 1960's, meant to serve as devices for the exploration of body and consciousness, self-perception and awareness of the other. *Corpo coletivo* followed, as a consequential stage in Clark's work, where the body to be explored and engaged became the one involved in social dynamics, just as a knot of a broader network of relations.

Rede de élasticos is a net, whose knots are woven collaboratively by a group of participants previously provided with basic instructions. The participants' lived experience concerns both the process of construction of the net and its usage. In fact, the rubber bands knotted together are elastic, so that once finished the net itself becomes elastic. It moves and changes according to the bodies' movements, though keeping its geometric structure. In the dialectic between geometry (the structure) and random movement (caused by the participants) both the constructivist roots of Clark's art and the will to overcome them through opening the process to users can be identified.

The act of knotting elastic bands engages the group of participants in creating an interdependence between their actions, with the mesh taking on an unstable and never-ending shape. Furthermore, the act of moving collectively requires the network to maintain its knots to reach the same result, making tangible the participants' interconnection as an individual's movement must correspond to the movement of the others.

Just to conclude with a note, it's no coincidence that the Brazilian Pavilion at EXPO Milan 2015 was built around a huge elastic net which thousands of visitors crossed, reviving the memory of Clark's pioneering participatory practices.

The kind of experience elicited by *Rede de élasticos* is in certain aspects very close to that generated by *On Space Time Foam* and can be interpreted as an empathic experience.

- It is an embodied relational experience. Participants are involved together in the making of a "relational" device that calls for a somatic, collective use;
- it requires the presence of at least two people. The original instructions actually suggested the simultaneous participation of at least five individuals. It's clear that *Corpo Coletivo* is itself a statement of a collective experience;
- it is an immediate experience, happening there-and-then;
- it involves the somatic perception, mostly in moving the net and responding to its changes;
- it entails a deep connection self-other emerging from the act of knotting the elastic bands together;
- It enhances the interdependence of people's actions, both in the knotting phase and in the outcomes;
- It is a very demanding experience in terms of active personal engagement, just as *On Space Time Foam* experience, except for the difference that participants' engagement concerns the building process as well, in addition to the final output. Furthermore, Clark intended each of her *Proposições* as a stage in a 'healing' process of art therapy. In this respect the participation is meant to be personally engaging.

2.3.2 Green Light, *Olafur Eliasson (2017)*

This last case study has been left till the end because of the particular way in which it bears a vision of art as a driver of social improvement, putting it into practice through a tangible and impactful agency. This does not mean that *Green Light* is more important than the other case studies, rather that, as a solution-oriented project enacting participation to the highest degree, it stands itself as a bridge between art and emerging design practices, at the border of product design (the workshop's task is the assemblage of a lamp to be sold) and service design (the *shared learning program* joined to the workshop is designed as a

service for refugees and asylum seekers who have few alternatives of integrating in a community).

Actually, Eliasson's entire artistic production may itself be a case study, since it has always been focused on the interconnection between humans and their perception of the surrounding environment. Eliasson has even developed an important collaboration with a social neuroscientists at the Max Planck Institute in Berlin, Dr. Tania Singer, for a project about empathy and compassion[15]. For every key concept outlined above there would be a suitable case within Eliasson's production: for instance *Din Blinde Passager* (2010) for walking through or *Where mind and body swing back and forth* (2013) for sharing. Also well-known projects such as *Little Sun* (2012) or *Ice Watch* (2014) could be considered to address a global empathic experience of interdependence. It's also notable that Henry F. Mallgrave mentions Eliasson's *Weather Project* (2003) as an example of empathic space in his *Architecture and embodiment* (Mallgrave, 2013). Nevertheless, in this study *Green Light* was selected over Eliasson's artworks on the basis of its highly participative approach, its socially engaged goals and its special way to raise awareness of the crucial role of otherness in human relationships. Eliasson's words themselves supported the selection:

> I am especially interested in models exploring our notions of self and other in relation to how we live in our societies and in the globalized world of today. […] Art challenges notions of identity, of belonging, and estrangement, and questions borders and the distribution of privilege, to mention only some of the things it is capable of doing. To me, *Green light – An artistic workshop* is about all of the above (Eliasson, 2017, p. 13).

The *Green Light* page on Eliasson's website lists many tags that, besides being useful to navigate through his projects according to the

15. The project *Raising Compassion* brings together a diverse group of neuroscientists, mental health professionals, and Buddhist monks in a remarkable exchange between science, art, and contemplative practice in a series of informal conversations about compassion, initiated by neuroscientist Tania Singer and artist Olafur Eliasson. Commissioned by the Max Planck Institute and produced by Studio Olafur Eliasson, *Raising Compassion* arose from the multidisciplinary workshop "How to Train Compassion", organised by Prof. Dr. Tania Singer, director of the Department of Social Neuroscience at the Max Planck Institute, Leipzig, and hosted in July 2011 at Studio Olafur Eliasson, Berlin. The film by Tómas Gislason is available at https://olafureliasson.net/video/raising-compassion-a-film-by-tomas-gislason-2013/ (consulted 09/02/2023).

issues they concern, immediately draws the focus to *Green Light*'s core concepts: *Being with*; *Community; Compassion; Democracy; Doing things together; encountering others*. Eliasson describes his project as follows[16]:

> Green light is an act of welcoming, addressed both to those who have fled hardship and instability in their home countries and to the residents of the cities receiving them. Working together in a playful creative process, participants build a modular light and construct a communal environment in which difference is not only accepted but embraced.

The project results from a collaboration between Eliasson and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (TBA21), an art foundation historically committed to supporting the arts, especially when they put at stake their transformational force. The pilot project took place from March to July 2016 at TBA21 – Augarten (Vienna) developing a replicable structure that was then proposed in other locations and contexts worldwide, modified according to local needs and regulations. Again in 2016 the workshop was presented in the format of smaller seminars led by former participants in Basel, Salzburg and Prague. In spring 2017 *Green Light* moved to the Moody Center for the Arts in Houston, Texas and finally arrived at the 57th Venice Biennale Viva Arte Viva.

Participants are recruited among refugees and asylum seekers who are living in refugee camps waiting for their application to be evaluated. In this particular circumstance the actualization of the project needs the support of local NGO's to manage the bureaucracy and to provide organisational help, since the migration policies can differ from country to country. In general, participants number up to forty. In Venice they were eighty, divided in two groups of forty, each one involved in a three-month period during the Biennale. They are mostly from Afghanistan, Syria, Iraq, Eritrea, Somalia, and Nigeria.

Green Light is actually two-fold: it is made of a full seven or eight-week workshop and a parallel *shared learning program*.

As Daniela Zyman (2017, p. 68) notes:

> *Green Light* emits two interrelated frequencies. Once frequency, publicly visible, involves the production of *Green Light* lamps under the artistic guid-

16. https://olafureliasson.net/greenlight/ (consulted 09/02/2023).

ance of Studio Olafur Eliasson. During set hours, *Green lights* were assembled from materials and components that were made available in an ongoing workshop. […] The other, quieter, more introverted frequency of the project draws from and builds on critical pedagogic ideas, as developed by artists and engaged educators. This informal pedagogic production, called *Green Light – Shared learning*, embraces forms of learning that create multidirectional and collaborative processes of exchange. Engaging educators, artists, language teachers, and cultural practitioners as well as vocational training, shared learning activates the needs, talents, desires and imaginaries of its participants.

The workshop deals with producing the modular Green Light lamps, starting from the preparation of the materials to their assemblage. The components are mostly made from sustainable or recycled materials: wooden sticks, connecting pieces 3D printed using recycled plastic bags and LED lights. At the beginning, participants are trained to preparing all the components, sanding and painting the sticks, assembling them together with the printed junctions, threading and adjusting the LEDs. All these operations were deemed best executed in pairs, thus facilitating conversation and communication. Considering that participants speak many different languages they need to find alternative ways to effectively communicate with each other, like gestures and body language, sketches and other visual strategies. Visitors, or locals interested in the workshop are invited to join, trained by former participants in an interesting role reversal.

Green Light lamps are not just symbolic objects that shine a light of hope for migrants. They are products destined for the market, designed combining stackable modules based on cube and the golden triangle, functioning on their own or put together to create complex structures. Lamps, produced in unlimited series, are sold both during the workshop and online, contributing to the fundraising campaign that sustains the workshop itself and the shared learning program. The proceeds of the sale go to the local NGOs supporting the project which ensure the basic services for participants refugees (food, shelter and public transports).

In conjunction with the workshop the *Shared Learning Program* provides an answer to the forced immobility refugees and asylum seekers experience as they wait for their application to be evaluated. In refugee camps they are denied the opportunity to work as well

as access to education. In their countries they might hold a profession, which they they are prevented from practicing until the process of application and evaluation comes to an end. *Green Light – Shared Learning Program* provides the context for weekly theater gatherings, film screenings, seminars and workshops held by visiting artists, daily language classes, vocational training and other activities proposed by participants themselves. They are also offered counselling, legal advice and practical support for daily life.

Besides providing opportunities of working, learning and living together, *Green Light* results in «assembling communities» (Eliasson, 2017, p. 13). Through the daily sharing of lunches, classes, activities, and hands-on construction, a sense of we-ness is co-created, beyond the differences of culture and identity. It may be useful to stress the opinion of Andreas Roepstorff about a we-ness built through instances of sharing towards a 'we-mode'. Roepstorff's observations are worth noting:

> I was wondering whether this might be one of the metaphors of *Green Light*, as a construction. Is it exploring not so much the feeling of we-ness, of becoming one, but that feeling of modular assembly? Individual modules are being combined with one another to create something that transcends the individual. This motif of greenness, of modules that all look the same but somehow get recombined into something else, is what this afternoon has been about for me. And maybe that is better than being sucked into a we that dissolves each of us (Roepstorff, 2017, p. 28).

The broad description of *Green Light* highlights its multifaceted features. The work focus is on the concrete space that the project offers to relate to one another without dissolving into one another. *Green Light* relies on differences for a process of mutual learning and acknowledgment.

> The "archipelagic" intertwining of individuals demonstrates the potentials of communal production that endorses the idea of the utopian experiment, creating a model situation of difference. Differences as pointers not toward irreconcilability but rather toward what relates us, making our being together both complex and creative (Zyman, 2017, p. 69).

Hence, *Green Light* is accountable for as an empathic dialogic experience.

- It is an embodied relational experience. Participants are involved in the collaborative process of producing a tangible output. To achieve this goal they are asked to engage in embodied interpersonal interactions;
- it requires the presence of at least two people. Actually the project hosts up to forty participants. In any case, in assembling the elements of the lamp participants are often paired together to work on a precise task;
- It is an immediate experience, happening there-and-then, an hands-on experience;
- it involves the somatic perception, or rather a somatic engagement, since the communication between people of different languages occurs mostly through gestures and body language;
- it entails a deep connection of self-other that emerges from the act of assembling the lamp, sharing food, learning from the other and with others;
- it enhances the interdependence of people's actions in activating the "we-mode" mentioned above, according to which we are – metaphorically speaking – modules that, despite looking all the same, once recombined give shape to something else;
- it is a very demanding experience in terms of active personal engagement, mostly for refugees and asylum seekers, but also for locals who decide to get involved in the project. Beyond working together – that is already an engaging activity for complete strangers recently arrived in a foreign country after a difficult journey – the *Shared Learning Program* asks participants to actually put at stake their skills, their personal stories, their strengths, but also their weaknesses.

Both *Rede de élasticos* and *Green Light* stem from a vision of art as a concrete space where to rehearse relations and instances of sharing. They are both inherently participatory, and in both cases participation unfolds through producing something tangible together. Nevertheless, the output of *Green Light* workshop creates a product to be sold. Participants feel the responsibility to complete their task accurately, since their work determines whether the lamp will be sold or not. However, the product will be used and enjoyed outside of the workshop by people who did not take part in its production.

Otherwise, the elastic net of *Rede de élasticos* is made by and for the participants themselves. Process and fruition bind together and both remain in the art context, while *Green Light* aims at producing an object that will live outside of the art context. That changes the attitude participants have as respect to the output of the process and, consequently, toward the process itself.

Green Light includes also the *Shared Learning Program*, which is crucial as well in enabling empathic experiences, as it provides all the conditions for it to happen.

6. Enablers of the empathic experience

In the previous chapter six case studies were presented that draw the attention to "constructed situations" consistent with the interpretive framework of empathy as a dialogic experience. What are the conditions that allow such an experience to occur?

I decided to name these conditions *enablers*, since their role is precisely to enable the experience to happen. A short review of *enabler*'s etymological origin will help explain the reason why this term fits in this context. *Enabler* is the corresponding noun of the verb 'to enable' composed by the prefix *en-* plus *able*. The prefix *en-* occurs in forming verbs with the general sense of "to cause (someone or something) to be in" a certain condition. Together with *able*, hence, it indicates someone or something that puts someone or something in the condition to be able to do something. Therefore, I adopted the term *enabler* as it suitably identifies what aspects may elicit, facilitate and support empathy to unfold as a dialogic experience. Using a simplifying metaphor, an enabler is a sort of switch that may light up the experience. However, the enablers don't work as precisely as a switch, i.e. through an on/off mechanism. In fact, the effects they trigger may occur or not and if they do, are uncontrollable. Also, experiences are absolutely subjective. Nevertheless, enablers can be set up in order to switch on the "experiential circuit" involved in empathy, in this case. The final result depends on whether or not people flip that switch, thus the experience may or may not happen.

Even if empathy does not work in such a mechanic manner, the metaphor is useful to highlight the enablers' role as the one that lays the ground for the experience to unfold, as well as reduce constraints which may block it.

It's worth clarifying that in this context *enabler* never relates to an individual. In psychology, when referred to a person, the word *enabler* takes on a negative connotation, meaning a subject that encourages someone else's dysfunctional behaviour. It is thus important to clear up any possible misunderstanding regarding the use of the term in this book. It is again stressed that the concept of enabler is here applied only to contextual or relational conditions, more or less designed to raise a certain response in the participants. *Enabler* is here intended in a sense closer to the one used in business related language, where the term identifies resources and capabilities that contribute to the success of a project or a program. The study of cases was addressed by detecting the elements responsible for the experience unfolding. Specifically, the main question was: which are the particular conditions that in each case allow the empathic experience to occur? Therefore, each case was deeply studied towards this aim and the results have been combined in a list of enabling conditions, which then became the enablers of the empathic dialogic experience. The first stage of the analysis was to define the enablers and match them to each case. Afterwards a survey was carried out among the cases' participants – where they were available and keen to answer the questionnaire – in order to get feedback on the previously established hypothesis. The survey provided some interesting inputs thus contributing to the ultimate definition of the enablers. As a further assessing tool, a workshop was held, focussed on discussing the *enablers* together with other members of the design community and giving them a logical organisation.

The enablers were then distinguished into two different typologies: **contextual enablers** – i.e. external conditions, and **relational enablers** – i.e. personal or interpersonal conditions – on the basis of the different elements accounted for as determining the experience.

In the following sections, all the enablers will be presented according to this two-fold organisation. Then, the case studies will be reviewed one by one marking the different enablers they are characterised by. As will be observed as the research unfolds, only one enabler is never enough to spark the empathic experience. At least two enablers must be simultaneously present. One contextual and one relational enabler are likely to always occur in a pair.

1. Contextual enablers

Tab. 1 – Contextual enablers

Enablers of empathic experience	Typology
Art box	Contextual
Tricky space	Contextual
Bracketing place	Contextual
Suspended time	Contextual
Body to body	Relational
In your shoes	Relational
Common goal	Relational
Foreign face	Relational
In the same boat	Relational

Contextual enabler is intended as an external condition, independent from participants' attendance to the event, installation, workshop or activity. It relates to the general circumstances set up to characterise the space and the time for the event to happen. Contextual enablers may be space-related, when involving the environment in which the experience takes place, or time-related, when they pertain to the experience's duration and the particular time in which it occurs.

Contextual enablers are specifically designed to elicit a determined response from the participants. Nevertheless, their effects on people's perception are unpredictable, depending on each one's individual sensitivity and attitude.

1.1 Art box

The awareness of being part of an artistic intervention may transform a common experience into something different. The artistic context is usually perceived as a neutral zone with particular rules exiting from socio-economic constraints. This special contextual condition may be considered itself an enabler of the empathic experience because it contributes to making participants, more open in welcoming otherness beyond their biases. Outside of the prejudices affecting

everyday activities, participants are keen to establish equal interactions. The enabler **Art box** indeed covers all the cases, in this sense being a higher-order condition.

1.2 Tricky space

The environment in which participants are immersed may be specifically designed to the aim of challenging their perceptual habits. Space may be set up with perceptual tricks that force participants to renegotiate their relation with the surrounding environment, thus enhancing the awareness of the basic connection body-space. In pushing participants to an active spatial perception, rather than passive and unaware, a **Tricky space** may be accounted for as an experience enabler. Moreover, when a space is hard to walk through, people are likely to seek someone else's help as well as giving their support to the other. That process contributes to conveying a context of togetherness based on mutual trust.

1.3 Bracketing place

Some of the artistic interventions presented by the case studies are set up in public spaces temporarily transformed to the specific aim of the project. These places, more or less designed, behave like parentheses in a written text. A portion of public space is "put in brackets"to disrupt the ordinary urban landscape. Out of such disruption a spatial pause is determined, inside of which people live an extraordinary experience. A place "put in brackets" is a neutral concrete space allowing particular ways of being together. It is a place where relations are not yet commodified. As such, it can be an enabler of the empathic experience, setting up rules of interaction outside the usual social constraints.

1.4 Suspended time

What has been said for space being "put in brackets" can be said for time as well. Within the constant flow of commitments and activities of

an ordinary day, the room for human relations is usually circumscribed to some more or less formal routines, such as dinner with the family, a coffee with a friend or a business meeting. By creating a fracture in the ordinary unfolding of a typical day, some artistic interventions ask participants to stop and focus on one simple activity at a time, suspending for a moment what they were doing before. This **suspended time** allows a moment for undivided attention, an attitude to listen and connect to the other, thus facilitating the empathic experience to happen.

2. Relational enablers

Tab. 2 – Relational enablers

Enablers of empathic experience	Typology
Art box	Contextual
Tricky space	Contextual
Bracketing place	Contextual
Suspended time	Contextual
Body to body	Relational
In your shoes	Relational
Common goal	Relational
Foreign face	Relational
In the same boat	Relational

By **Relational enabler** I mean a condition determined by making people involved interact in a particular way. Relational enablers concern the rules of interaction set up in the context of each case (Tab. 2). Rules can be established, yet the individual response is absolutely unpredictable. Therefore, the desired interactions may happen or not, or may follow unexpected patterns.

2.1 Body to body

As already stressed, empathy is accounted for in this study as an interpersonal experience, involving always at least two subjects. I also

argued for the embodied nature of the empathic experience. Given these assumptions, a crucial enabler for this kind of experience shall be the embodied presence of – at least – two individuals. **Body to body** thereby indicates that a basic condition for empathy is the interpersonal physical encounter. To be more specific, Body to body stands as a pre-condition among the other enablers. It is a *conditio sine qua non*.

2.2 In your shoes

I intentionally choose the expression "in your shoes" to recall what is usually associated with empathising, i.e. stepping in someone else's shoes. Nevertheless, in this context such an expression designates an enabling condition for empathy, instead of being empathy itself. The emotional response to others' physical or mental state and the intellectual effort to guess how it would be to walk in their shoes are here acknowledged as steps towards an authentic empathic experience. In Stein's phenomenological analysis of empathy, projecting yourself in the "place" of another is precisely a phase of the overall empathic experience. It is a phase of identification between self and other, occurring right before the emerging awareness of being irreducibly different (Meneses, 2011; Boella, 2018).

The enabler **In your shoes** identifies a situation in which participants are asked to shift their roles with someone else. The reversal of usual roles facilitates a change in one's own perspective, enabling the following steps toward the empathic experience.

2.3 Common goal

Some of the art practices selected as case studies are based on a particular activity, i.e the process of collaboratively producing a tangible output. The focus is more on the process, rather than on the product. However, setting a concrete objective to achieve together, puts participants in the condition of establishing a dialogue with others, finding ways to communicate one each other and experimenting with horizontal relations based on trust, openness and mutual help. In this sense, a **Common goal** is an enabler of the empathic experience. It raises the

feeling of being all part of a community, made of very different people, in which everyone gives a personal different contribution towards a shared outcome.

2.4 Foreign face

Dealing with foreign persons may be very challenging for some people. Despite the increasing multiculturalism of our present society, the fear of strangers remains an important issue, particularly related to mass migrations.

A growing number of cultural initiatives today deal with this issue, many of them designed precisely to make strangers meet and collaborate, in the attempt to dispel prejudices and give migrants the opportunity to integrate in host countries. In this context, the different identity, socio-cultural background, and geographical provenance is considered an enabler of the empathic experience, instead of an hindrance. In fact, art practices based on the premise of pairing migrants and locals or providing the opportunity to connect people from different countries prove particularly successful in enhancing otherness and diversity as valuable assets.

2.5 In the same boat

Indeed, sharing a particular circumstance, be it negative or positive, sharpens feelings of togetherness. When we are all **in the same boat** we are more keen to acknowledge the others as someone very similar to us, tuning with them. Some of the interventions featured in here set this condition as a rule, intentionally putting participants in the same boat, even if on a transitory basis. A shared condition enables the empathic experience in setting the same point of departure for everyone involved.

3. Matching enablers and case studies

With the list of enablers for empathic experience now defined, each case can be reviewed according to these types. The guiding question

is: which are the enablers that in each case study contributes to the empathic experience unfolding?

As mentioned above, the contextual enabler **Art box** covers all the cases, as they generally belong to the artworld. Therefore, **Art box** will not be repeated for each and every case. It shall be considered as the basic enabler that applies to all cases.

As regards the enabler **Body to body**, it was already stressed that it applies to all cases as well. It has to be acknowledged as a sort of pre-condition for the empathic experience to unfold, since the latter happens only within an encounter between at least two subjects. So, 'Body to body' as well will not be outlined in each case's review.

3.1 On Space Time Foam

The installation by Tomás Saraceno is really a **tricky space**: the transparent floating membranes, attached at 14-22 metres height above the ground, question people's perceptual certainties and force them to continuously renegotiate their equilibrium. At the same time, up on the airy bubbles the distance self-other is blurred as the challenging environment conveys the same uncertain condition for everyone involved. It combines the contextual enabler **tricky space** and the relational one **in the same boat**: participants are pushed to find together an embodied strategy for exiting the membranes, playing with their movements and their body's weight. Up there, everyone gives his/her own contribution in a *we-mode* where "I" and "Thou" are bound together without ever dissolving into one another. The interrelation of bodies, movements and environment becomes tangible, facilitating an empathic experience which raises awareness of our basic interdependence.

3.2 Dialogue in the Dark

As in the previous case, *Dialogue in the Dark* also sets up a **tricky space** to be navigated. In this particular case, the situation that most questions and challenges participants' habits is the totally darkened environment. Such a strategy inverses the usual roles of the seeing and unseeing for the duration of the journey throughout the

dark exhibition. In fact, people who ordinarily are guided through space become guides to those who are temporarily deprived of the ability to see and need help orientating themselves. A role reversal results in a change of perspective towards the visual impairment, from a dis-ability to a different ability. The right combination of enablers in *Dialogue in the Dark* is **tricky space** with **in your shoes**, i.e. a contextual with a relational enabler, opening up the possibility for an empathic experience to unfold along the encounter with a specific kind of diversity.

It could be argued that **in the same** boat is not listed in DiD even if the dark environment puts all the people within it in the same condition of being unable to see. However, a visually impaired person is already adapted to this condition, while a sighted person is not. As a consequence, the same darkness is perceived as more dark by a seeing person than a blind one. Hence, seeing and unseeing cannot be considered 'in the same boat' in *Dialogue in the Dark*.

3.3 Portals

In the *Portals* experience the most characterising enabler is the act of stepping into a device for "spatio-temporal journeys". A *Portal* is in a certain sense a "space-time capsule", a room separated from the surrounding context in which timezones and geographical distances are abolished. The gold containers, dropped into public spaces, disrupt the ordinary urban setting by raising curiosity and inviting passers-by to step through their doors. By **bracketing space**, *Portals* create neutral zones where purposeless conversations happen. Inside *Portals* people are forced to take a break from their activities and focus only on the person they are (virtually) facing. This s**uspended time** facilitates a pressure-less conversation and enhance a listening attitude towards the other (Boella, 2018).

Paired locations are very distant from one another, participants are necessarily strangers, living in the most varied socio-cultural circumstances and hold very different identities. In the particular context of *Portals*, encounters between strangers (**Foreign face)** enable an empathic experience by raising a sense of similarity beyond difference and closeness beyond distance.

An annotation must be added in this case, as regards the enabler **Body to body.** Inside *Portals* encounters are mediated by audio-visual technology. One could argue that a live streaming connection could in no way provide an encounter equal to an embodied one. Nevertheless, the enabler is marked as well. This is because the experience of the other that *Portals* provides is one of a somatic kind, involving s the whole body-mind during an embodied encounter. In this respect, it's worth mentioning the artist's statement about the difference with traditional online tools for live streaming (Skype for instance).

> Instead of talking to a disembodied head in a computer screen, participants spoke to a full, standing human being – fidgeting and swaying – and made direct eye contact, unencumbered by goggles or headphones (Bakshi, 2016).

3.4 Eye Contact Experiment

A typical *Eye Contact Experiment* takes place as a flash mob. A group of people suddenly gathers in a public place, invite passers-by to stop for a while and choose a partner for sharing one minute of eye contact. As a flash mob, an *Eye Contact Experiment* disrupts the normality of the situation by taking over a public space for a temporary suspension of the surrounding activities. *Eye Contact Experiment* takes a public place and puts it in brackets (**Bracketing space**); it takes "public time" and suspends it for a while (**Suspended time**). Participants are asked to focus on a simple yet demanding act: staring into a stranger's eyes (**Foreign face**), silently – at least in the beginning – seeking the lost human connection. In this case participants are not necessarily very different in terms of socio-cultural background, yet they are strangers to each other. In fact, they are casual passers-by who share nothing but the same place in the very same moment. In other words, they are not members of an already existing community or social group, unless being in that particular venue at that particular time.

As in *Portals*, although in a less "designed" way, the combination of three enablers (**Bracketing space, Suspended time, Foreign face**) contributes to the unfolding of an empathic experience among participants.

Similarly to *Eye Contact Experiment, Looking refugees in the eyes* could have been taken into consideration. *Looking refugees in the eyes* is a video experiment by Amnesty International + Al Jazeera, launched

in 2016, based as well on sharing a prolonged eye contact. The main difference is that the experiment was particularly addressed to pairing recently arrived refugees from Syria and Somalia with people from hosting European countries, such as Belgium, Italy, Germany, Poland and the UK. In this case then, a rule specifically set determines an amplification of the empathic experience. In fact, the difference of participants in terms of geographical, cultural, social provenance was the main focus of the experiment, aimed at enhancing the emotional impact of two foreigners facing one another.

3.5 Rede de élasticos

Participants to the *Rede de élasticos* are given a simple task, i.e. to knot an elastic band in order to braid a net. They sit in circle so to start knotting from different points and, knot after knot, they achieve together the expected outcome: a network resulting from a collaborative process. The elastic mesh is braided for the purpose of then being used together by participants themselves, co-creating a performance made of interconnected bodies moving according to the net's changes. The knotting process brings about the embodied experience of being **in the same boat**, each one pushed at moving by the others' movement.

Both the building process, which is focused on a **common goal** achieved by means of individual contributions, and the fruition of *Rede de élasticos*, which is co-experienced and co-performed by the same group, enable an empathic experience unfolding seamless along the two phases.

It is also important to stress that the output of the process – i.e. the net – conveys itself a metaphoric meaning of interconnected things or people, thus enhancing a sense of interdependence co-created in the act of knotting the bands.

3.6 Green Light

Like in *Rede de élasticos*, participants to *Green Light* are given a task, i.e. assembling some materials in order to produce a lamp. To be more specific, participants work in small groups, each one managing

a stage of the assembling process, from sanding and painting the wooden sticks, to wiring the electric parts and putting together the connecting pieces. So, the process is actually collaborative, engaging manual skills and communicative abilities as well. Considering that participants speak very different languages – they are refugees and asylum seekers from various countries – they need to find alternative strategies for understanding each other. Participants' **common goal** in *Green Light* is to produce an object that will be brought to market. This circumstance contributes to raise a sense of responsibility toward each one's individual task, and with it the awareness of each action's interdependence.

Green Light's context is, intentionally, a neutral zone for refugees and asylum seekers, out of the refugee camps in which they are forced (**Bracketing space**). Furthermore, *Green Light* provides them with a physical space where they can work, learn, practice their skills, relate to one another, leaving behind for a period the legal constraints fixed by bureaucracy related to migration policies.

Participants, local volunteers, visitors and teachers (**Foreign face**), are given a particular opportunity to experience positive relationships, based on collaboration and mutual knowledge. In the workshop and mostly in the *Shared Learning Program* a reversal of traditional roles of teacher and student (**In your shoes**) occurs. Drawn by critical pedagogical methods, the *Shared Learning Program* invites participants to share their skills, propose activities according to their interests and discover their talents and desires. All of the above contributes to the unfolding of an empathic experience for everyone involved. Being all together **in the same boat**, brings an awareness that every single individual counts and the collective growth arises.

4. Insights

By reading the synopsis (Tab. 3) vertically, the following highlights emerge. A first consideration can be made regarding the recurrence of some enablers in each pair of case studies distinguished by the actions of **walking through**, **sharing** and **making together**. *On Space Time Foam* and *Dialogue in the Dark* belong to the wal**king through** category. They have in common the enabler **Tricky space:**

the environment where participants are immersed is set in a way that pushes them at relying on one another in order to overcome the challenging situation.

Portals and *Eye Contact Experiment* share three enablers: they both rely on space and time out of the ordinary (**Bracketing place**, **Suspended time**) and aim to provide opportunities of novel encounters between strangers (**Foreign face**). They belong to the category **sharing**.

Rede de élasticos and *Green Light* are clustered as **making together**. In fact they share the enabler **Common goal**, that is focused on the actual production of something tangible along the practice. Therefore, the three pairs of case studies are characterised by different enablers moving from contextual to relational. In particular, **walking through** relies mostly on contextual enablers – specifically those concerning space; **sharing** requires both contextual and relational enablers; while **making together** is more centred on relational enablers. It seems that the more participatory and goal-oriented the proposition, the more it is characterised by relational enablers. As a confirm, *Green Light* features all of the 5 the relational enablers.

Alternatively, by reading the table 3 horizontally I can be observe that among contextual enablers – leaving aside **Art box** and **Body-to-body**, already discussed – **Bracketing space** is the most recurring (3 cases). Among relational enablers the same can be said for **Foreign face** (3 cases). Furthermore, both are present together in the same case studies. All of the above would suggest that:

1. providing a concrete space in which to relate to one another outside of social constraints, as in a kind of safe zone where horizontal relations can occur, could be a basic condition for the unfolding of an empathic experience;
2. the encounter between people from different socio-cultural backgrounds, when it takes place in the safe zone outlined above, enhance the opportunity for the empathic experience to happen. The more people are different the more otherness can emerge and may transform into value.

Tab. 3 – Synopsis of the enablers identified in each case study

Enablers	**Case studies**					
	On space Time Foam	Dialogue in the Dark	Portals	Eye Contact Experi-ment	Rede de élasticos	Green Light
Art box						
Tricky space						
Bracketing place						
Suspended time						
Body to body						
In your shoes						
Common goal						
Foreign face						
In the same boat						

7. Testing the system

By looking into each case study, what has come out is a plurality of different strategies which can be held accountable for triggering an embodied, dialogic experience here referenced as empathic. The list of *enablers* identified within the practices stands for the multiplicity of contextual/relational conditions which can be set up in order to achieve a specific kind of experience.

In order to strengthen my proposal I collected first-hand impressions from people who participated to the selected practices. The survey aimed at gaining feedback from participants about their personal experience and verifying the consistency with my framework. A second stage assessment took the form of a workshop aimed at discussing with scholars and practitioners the *enablers* and their usefulness within collaborative processes.

The survey and workshop have been part of the doctoral research project that gives origin to this book. They made sense in that context and here they both sound a bit naive. Still I believe that they should be worthy of mention, as they provided decisive insights for the most challenging task I had to face along my journey of art historian struggling with design, i.e. weaving together theory and practice.

In the following I shortly overview the results of the survey and the workshop, then processed towards the drafting of a set of principles valid for building those "constructed situations" that spark empathic experiences.

Such principles converged into guidelines, intended as a flexible set of suggestions to be adopted in collaborative contexts when you need that participants sharpen their open-mindedness, cooperative and

dialogical skills. Undergoing an empathic experience means recognising the other in yourself and yourself in the other, without ever merging one into the other. This encounter of subjects who acknowledge their respective alterity, may lead to improved cooperative skills (Sennett, 2012). Empathic experiences may sustain fair, open and honest conversations. They may help in managing conflicts so as to transform them into positive and constructive agonism (Mouffe, 2005) and help to account for each one's role in a collective achievement. As reported by the surveyed participants, the experience of empathy reveals transformative, as it raises awareness of the basic interdependence that binds together individuals and their actions. Being aware of such an interrelation means giving shape to our own identity in relation to the other's and being capable of renegotiating our "borders" according to the circumstances. Being exposed to empathic experiences is being exposed to otherness and acknowledging its value.

1. Survey

The survey was carried out among participants of the artistic interventions selected as case studies. Through a short questionnaire about their own experience, the survey aimed at verifying its consistency with my reading of the arts-based practices. The survey has been held by online digital tools, considering the wide-ranging provenance of participants. Precisely because of the inclusion of several countries, language has been an issue, as well as internal regulations. In some cases, difficulties were overcome thanks to local organisers interested in the research and keen to collaborate.

In the case of *Portals*, only that of Gaza responded to the invitation. Participants were barely able to speak and understand English. Despite the *Portal* curator translating, just four participants filled in the questionnaire before the central organisation suspended the survey. They prevented local curators from dispensing the questionnaire and proposed in turn to consult the visitors' reactions uploaded on the Shared Studio website. Thus, the results of the survey were integrated with the review of recorded reactions.

For *Green Light*, instead, the study took advantage of a direct contact with the TBA21 project manager, Nataša Venturi, who led the

Venice Biennale edition. She helped participants fill out the questionnaire, reduced and made easier based on the average understanding of English and Italian. Questions were then focused on the conditions perceived as enabling their experience. For *Green Light* a significant amount of feedback from participants and volunteers was available.

In regards to *Dialogue in the dark*, just four participants from different locations of the exhibition filled out the survey form and an attempt was made to get in touch with the organisation. They helped in spreading the call by posting and reposting it on their social media channels. This led to the feedback from four different hosting locations across the world, yet by just one visitor each.

The support of local organisers helped also in the case of *Eye Contact Experiment*. A member of Liberators International operating in Munich, assisted in disseminating the survey among participants at weekly eye contact events and answered some questions within an informal interview. In total, ten participants replied.

On Space Time Foam and *Rede de élasticos* took place in the past, so their attendees are difficult to trace back. However visitors to the installation at Hangar Bicocca in 2012 answered the survey posted on my personal Facebook profile. Five individuals filled in the questionnaire. For further input, an informal interview was conducted with Claudia Melendez, the architect from Saraceno Studio who realized the project in Milan, though the conversation focused mostly on very technical aspects rather than on participants' feedback.

For *Rede de élasticos* an attempt was made to reach participants at Lygia Clark's retrospective held at MOMA (2014), but there were no responses. The case therefore was – unfortunately – not part of the survey.

Despite the limited number of replies, and the consequent impossibility of using them as actual findings in the framework of a research, I've decided to summarise the survey's results into a tab (Tab. 1) and comment them with few observations.

The questionnaire dispensed to participants was structured in two parts. One concerned general information about participants' profile (age, education, profession, nationality, location of the visit). The other was focused on their experience during the visit/attendance, asking to what extent they considered it to be empathic and what, in their opinion, contributed to making it that way.

Interestingly, the most responders stated that they had an empathic experience during the participation with the artistic intervention, characterised by a deep connection with the others involved. A connection that allowed them to feel with others during the experience.

It is also worth noting that, even though coming from diverse countries and cultures, participants claimed to understand empathy explaining it in similar words, generally stressing its nature of a lived experience involving an interpersonal encounter.

Regarding the enabling conditions perceived as necessary by participants for the experience's unfolding, it is curious that they almost overlap with the *enablers*, even when expressed with other words.

Tab. 1 – Synthetic overview of participants' replies

Name of the case study	Replies	Understanding of empathy (fusion/ connection self-other)	Empathy experienced (yes/no)	Enabling conditions
On Space Time Foam	5	Blend of connection and fusion self-other	60% yes 40% no	Individual and collective displacement Transparency that allowed the reciprocal observation Simultaneous presence of many people
Dialogue in the Dark	4	Connection self-other	100% yes	Being in the same condition Blackness
Portals	4	Connection self-other	50% yes 50% no	Encountering new people Meeting different cultures
Eye Contact Experiment	10	Connection self-other	100% yes	Silence Time Undivided attention

Tab. 1 – continued

Name of the case study	Replies	Understanding of empathy (fusion/ connection self-other)	Empathy experienced (yes/no)	Enabling conditions
Green Light	23	n.a.	100% yes	Friendly environment Similar past experiences Freedom in the workplace Sharing Working, talking, having lunch, dancing all together feeling of equality Telling and listening to stories Comparing oneself with others Encounters with new faces Climate of mutual respect Acknowledging the other as valuable resource

2. Workshop

I held the workshop *Design for Empathy* (Devecchi, 2017) in the context of my doctoral research project. I see it now as an ingenuous experiment by an unpracticed researcher, so familiar with theoretical reasoning as inexperienced with practical tasks. However, I believe that some important suggestion for following the job couldn't have come out elseway. As for the survey, also the workshop's result have no scientific value *per se*. Still, I do think that it makes sense here to tell very briefly its story. I conceived the workshop as a way to assess and discuss the *enablers* – at the time still under development – and their possible application in design practice. Besides providing context for debate, the

workshop also offered the opportunity for testing some strategies for enhancing participants' empathic attitude within a cooperative situation.

Participants were selected considering their engagement in relevant research areas, such as collaborative practices, design for social innovation and experience design.

I structured the workshop in three sequences, starting with a warm-up, moving to a main section and ending with feedback. In order to introduce the issue of empathy and to enhance openness and self-disclosure among participants a session of direct eye contact was set up. The group sat in chairs facing other participants without talking, just staring in each other's eyes for 2 minutes trying to make connections. The eye contact session was proposed to test its effect on participants' closeness at the beginning of a collaborative process. As a matter of fact, the eye contact session was too short and involved not enough people. Time and place were not right. Better contextual conditions should have been staged. Considered in this perspective, this test proved useful to further defining the *enablers* and how to operationalise them.

After the warm up phase I went into the theoretical backdrop of the research and the key points to keep in mind during the workshop.

Given that participants were all designers by education my deep concern was to clearly articulate the difference of approaches to the issue of empathy in design. To this aim, the meaning given to the expression "empathic experience" was clarified and why it does not completely overlap with empathy intended as usual. I then stated the intention to shift from design *with* empathy to design *for* empathy, i.e designing the conditions to allow empathic experiences to happen.

The first task was the assessment of the *enablers* identified through the analysis of the case studies. The group was asked to reflect upon the *enablers*, their relevance to the case studies and possible adjustments and/or improvements. To this aim, the case studies were presented in detail together with the related *enablers*. At that time, the research was still ongoing; hence, both the study of the cases and the defining of the enablers were under development.

As a result, the *enablers* were generally confirmed or slightly modified. Nevertheless, the discussion following the first task provided interesting suggestions about developing a kind of ingredients list for designing the empathic experience. For a recipe to be successful ingredients should be measured and added in a particular combination. With

this metaphor in mind, participants suggested to reflect on some possibilities of modulation n the dosage of some *enablers*, such as amplification or reduction. This interesting observation specifically concerned the *enablers* involving context setting and duration. Workshop participants proposed to set up a –/+ scale for some *enablers*, according to the desired effect. For instance, as demonstrated by the eye contact session, the duration of an activity affects the resulting empathic experience, when combined with other *enablers*. The longer is the immersion in a determined situation the more intense the empathic experience may be – though this is not a fixed rule. Similarly, the more challenging the environment is to our senses, the more we need to cooperate with others for getting by. Of course, these are just probable and nearly unpredictable effects. Nevertheless, all the propositions collected along the discussion added a new layer of meaning.

The second task required participants to reflect upon two different perspectives about the empathic experience in design.

A. enabling the empathic experience as a **means** to achieve some particular outcomes in the design process. I asked to make out some proposals about the particular phase of a design process that would eventually call upon the empathic experience, and to what aim;
B. enabling the empathic experience as a **result** of the design process. Participants discussed how and to what extent the empathic experience could become an outcome of a design process and in what particular branch of design disciplines.

As respect to A., the group proposed that enabling the empathic experience could be a preparatory phase of collaborative design processes, aimed at connecting participants, involving stakeholders, establishing a positive, open and trusting attitude among them to facilitate dialogue and enhance cooperative skills. Besides the preparatory phase – they argued – it could be useful to nurture and sustain the empathic experience during the process itself, to keep it at the right level up till the end of the process. Participants worked on a *Double Diamond*[1] model, marking the divergent phases of a process as the most appropriate for pushing participants to experience

1. www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/skills-learning/the-double-diamond/.

empathy. Unlike in empathic design, where empathy is placed at the fuzzy front end of the design process, they argued that in both the Discover and Develop phases empathy may help in conveying a fair and equal communication among participants, facilitating cooperation and sharing.

About B., participants agreed that the empathic experience can be as well a design scope. In this case the experience of empathy is accounted for its potential to transform and improve social relations, collaborative skills and the capability of sharing. As such, designing empathic experiences could be relevant for design approaches related to social innovation and sustainability. According to workshop participants, the materialization of an empathic experience may be a designed 'situation'. As an example they proposed the *Bonding Buffet Christmas Table* installed in 2016 by KLM at Amsterdam Airport Schipol with the support of the creative agency DDB & Tribal Amsterdam. The assumption behind this iniziative is that airports are impersonal places where people mind their own business, chatting on social networks or working on laptops. This sense of displacement may be felt especially at Christmas time, typically a time for being together and sharing. The *Bonding Buffet* is a table prepared for twenty, lifted up about 5 metres high so that it could not be reached. Around the table, twenty stools were equipped with a pressure sensor that lowers the table a little each time a traveller sits down on a stool. Only when all the twenty diners sat together could the Christmas dinner be enjoyed. Of course, the *Bonding Buffet* is most of all a smart advertisement strategy, nevertheless it succeeds in making tangible the importance of a collaborative attitude in achieving a common goal, that in this case is sharing a dinner together with foreign travelers.

The survey and the workshop represented a milestone along the research project, providing suggestions and fresh perspectives on the *enablers* and their translation into principles that can be adopted in practical situations.

Also, both the survey and the workshop demonstrated some weakness. The main limit of the survey was the fact that questioning participants about their experience does not actually provide access to their actual individual experience. What people can express through words is just a part of an experience; it is just the explicit part (Sanders and Dandavate, 1999) of what people want us to hear and is not free from

conditioning of various kinds. For this reason the survey's results can be considered only as supporting data to a broader argument, and not as evidence in and of itself.

As respect to the workshop, the main bias has been for participants to drift apart from the accepted account of empathic design and its take on empathy as a skill. As design practitioners, they struggled to shift to understanding empathy as a dialogic experience arising from people encountering each other and not concerning designers themselves alone in the studio.

Despite these shortcomings, both have contributed to the elaboration of a set of guidelines intended to drive designers towards building "constructed situations", where dialogic empathy can leverage collaborative processes.

8. From enablers to guidelines

Cooperation oils the machinery of getting things done, and sharing with others can make up for what we may individually lack. Cooperation is embedded in our genes, but cannot remain stuck in routine behaviour; it needs to be developed and deepened (Sennett, 2012, p. ix).

Richard Sennett's main thesis in the book *Together* posits that though we are naturally equipped with cooperation skills which allow us to be in relation with one another, cooperation may occur at different levels of engagement. Adult, developed, mature, cooperation can be incredibly demanding, especially when dealing with people unlike ourselves. This is particularly true in times that, according to Sennett, *de-skill* people at cooperation by weakening curiosity of others and instead emphasising anxiety of differences.

Sennett's proposal is to consider cooperation as a craft – a *techné*, to put it in Aristotelian terms – which requires skills earned and refined by rehearsing them over and over. Taking cooperation as a specific aspect of a collaborative attitude, Sennett's argument may be useful to introduce the last part of this book, i.e. the one in which I propose to translate the system of the *enablers of the empathic experience* resulted from the observation of arts-based practices, the survey and the workshop previously discussed, into a series of design principles addressed at supporting collaborative processes.

1. Weaving theory into practice. An attempt

To be honest, this side of the work has been the most challenging to me. Before my journey started, I had never took into real consideration the applied implications of my research. Definitely, I've always been more confident with theoretical and historic-critical thought than with actual practice. As an art-historian, coming to terms with the practical usage of research findings, has been a highly demanding task. Given that premise, I hope I had at least traced a path that shall be explored further into the broader topic of the relationship between art and design.

Going back to Sennett, it is worth to note here his take on the notion of "dialogic skills" as the foundation of cooperation. *Dialogic*, unlike *dialectic*, concerns «a discussion which does not resolve itself by finding common ground. Though no shared agreements may be reached, through the process of exchange people may become aware of their own views and expand their understanding of one another» (Sennett, 2012, p. 19). He argues that empathy relates to dialogic exchanges, since it – differently from sympathy that conveys identification – opens up to differences and discloses curiosity about people for who they are on their own terms, forcing us to focus beyond ourselves. Hence, empathy enhance dialogic skills by bringing about mutual knowledge and enabling cooperation. This doesn't mean that experiencing empathy necessarily leads to a cooperative attitude, rather that it contributes to make the others breaking into one's own personal horizon, by asking to reconsider what may be a way to share the world with them. The empathic experience transforms self-awareness in relation to the other's existence as another self, whom by dealing with makes sense of the context in which they are immersed together.

Sennett devotes many pages to sharing his personal experience as a musician and draws a brilliant analogy between rehearsing in performative arts and dialogical conversations as a way to lay the groundwork for cooperation. He observes that in rehearsing for professional performances, listening skills and responsiveness to others are required. He claims that «In the performing arts, the sheer need of others can often prove a shock!» (Sennett, 2012, p. 14). A "played conversation" of a rehearsing ensemble is based on the musi-

cians' capacity to listen to others' attitudes and negotiate their own, in the way in which they all sound well, individually and collectively all together at one time. In other words, each instrument, and the way it is played, should have its place within a larger whole, without ever submerging in it. There's a difference, Sennett notes, between practising and rehearsing: «the one is a solitary experience, the other is collective» (p. 15). In a sense, the same distinction lies between the account of empathy as a skill and empathy as a dialogic experience. Empathy as a skill is a solitary practice; whereas the empathic experience is a relational one.

Given that the act of rehearsing is a model of cooperation, where sharpened interaction is required to exchange mutual benefits, I argue that designing empathic experiences – i.e. building "constructed situations" that enable that kind of dialogic, embodied experience I defined as empathic – provides opportunities for rehearsing and refining our relational skills. Being exposed to others in situations specifically set up to make us aware of otherness and its value, means rehearsing our sociability. Once we have been exposed to otherness, we must admit that we need it.

In this perspective, given that some conditions – the *enablers* – facilitate more than others a kind of interpersonal encounter embedded within the empathic experience, I tried to transform the results of the observation of arts-based practices in a series of design principles (Tab. 1). The principles then took the form of a set of guidelines that I named *Guidelines for designing the empathic experience*, and that I wish can be relevant to design practices focused on collaborative processes.

Rehearsing involves rituals, gestures and routines for warming up. Acts and movements which do not require particular attention because they have been earned, in one way or another contribute to improvements, refinements and connections during the execution. Following up with the metaphor of rehearsing orchestral pieces, the guidelines are intended to design the tacit ground rules that may support and sustain collaboration, i.e. the conditions that, once set up, provide the background to free interactions, channeling them towards cooperative relationships, based on dialogic exchanges.

Tab. 1 – Principles and their short description

Principle	Short description
Safe zone	Select a location that conveys neutrality, safeness and freedom of thought.
Never mind the clock	Plan a schedule that allows participants to comfortably focus on the proposed activity with leaving room to free and pressure-less conversation.
Challenge the soma	Provide a temporary an immersive experience into an environment which questions perceptual habits and bodily engages participants.
Multi-subjectivity	Carefully define the number of people involved and their clustering.
Nurture diversity	Select participants or organise groups taking into consideration a balanced blend of their differences (social, cultural, geographical, gender, etc.).
Interdependence	Set a common goal that can be achieved only by connecting the different tasks given to participants or groups.
Role change	Create opportunities for bidirectional role reversals (I take your role, you take mine, both of us experience a change).

2. Guidelines for designing the empathic experience

The seven principles resulting from the work done on arts-based practices and the system of the *enablers* merged into seven guidelines. They concern different aspects of setting the context of collaborative processes and nurturing dialogic exchanges throughout their unfolding. In the following, the guidelines are presented one by one, specifying *which* aspects they affect, and *how* and *why* they contribute to enabling empathic experiences.

2.1 Safe zone

Safe zone concerns the selection of the venue and the context set up therein. It could be adopted before starting a collaborative practice, for instance a co-design session, or a design workshop. Selecting a location

that conveys neutrality and safeness (e.g. a museum, or a cultural institution), a non-politicised place where freedom of expression is granted, ensures openness and protection from outside constraints.

The selection of place is crucial in providing the right space for relating to one another without dissolving into one another. An open context provides a concrete space for being together, with each one in his/her own individuality. A **Safe zone** facilitates dialogic exchanges and discussions free from socio-cultural constraints. Researches show that space can be empathic itself, when designed in a way that affects the experience of being immersed inside it (Mallgrave, 2013).

Tab. 2 – Guideline description: Safe zone

Guideline's name	Safe zone
What	Venue selection and context setting.
How	Select a location that conveys neutrality and safeness, a place where freedom of expression is granted and which is open while ensuring protection from outside's constraints.
Why	A safe zone facilitates dialogic exchanges and discussion free from socio-cultural constraints. An open context provides a concrete space for being together, each one in their own individuality.

2.2 Never mind the clock

Never mind the clock concerns the time-setting of a collaborative design activity, be it a co-design session or a workshop. The schedule set up before starting the activity in order for it to be well organised may be planned so as to allow participants to comfortably focus their attention on the proposed activity, taking into consideration the physiological resistance to giving their undivided attention. On the other hand, it should also allow a free and pressure-less conversation unfolding. Even when limitations to disengaged conversations are necessary, there should be an attempt to convey the feeling that time rules are different than the ordinary.

Conversations free from pressures are rare moments in ordinary schedules, still they lay the groundwork for interpersonal relationships. Fast connections and social relationships enabled by digital technologies may be obstacles to empathy (Boella, 2018). Giving participants the opportunity to experiment with a relational situation far removed from the usual time constraints and behaviours may facilitate the initiation of a truly dialogical experience.

Tab. 3 – Guideline description: Never mind the clock

Guideline's name	**Safe zone**
What	Time setting and scheduling.
How	Plan a schedule that allow participants to comfortably focus on the proposed activity. Equally, have care of including some time slots for disengaged and pressure-less conversations. Convey the feeling that time ruòles are different from the ordinary.
Why	Giving participants the opportunity of experimenting a relational situation out of usual time constraints, may initiate meaningful dialogic exchange thus facilitating the empathic experience unfolding.

2.3 Somatic engagement

Being immersed into a specifically designed experiential environment that questions people's perceptual habits, participants are pushed to engage bodily and cooperatively to overcome an uncertain situation. Examples can include displacing conditions that affect the equilibrium, or one of the senses, so that you have to rely on mutual help from someone else to compensate for your sensorial gap.

Space can be challenging at various degrees. The more it provides a displacing experience the more it may leverage an empathic experience. In one sense, adopting this guideline requires adjusting it according to the desired impact. Indeed, a challenging environment alone is not a sufficient condition to enable empathy. Still, when this condition is lived collectively in a somatic, embodied way, it may strongly affect an empathic attitude.

Also, this kind of somatic engagement may enhance perception raising awareness of the basic interconnection between body, movement and space as well as between people immersed in it. When you are engaged somatically – with your whole body and mind – it is almost impossible not to be affected by other bodies. In uncertain perceptive situations, a mutual exchange between the bodies involved is established creating a naturally occurring interdependence. The account of empathy drawn from phenomenology is based on the main assumption that we are living bodies and our way of inhabiting and acknowledging the world – along with the other subjects within it – is primarily embodied (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

Hence, the suggested strategy can serve to warm up participants towards a collaborative activity as well as nurturing their cooperative attitude throughout the process itself.

Tab. 4 – Guideline description: Somatic engagement

Guideline's name	**Safe zone**
What	Warming up and/or nurturing cooperative attitude.
How	Set up a specifically designed experiential situation that puzzles the participants' perceptual habits. pushing them to actively engage their soma for finding a way out of the uncertain condition in cooperation with others.
Why	Challenging environments sharpen perceptual skills raising awareness of the basic interconnection between body, movement and space, and among the people there immersed.

2.4 Multi-subjectivity

Multi-subjectivity is a made-up word to express the need of taking into particular consideration the number of people involved in a collaborative process. It suggests a rule of interaction that may affect both the process and the outcome. It establishes the number of participants according to the kind of experience being addressed. The exchange may be a on a one-on-one basis or alternatively a large group interacting

together. This may affect the resulting experience, from individual to collective.

The number of participants may be adjusted according to the goal. An individual empathic experience may differ from a collective one. We've seen that empathy occurs along an encounter between at least two subjects, still it is always experienced by an individual. However, it can be amplified when it happens to several people simultaneously. Adjusting the number of participants bearing this in mind could help in fine-tuning the degree of the empathic experience.

Tab. 5 – Guideline description Multi-subjectivity

Guideline's name	Safe zone
What	Rule of interaction; number of participants.
How	Establish the number of participants according to the goal you are addressing. Encounters may be on a one-on-one basis or many-to-many, changing the impact of the experience from individual to collective.
Why	Empathy occurs along a relational embodied encounter between at least two subjects. Still it is experienced immediately by an individual. Its impact may be amplified when it occurs to multiple subjects simultaneously.

2.5 Diversity as value

The selection of participants and their clustering in working groups may stem from their differences instead of similarities. Indeed, making people work together who previously did not know each other and do not have much in common can be highly challenging. Yet, commonalities, while not being suddenly revealed, emerge spontaneously during the process by means of dialogic exchanges. When the sense of belonging to a group pre-exists, it may hinder the empathic experience conveying an inside or outside division.

Differences can be intended in terms of socio-cultural backgrounds, provenance or identity, etc. The blending of participants may be adjusted according to the aim being addressed. Cooperating with

someone unlike ourselves may be very demanding and challenging. Still, it is also rewarding, making the interaction meaningful and pushing us to put our dialogic skills at stake the most. The more diverse the people involved, the more agonism (Mouffe, 2005) can unfold and drive the experience towards a reciprocal acknowledgment. Inclusion is thus ensured and with it a rich landscape of humanity.

Tab. 6 – Guideline description: Diversity as value

Guideline's name	**Safe zone**
What	Selection and/or clustering of participants.
How	Select and group participants giving value to their differences. Cluster together people who don't know each other previously.
Why	When commonalities emerge spontaneously by means of conversation and cooperation, a sense of belonging may establish among people involved opening the door to empathic encounters. When groups pre-exist the same sense of belonging may, otherwise, contribute to marginalize those who are not included. This, instead, hinders empathy unfolding.

2.6 Interdependence

This guideline concerns the planning of tasks and activities in collaborative practices, and how this can reveal participants' actions interconnection.

Setting a common goal to be achieved together leverages the need of each one's contribution in accomplishing it. By giving each participant – or group of participants – a different assignment, still taking care of highlighting the connections between the tasks and each one's role in achieving the ultimate goal, make people feel themselves as knots within the same net.

Dealing with tasks that are connected and consistent to one another may raise awareness of the interdependence underpinning each individual action. Actually, empathic experiences are at one time both the cause and effect of this sense of interconnection.

Tab. 7 – Guideline description: Interdependence

Guideline's name	Safe zone
What	Organisation of tasks and activities.
How	Set a common goal to be achieved together clearly explaining the need of each one's contribution for its accomplishment. Participants should feel as knots of a same network.
Why	Dealing with tasks that are connected and consistent to one another may raise awareness of the interdependence of each individual action.

2.7 Role change

During a collaborative process a phase could be devoted to reversing usual roles as a way to increase the chances for empathic experiences to happen. In traditional role playing techniques, the change is unidirectional, in the sense that I pretend to be someone else, for instance a new mother, or an old man with mobility problems, and not vice-versa. **Role change**, instead, means finding strategies for embodied bidirectional reversal of roles, exploring the relational dynamics between participants when the reversal concerns me taking on your role and you taking on mine. The notion of role may be intended as regard identity, personal life conditions, provenance, socio-cultural background and others.

In Edith Stein's view, a first step of the empathic experience is to directly perceive the embodied, embedded experience of another (Meneses, 2011), "lived" in its wholeness. Getting closer to the others' perspective is crucial for gaining awareness of their irreducible otherness, that emerges throughout the unfolding of the experience. Reversing each one's role may be a trigger of this first and important start of the whole empathic experience. Moreover a r**ole change** contributes to rehearsing openness with others, since while you take on their role, they take yours, in an exchange that involves you both.

The main goal of **role change** is the transformative experience itself, and its potential to disclose the other's world to you and vice-versa.

Tab. 8 – Guideline description: Role change

Guideline's name	Safe zone
What	Rule of participants' interaction.
How	Find strategies for embodied bidirectional role reversals. The notion of role may be intended as concerning identity, personal life conditions, age, etc.
Why	Role reversals contribute to rehears an open mindset. You take my role and you take mine, the change involves us both. The main goal of this kind of role playing is the transformative experience itself, and its potential to disclose the other's world to you and vice-versa.

3. Observations

The guidelines are meant to provide a flexible design tool, a set of suggestions about what may activate the kind of experience here defined as empathic. The empathic experience may be sought as a result *per se* or as a stepping stone for launching and supporting collaborative processes. When intended from this perspective, the *guidelines for designing empathic experiences* can be considered as a meta-design approach, addressed to setting up a context for collaborative practices and sustaining cooperation throughout the process (Menichinelli and Valsecchi, 2016). Returning to Giaccardi (2005, p. 343) «metadesign deals with the creation of context rather than content». Fischer and Sharff (2000, n.p.) also state that «creating the technical and social conditions for broad participation in design activities is as important as creating the artifact itself». Hence, designing the design process results an important aspect of the process's unfolding and attainment.

Empathy needs a stage, a designed place and a choreography, real and symbolic at the same time (Boella, 2018). The guidelines address the setting up of the scene and managing a possible choreography of the actors on stage.

Assuming that guidelines are just suggestions and could be adopted in full or in part, according to the desired effect and the actual need to trigger cooperation skills, a general indication is to combine them in order to achieve meaningful experiences. In fact, setting the context alone may not be enough to activate particular

relational dynamics. The context is the stage on which the empathic experience may unfold, still it requires actors to perform an action as – going back to Sennett's metaphor – musicians to rehearse a piece of music. Therefore, it is crucial to also set some rules of interaction inside the prepared context. To use Andrew Roepstorff's words, «In setting up spaces, you also set up rules of interaction, ways of engaging one another» (Roepstorff, 2017, p. 28).

By definition a set of guidelines identifies a recommended practice that allows some discretion or leeway in its interpretation, implementation, or use. Hence, following guidelines is never mandatory as they are «meant to *guide*, not to *restrict*» (Klionsky, 2016, p. 734). They instead draw a possible path, leaving room for individual interpretation. The choice to develop guidelines instead of a typical toolkit or a strict methodology has been determined by the admission that, dealing with such a delicate issue as human relationships requires humble and light interventions.

It is no coincidence that guidelines are particularly used in medical contexts. Healthcare workers have to deal with bodily and mental aspects of patients and their parents; they have to take into consideration hygiene issues, ethical codes and human comprehension. To do this, they need on one side a general guidance concerning ground rules and, on the other, adaptability to particular cases.

This set of guidelines are intended to operate within this perspective of flexibility. As a consequence of this flexibility and of the sensitive aspects the guidelines are addressed to – i.e. human experiences and relationships – making use of them requires the acceptance of the essential unpredictability of the effect they may arise. As already stressed, experiences and relationships cannot be designed, only enabled. They may occur in a desired manner, in another, or not occur at all, despite the effort to design the best possible enabling conditions. While an unstable and uncertain tool, guidelines ensure the replicability of processes, giving them the opportunity to be improved and fine-tuned according to the need.

Further research indeed might expand the number of guidelines and refine them. This study has to be considered as a starting point in the exploration of "practices of empathy" (Boella, 2018b), and the guidelines are just one possible actualisation. Of course, they are questionable and may benefit from further discussion; still, they represent

an endeavour to bring the complexity of the empathic experience to the field of design, in order to support meaningful and constructive relationships.

3.1 Design in the Middle

Right after the definition of the *Guideline for designing the empathic experience*, I came across a project that could have been part of the research I had just concluded. Since I couldn't turn back the clock, I decided to use the project as a testing ground. The project was *Design in the Middle*[1], a workshop curated by Maria Alicata, Merav Perez and Ezri Tarazi who invited 30 designers from the Middle East/Euro-Med region to co-designing possible responses to challenging issues relevant to their territory. Together with Luca Guerrini we applied the guidelines to the analysis of the project, and by interviewing the curators and the participants we observed to what extent some of the principles converged into the guidelines had an effect on the process. The results of this work are available in an essay co-authored with Guerrini (Devecchi and Guerrini, 2019). Yet, I believe that's the right place to recall some highlights from there, since they provide an opportunity of further reflection upon the main issue of this book.

Design in the Middle took place in 2017 at MAXXI Museum in Rome. Participants shared one week of work on critical topics such as borders, religious diversity, migration, water and food resources, information mobility and cultural exchange (Perez and Tarazi, 2017).

> The goals of the workshop were multiple: to ignite and rehabilitate the fragile civic imagination of participants through the conception of alternative near-future scenarios, while eliciting a wide range of design proposals, from the imaginary to the applicable (Perez and Tarazi, 2017, p. S4308).

The workshop's venue was the Guido Reni room, a large conference room of the MAXXI which for the occasion was unsettled and transformed with the purpose of creating two main zones: one for a more intimate and quiet work, the other for public discussions snd presentations.

1. www.designinthemiddle.org/01-workshop/ (consulted 16/02/2023).

Curators claimed success for the initiative, especially as an opportunity of thinking and imagining beyond borders. A campaign of interviews I've run upon participants and curators after the workshop revealed that some enabling strategies, more or less intentionally set up by the organization, contributed to the initiative's outcomes. Interestingly, a number of those strategies somehow overlap with the *Guidelines*.

A. **Location**. The workshop has been hosted in a museum, an institution that, by its very nature, preserves cultural identity. Curators considered MAXXI appropriate for gathering people from different conflict areas, as it was an extra-territorial place, neutral and safe. Participants particularly appreciated working inside a museum in Italy, a place rich in history and culture they felt as a kind of de-risked environment[2] (Devecchi and Guerrini, 2019).
B. **Setting**. The Guido Reni room was temporarily changed into a cosy studio environment, where it was easy to switch from small group work to shared dialogue and discussion, equipped with tall yellow elements on wheels. These, in the curators' intent, might reference the desert tents echoing a familiar context and serving as triggering artifacts for dialogical encounters (Manzini and Till, 2015).
C. **Participants**. The list of participants was drawn up accurately. The final group included «junior and seniors designers and architects from all over the Middle East/Euro-Med Region, students and designers from the Middle East who were studying or working in Europe, and a few European social designers and entrepreneurs who were actively involved with the issues at stake» (Perez and Tarazi, 2017, p. S4314). The resulting blend of perspectives, due to different background, degree of education, life experiences, age and – especially – religious beliefs, could be potentially explosive. On the contrary, the workshop offered the opportunity for each and every voice to speak, building on diversity its most valuable outcomes. Equally concerned for their own countries, plagued by everlasting conflicts, participants discovered that their differences in opinion, expressed in a neutral context, could be a resource instead

2. Interview by the author, May-June 2017.

of a hindrance. Most of them referred to this specific experience as empathic[3].

D. **Interactions**. Informal discussions, light encounters, opportunities for sitting all together and sharing personal life experiences were scheduled in the agenda of the workshop. The balance between highly demanding work and disengaged moments of exchange proved to be effective in building a cooperative attitude[4].

By checking to what extent these contextual and organisational conditions match with the *Guidelines*, I may consider that A. **Location** and B. **Setting** partially converge with **Safe zone**; C. Participants with **Multi-subjectivity** and **Diversity as value**; D. Interactions with **Never mind the clock**. As a partial confirmation of the *Guidelines*' validity, the interviewed participants referred to the experience lived along *Design in the Middle* as empathic.

3. Interview by the author, May-June 2017.
4. Interview by the author, May-June 2017.

Conclusions

The main thesis of this book is that emerging collaborative approaches to design may benefit from a rethinking of the traditional consideration of empathy as a designer's skill aimed at understanding users' needs. In managing collaborative processes, the designer's ability to step into the other's shoes is no longer enough. Empathy should be introduced to participants who are asked to cooperate towards a common goal. To attain this shift of the locus of empathy from designer to participants, a different consideration of its nature is required. In fact, if we take empathy as an embodied experience that unfolds within dialogical encounters, we can begin to consider how to enable such experiences not only for designers but also for participants. By setting up favourable contexts for relations to develop into empathic experiences, we also lay the basis for dialogic exchanges and cooperation, crucial to collaborative practices. Empathy introduces the others into one's own personal horizon and the recognition of their irreducible diversity. Following this, enabling empathy means opening spaces for 'diversities' to be revealed and to come to terms with.

One aim of this book is then to provide a theoretical framework for introducing a different perspective of empathy into design practices, one more suitable to emerging collaborative approaches. Such a framework can be drawn from a phenomenological account of empathy that focuses on its nature as an interpersonal experience. Empathy may unfold within relational contexts, requiring facilitation and support. It needs circumstances which do not prevent it from occurring when one faces another person.

For creating these circumstances as much as possible, this books provides a set of guidelines intended to assist in the design of the empathic experience, a practical tool to help set up the context of collaborative processes in order to foster them. To develop the *Guidelines for designing the empathic experience* I combined theoretical inquiry and an experimental approach. Methodologically, I first completed desk research and speculation before moving to field research and ultimately to action research. To be more specific, most of the study underpinning this book relied on secondary sources: the theoretical backdrop about empathy built upon relevant existing studies by acknowledged scholars. My task was that of collecting and interpreting sources in an effort to elaborate a personal viewpoint. The same is valid for the existing literature about empathy in design. Much has been written about this issue and I selected papers, books and articles which might draw as complete a picture as possible of the relation between empathy and design.

At this point, my personal educational background, and main research interest, came to my rescue, i.e. socially collaborative art. Within that broad area of contemporary art, I found that looking through the lens of empathy could be an opportunity to re-articulate the mutual relation between arts and design today. I attempted to bridge the two fields by collecting and systematising some suggestions drawn from art practices I then translated into design principles. To do this, I selected some case studies from among socially collaborative arts-based practices which – through different strategies – give birth to the experience of empathy in a dialogical embodied way. In choosing these practices, of course I could have considered the performing arts as well. Dance and theatre are essentially experiential and immersive; often they trigger our "empathy circuit", even unwillingly, relying on deep emotional responses. Instead, I preferred to draw attention to relational situations, where complex dynamics unfold as individuals encounter each other, share something, work together and establish a dialogical exchange. I collected information as much as possible about these practices, coming from different sources, including both secondary and primary. I conducted interviews with people involved at different levels within the organisations and implementation of the selected case studies. Field research also involved a survey of participants of the case studies, in an effort to gain deeper

insights about their attendance and the role they assigned to empathy within the overall experience.

I applied an empirical approach for experimenting and validating all of the knowledge built throughout the previous stages. By means of a workshop I developed – together with participants – some suggestions and general principles for enabling the empathic experience. Hence, I processed the survey and workshop's results in order to transform them into a practical outcome, i.e. the *Guidelines for designing the empathic experience*.

Despite the conclusion of this book, the issue of empathy in design and the contribution of art in its respect, continues to raise questions to me. I consider such open-endedness not as a downside, yet as room for many future research perspectives, both at a theoretical and practical level. There are as many points that seek further insights and refinement as possible lines of research. To draw a provisional picture of these multiple research threads which are likely to be undertaken, I would focus on what this study has abstained from considering for reasons of consistency and unity.

Starting from the theoretical inquiry about the concept of empathy, I have already mentioned the choice of focusing on the phenomenological tradition, from which I drew indications for building the framework of empathy as a dialogical experience. However, despite a consistency with "phenomenological empathy", the researches into neuroaesthetics – following the discovery of mirror neurons – has barely been mentioned. For instance, though very close to my topic, Vittorio Gallese's work about intersubjectivity and its neurological basis has not been scrutinized here. Nor has the study of the social neuroscience of empathy been raised, which bridges brain studies and social sciences to understand the relations between neural empathic circuits and our social behaviour.

On another side, when speaking of empathy and art, it is natural to think about German art historians between XIX and XX Century, such as Heinrich Wölfflin and Wilhelm Worringer, along with philosophers like Friederich Theodor Vischer and Theodor Lipps. All of them investigated different declinations of a theory about how we perceive artworks by means of establishing an empathic relation with them, projecting ourselves and merging into them. This crucial origin of the concept of empathy has been just quickly recalled in this book, as it

deals with understanding relations between subject and object, instead of between subject and subject. A more specific study on this topic could be relevant for design as respect to its relation with Aesthetics.

I also left aside the political implications of empathy. While acknowledging the importance of such an issue in the current debate (Ahmed, 2004; Pedwell, 2014) my aim was not the one of discussing how and why our natural empathic attitude has been identified as a key to overcoming the crisis of democratic systems. Additionally, I did not mention unless fast the positions against empathy (Bloom, 2013) and its failures (Cikara et al, 2011), which shed light upon the most critical sides of a concept usually taken for granted as being positive.

In short, amongst the multiple facets of empathy, this research focused on one in particular: empathy as the discovery of the others' existence and the acknowledgement of their otherness (Boella, 2018).

The shape of this book is that of a fabric, braided by intertwining different hypothesis repeatedly connected and assessed along the underpinning research process. Each chapter is like a thread of a main texture, woven step by step in light of new findings and viewpoints unfolding along the research. Each one of the subjects I did not handle within this study are likely to be future threads of investigation spreading from the present one, destined to thicken the research's texture. This may be considered only a piece of a broader exploration about the relations between empathy and design, stemming from a perspective on empathy as a relational experience rather than an individual skill. A particular piece which ends with a specific proposition: the provision of *Guidelines for enabling empathic experiences*, drawn from a study focused on art practices and the strategies they use to enable empathy.

Nevertheless, the *Guidelines* themselves open future research paths about their use, evaluation, and implementation. A process that shall start from now on, focused on how these proposed guidelines may translate into practice, including tests in real-life design research environments, for instance workshops, co-design sessions and contexts that require to «oil cooperation» (Sennett, 2012). Guidelines need to be used but also to be disseminated. Perhaps a first step would be to initiate a community discussion where design researchers and practitioners could bring their own contributions. Seminars and workshops might touch upon different aspects, such as the most appropriate format for the

guidelines, their area of application and impact on design processes. Given that «the guidelines are meant to be dynamic, reflecting a field of active research, which means that there will frequently be new findings, new methodologies, and new thoughts on data interpretation» (Klionsky, 2016), an additional issue may be to understand to what extent revisions should be carried out and how frequently they need updating.

This book posits a little contribution to a broader debate that is lively present in the design discourse, i.e. the redefinition of the relationship between design and other disciplines such as philosophy and the arts. This urgent issue is focused on the value that such disciplines may bring to design research and practices. In this context, I took the challenge of proposing new approaches to consolidated issues.

The main lesson I learnt along the journey regards the value of uncertainty. Guidelines are not rules, and the results of their application is absolutely unpredictable. Their flexibility is their strength and limit at the same time. Dealing with interpersonal relationships and the sphere of experience requires the acceptance of unexpected outcomes and probable failures. Paradoxically, experiences may be enabled, not designed, just as empathy can only be enabled and not designed. The experience of empathy can be designed only by intervening on its enabling conditions, which lay the base for a co-generated experience between the people involved. The ultimate benefit is for them, the people who encounter, interact and dialogue with those that are different from themselves.

To return back to the start of the book: the humans in WALL.E are surrounded by products and services, designed to make their life easier and comfortable. Their needs are induced by the same company which provides them with everything they need. Everything is designed, even their commute along definite paths. WALL.E becomes the unexpected, unpredictable, "undesigned" element in their lives which reintroduces humanity back to humans. Guidelines, tools, methods support designers' work; still, there's WALL.E.

References

Ahmed S. (2004), *The cultural politics of emotions*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.

Anzillotti E. (2017), "The Next Genius idea is creating global empathy". Available at www.fastcompany.com/3068880/the-next-genius-idea-is-creating-global-empathy (consulted 09/02/2023).

Arendt H. (1993), *Men in Dark Times*. Harcourt, New York, 1955.

Bakshi A.C. (2016), "Lessons from the launch of Portals". Available at www.amarcbakshi.com/story/ (consulted 09/02/2023).

Battarbee K., Koskinen I. (2005), "Co-experience. User experience as interaction", *CoDesign*, 1, 1: 5-18.

Battarbee K., Fulton Suri J., Gibbs Howard S. (2014), "Empathy on the edge". Available at https://new-ideo-com.s3.amazonaws.com/assets/files/pdfs/news/Empathy_on_the_Edge.pdf (consulted 21/01/2023).

Bauman Z. (2003), *Amore liquido*, Laterza, Bari.

Bauman Z. (2017), "Sui social per diventare tutti autistici". Available at www.che-fare.com/zygmunt-bauman-sui-social-per-diventare-tutti-autistici/ (consulted 10/02/2023).

Benasayag M., Rey A. D. (2018), *Elogio del Conflitto*, Feltrinelli, Milano.

Bernagozzi A. (2021), *Towards sharing common futures. Celebrating diversity for a more resilient society through design*, Corraini Edizioni, Mantova.

Bhabha H.K. (2004), *The Location of Culture,* Routledge, Abingdon.

Bishop C. (2004), "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics" *October*, 110, 3: 51-79.

Bishop C. (2006a), "The social turn. Collaboration and its discontent", *Artforum*, 44,6: 178-183.

Bishop C., ed. (2006b). *Participation*, Whitechapel and MIT Press, London, Cambridge.

Bishop C. (2012), *Artificial Hells. Participatory art and the politics of spectatorship*, Verso, London, New York.

Bloom P. (2016), *Against Empathy. The Case for Rational Compassion*, Harper Collins, New York.
Boella L. (2006), *Sentire l'altro*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano.
Boella L. (2018a), *Empatie. L'esperienza empatica nella società del conflitto*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano.
Boella L. (2018b). "From empathy to empathies: towards a paradigm change", *Rivista internazionale di filosofia e psicologia*, 9, 1: 1-13.
Bois Y.A. (1999), "Lygia Clark", *Artforum*, 45, 19: 173-174.
Boulanger C., Lançon C. (2006), "L'empathie. Réflexions sur un concept", *Discussions Annales médico-psychologiques*, 164, 6: 497-505.
Bourriaud N. (2002), *Relational Aesthetics*, Les Presses du réel, Dijon.
Brett G. (1994), "Lygia Clark. In search of the body", *Art in America*, 82, 7: 57-108.
Buber M. (1923), *I And Thou*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann, Touchstone, New York, 1996.
Buber M. (1947), *Between Man and Man*. Translated by Ronald Gregor-Smith, Routledge Classics, 2006.
Carter K. (2017), "Lygia Clark and the Logics of Participation After 'Failed' Revolt", *Excursions*, 7, 1: 1-20.
Chang-Arana A.M., Piispanen M., Himberg T., Surma-aho A., Alho J., Sams M., Hölttä-Otto K. (2020), "Empathic accuracy in design: Exploring design outcomes through empathic performance and physiology", *Design Science*, 6, E16.
Chang-Arana A.M., Surma-aho A., Hölttä-Otto K., Sams M. (2022), "Under the umbrella: Components of empathy in psychology and design", *Design Science*, 8, E20.
Cho E.J. (2013), *Design for sociability. A relational aesthetic approach to service encounter.* Doctoral dissertation in Design, Politecnico di Milano.
Cikara M., Bruneau E.G., Saxe R.R. (2011), "Us and them. Intergroup failures in empathy", *Current directions in psychological sciences*, 20, 3: 149-153.
Cipolla C. (2004), *Tourist or Guest – Designing Tourism Experiences or Hospitality Relations?*, in Willis A.M. (ed.), *Design Philosophy Papers 2*, Team D/E/S Publications, Ravensbourne.
Cipolla C. (2007), *Designing for Interpersonal Relational Qualities in Services.* Doctoral dissertation in Design, Politecnico di Milano.
Cipolla C. (2008), *Creative communities as "relational" innovations. A service design approach*, in Jégou F., Manzini E. (eds.) *Collaborative services. Social innovation and design for sustainability*, POLI.Design, Milano.
Cipolla C. (2009), "Relational services. Service design fostering sustainability and new welfare models", *Proceedings of the 2nd International Symposium on Sustainable Design (IISSD)*, 1-6.

Cipolla C. (2012), *Solutions for relational services*, in Miettinen S. (ed.), *Service Design with Theory. Discussions on Change, Value, Methods*, Lapland University Press, Rovaniemi, Finland.

Cipolla C. (2018) "Designing for Vulnerability: Interpersonal Relations and Design", *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economic, and Innovation*, 4, 1: 111-122.

Cipolla C., Bartholo R. (2014), "Empathy or Inclusion. A Dialogical Approach to Socially Responsible Design", *International Journal of Design*, 8, 2: 87-100.

Cipolla C., Manzini E. (2009), "Relational Services", *Knowledge, Technology and Policy* 22 (1), 45-50.

Clark L. (1994), "1968: Are We Domesticated?", *October*, 69: 85-109.

Clark L. (1998), *To Capture a Fragment of Suspended Time*, in *Lygia Clark* [Exhibition catalogue], Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, 187-189.

Danto A.C. (1981), *The transfiguration of the commonplace. A philosophy of art*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Davis M.H. (1983), "Measuring individual differences in empathy: evidence for a multidimensional approach", *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 44, 1: 113-126.

Design Council (2021), *Beyond Net Zero. A systemic approach*. Available at www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-work/skills-learning/tools-frameworks/beyond-net-zero-a-systemic-design-approach/ (consulted 18/02/2023).

Devecchi A. (2017), *Designing the empathic experience. A workshop*, in Valušytė R., Biamonti A., Cautela C. (eds.), *4D Designing Development. Developing Design*, KTU Design Centre, Kaunas, 73-84.

Devecchi A., Guerrini L. (2017), "Empathy and Design: A New Perspective", *The Design Journal*, 20, sup 1: S4357-S4364.

Devecchi A. (2018), *Designing the empathic experience. Suggestions from art practices*, Doctoral dissertation, Politecnico di Milano.

Devecchi A., Guerrini L. (2019), *Empathy for resilience*, in Häkkilä J., Pakanen M., Luiro E., Mikkonen E, Miettinen S. (eds.), *Cumulus Conference Proceedings Rovaniemi 2019 – Around the Campfire*, 594-607.

Donato F. (2021), "Cultura, patrimonio culturale e creatività nelle politiche della ricerca europee / Culture, cultural heritage and creativity in European research policies", *Il capitale culturale*, 24: 341-359.

Drouet L., Bongard-Blanchy K., Lallemand C., Koenig V. (2022), "The Measure of Empathy in Design: How Do We Trigger Empathy among Designers and Beyond?", *Empathy-Centric Design At Scale Workshop at CHI 2022,* ACM.

Duan C., Hill C.E. (1996), "The current state of empathy research", *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 43, 3: 261-274.

Eco U. (1962), *Opera aperta*, Bompiani, Milano.
Eggebert A. (2018) "The Unlikeliness of Us", *She Ji: The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation*, 4, 1: 11-30.
Eisenberg N., Eggum N.D. (2009), *Empathic responding. Sympathy and personal distress*, in Decety J., Ickes W. (eds.), *The social neuroscience of empathy*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 71-84.
Eliasson O. (2017), *Assembling a light, assembling communities*, in Zyman D., Ebersberger E. (eds.), *Olafur Eliasson. Green Light – An artistic workshop*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 13-15.
Figueiredo L. (ed.) (1996), *Lygia Clark-Hélio Oiticica: Cartas (1964-74)*, Editora UFR, Rio de Janeiro.
Finlay L. (2005), "Reflexive embodied empathy: A phenomenology of participant-researcher intersubjectivity", *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 33, 4: 271-292.
Finlay L. (2006), "Dancing Between Embodied Empathy and Phenomenological Reflection", *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, 6, sup1: 1-11.
Fischer G. (2003), "Meta-Design: Beyond User-Centered and Participatory Design", *Proceedings of HCI International*, 88-92.
Fischer G., Scharff E. (2000), "Meta-design. Design for designers", *Proceedings of the 3rd Conference on designing interactive systems*, 396-405.
Forlizzi J., Battarbee K. (2004), "Understanding experience in interactive systems", *Proceedings of DIS Conference – Designing Interactive Systems: Processes, Practices, Methods and Techniques*.
Foster H. (2004), *Chat Rooms* in Bishop C. (ed.), *Participation*, Whitechapel Gallery+MIT Press, London, Boston, 2006.
Fulton Suri J. (2003), *Empathic design. Informed and inspired by other people's experience*, in Koskinen I., Battarbee K., Mattelmäki T. (eds.), *Empathic design*, IT Press, Helsinki, 51-58.
Gallese V. (2009), "Mirror neurons, embodied simulation, and the neural basis of social identification", *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 19: 519-536.
Giaccardi E. (2003b), *Principles of metadesign: processes and levels of co-creation in the new design space*. Doctoral dissertation in Philosophy, University of Plymouth.
Giaccardi E. (2005), "Metadesign as an emergent culture", *Leonardo*, 38, 4: 342-349.
Goleman D. (1995), *Emotional intelligence. Why it cam matter more than IQ*, Bantam Books, New York.
Goleman D. (2006), *Social intelligence. Beyond IQ, beyond emotional intelligence*, Bantam Books, New York.
Heylighen A., Dong A. (2019), "To empathise or not to empathise? Empathy and its limits in design", *Design Studies*, 65: 107-124.

Ho D.K.L., Lee Y.C. (2012), "The quality of design participation. Intersubjectivity in design practice", *International Journal of Design*, *6,* 1: 71-83.

Holmild S., Mattelmäki T., Visser F.S., Vaajakallio K. (2015), *Co-creative practices in service innovation*, in Agarwal R., Selen W., Roos G., Green R. (eds.), *The Handbook of Service Innovation*, Springer-Verlag, London, 545-572.

Horner C., Westacott E. (2000), *Thinking through philosophy. An introduction*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Husserl E. (1950), *Cartesianische Meditationen und Pariser Vorträge*, Husserliana 1, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague.

Husserl E. (1973a). *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität II.* Husserliana 14, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague.

Husserl E. (1973b). *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität III.* Husserliana 15, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague.

Jégou F., Manzini E. (eds.) (2008), *Collaborative services. Social innovation and design for sustainability*, POLI.design, Milano.

Jiancaro T. (2018), *Empathy-based design approaches*, in Filimowicz M., Tzankova V. (eds.), *New Directions in Third Wave Human-Computer Interaction: Volume 2 – Methodologies*, Springer, Cham.

John N. (2017), *A short history of the word 'Sharing'*. Available at www.shareable.net/blog/a-short-history-of-the-word-sharing (consulted 18/02/2023).

Kester G. (2004), *Conversation pieces. Community and communication in modern art*, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Kester G. (2011), *The one and the many: Contemporary collaborative art in a global context*, Duke University Press, Durham.

Klionsky J.D. (2016), "Developing a set of guidelines for your research field. A practical approach", *Mol Biol Cell*, 27, 5: 733-738.

Kolawole E. (2015), *Empathy.* Available at www.designkit.org/mindsets/4 (consulted 19/02/2023).

Koskinen I. (2003), *Empathic design in methodic terms*, in Koskinen I., Battarbee K., Mattelmäki T. (eds.) *Empathic design*, IT Press, Helsinki, 59-65.

Koskinen I., Battarbee K., Mattelmäki T. (eds.) (2003), *Empathic design*, IT Press, Helsinki.

Kouprie M., Visser F.S. (2009), "A framework for empathy in design. Stepping into and out of the user's life", *Journal of Engineering Design*, 20, 5: 437-448.

Krznaric R. (2009), *Empathy education. Why it matters and how to do it*, Oxfam education. Available at *http://hdl.handle.net/10546/620740* (consulted 10/02/2023).

Kullman K. (2016), "Prototyping bodies: A post-phenomenology of wearable simulations", *Design Studies*, 47: 73-90.
Laclau E., Mouffe C. (1985), *Hegemony and socialist strategy. Towards a radical democratic politics*, Verso, London.
Leonard D., Rayport J. (1997), "Spark innovation through empathic design", *Harvard Business Review*, 75, 6: 102-113.
Leon A.M. (2011), "Lygia Clark: Between Spectator and Participant", *Thresholds*, 39: 45-53.
Lewis D.M.G. (2017), *Eye contact: A challenge with real benefits*. Available at *https://inspiralight.wordpress.com/2017/09/07/eye-contact-a-challenge-with-real-benefits-by-david-m-g-lewis-phd/* (consulted 09/02/2023).
Lippard L. (1973), *Six years: the dematerialization of the art object from 1966 to 1972*, University of California Press, Berkeley.
Mallgrave H.F. (2015), *L'empatia degli spazi. Architettura e neuroscienze*, Raffaello Cortina, Milano.
Manzini E. (2011), *Introduction*, in Meroni A., Sangiorgi D., *Design for Services*, Gower Press, Farnham, 1-8.
Manzini E. (2015), *Design, when everybody designs*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
Manzini E., Till J. (eds.) (2015), *Cultures of Resilience. Ideas*, Hato Press, London.
Manzini E. (2016a), "Design culture and dialogic design", *Design Issues*, 32, 1: 52-59.
Manzini E. (2016b), *The sharing movement in its maturity. Towards a disruptive normality*. Available at http://magazine.ouishare.net/2016/06/the-sharing-movement-in-its-maturity-towards-a-disruptive-normality/ (consulted 09/02/2023).
Manzini E. (2018), "Autonomy, collaboration and light communities. Lessons learnt from social innovation", *Strategic Design Journal*, 11, 2: 162-166.
Manzini E. (2019), *Politics of the everyday*. Translated by Rachel Anne Coad, Bloomsbury, London.
Marsden N., Wittwer A. (2022), "Empathy and exclusion in the design process", *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*, 4.
Mattelmäki T., Battarbee K. (2002), *Empathy Probes*, in Binder T., Gregory J., Wagner I. (eds.), *Proceedings of the Participatory Design Conference 2002*, CPSR, Palo Alto, 266-271.
Mattelmaki T. (2003), *Probes. studying experiences for design empathy*, in Koskinen I., Battarbee K., Mattelmäki T. (eds.), *Empathic design*, IT Press, Helsinki, 119-130.
Mattelmäki T. (2018), *Empathic design in new relationships*, in Guerrini L., Volonté P. (eds.), *Dialogues on design*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
Mattelmäki T., Vaajakallio K., Koskinen I. (2014), "What happened to empathic design?", *DesignIssues*, 30, 1: 67-77.

McDonagh D. (2008), "Do it until it hurts! Empathic design research", *Design Principles and Practices: An International Journal*, 2, 3: 103-110.
McDonagh D., Thomas J., Strickfaden M. (2011), "Empathic design research. Moving towards a new industrial design education", *Design Principles and Practices: An International Journal*, 5, 4: 301-313.
Meneses R. (2011), *Experiences of empathy.* Doctoral dissertation in Philosophy, University of Birmingham, Birmingham.
Meneses R., Larkin M. (2012), "Edith Stein and the contemporary psychological study of empathy", *Journal of phenomenological psychology*, 43, 2: 151-184.
Menichinelli M., Valsecchi F. (2016), *The meta-design of systems: how design, data and software enable the organizing of open, distributed and collaborative processes* in *6th IFDP – Systems Design: Beyond Processes and Thinking*, Editorial Universitat Politècnica de València, Valencia, 518-537.
Merleau-Ponty M. (1945), *Phenomenology of perception*. Translated by Colin Smith, Routledge, London, 2002.
Meroni A. (2007), *Creative communities. People inventing sustainable ways of living*, POLI.Design, Milano.
Meroni A. (2008), *Collaborative organisations and enabling solutions. Social innovation and design for sustainability*, in Jégou F., Manzini E. (eds.), *Collaborative services. Social innovation and design for sustainability*, POLI.design, Milano.
Meroni A., Sangiorgi D. (2011), *Design for services*, Gower Press, Farnham.
Mikkonen E., Konttinen K. (2023), *Fostering agency of youth with asylum-seeking backgrounds by arts-based methods and dialogue as actions of empathy*, in Sarantou M., Miettinen S. (eds.), *Empathy and business transformation*, Routledge, New York.
Mishra P. (2017), *The Age of Anger. A history of the present*, Penguin Books, London.
Mouffe C. (2005), "Which public space for critical artistic practices?", *Cork Caucus. On Art, Possibility and Democracy*, National Sculpture Factory, Ireland, 149-171.
Mulgan G. (2007), *Social innovation: what it is, why it matters and how it can be accelerated*, Young Foundation, London.
Murray R., Caulier-Grice J., Mulgan G. (2010), *The open book of social innovation*. Available at *www.youngfoundation.org/our-work/publications/the-open-book-of-social-innovation/* (consulted 09/02/2023).
Nussbaum M. (2001), *Upheavals of thought: the intelligence of emotions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
Pacenti E. (1998), *Il progetto dell'interazione nei servizi. Un contributo al tema della progettazione dei servizi*, Doctoral dissertation in Design, Politecnico di Milano.

Pedwell C. (2014), *Affective relations. The transnational politics of empathy*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.
Perelli L. (2017), *Arte che non sembra arte. Arte pubblica, pratiche artistiche nella vita quotidiana e progetto urbano*, FrancoAngeli, Milano.
Perez M., Tarazi E. (2017), "Design in the Middle: A New Approach to Collaborative Socio-political Design in Conflict Areas", *The Design Journal*, 20, sup1: S4307-S4318.
Pinotti A. (2011), *Empatia. Storia di un'idea da Platone al postumano*, Laterza, Bari.
Postma C.E., Zwartkruis-Pelgrim E., Daemen E., Du J. (2012), "Challenges of doing empathic design. Experiences from industry", *International Journal of Design*, 6*,* 1: 59-70.
Ratcliffe M. (2012), "Phenomenology as a form of empathy", *Inquiry*, 55, 5, 473-495.
Restakis J. (2010), *Humanizing the economy. Co-operatives in the Age of Capital*, New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island.
Reynolds D., Reason M. (eds.) (2012), *Kinaesthetic empathy in creative and cultural practices*, Intellect Books, Bristol.
Rifkin J. (2009), *The empathic civilization. The race to global consciousness in a world in crisis*, Tarcher/Penguin, New York.
Ripamonti E. (2018), *Collaborare: Metodi partecipativi per il sociale*, Carocci Faber editore, Roma.
Roepstorff A. (2017), *Hosting the spirit of Green Light. Olafur Eliasson in conversation with Andreas Roepstorff*, in Zyman D., Ebersberger E. (eds.), *Olafur Eliasson. Green Light – An artistic workshop*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 27-37.
Rogers C.R. (1975), "Empathic: An unappreciated way of being", *The Counseling Psychologist*, 5*,* 2: 2-10.
Rolnik S. (2007), *The body's contagious memory. Lygia Clark's return to the museum*. Available at http://eipcp. net/transversal/0507/rolnik/en (consulted 09/02/2023).
Sanders E. (2002), *From user-centered to participatory design approaches*, in Frascara J. (ed.), *Design and the social sciences*, Taylor & Francis Books, London.
Sanders E. (2013), *Perspectives on participation in design*, in Mareis C., Held M., Gesche J. (eds.), *Wer gestaltet die Gestaltung? Praxis, Theorie und Geschichte des partizipatorischen Designs*, transcript Verlag, Bielefeld, 65-78.
Sanders E., Dandavate U. (1999), *Design for experiencing. New tools*, in Overbeeke C.L., Hekkert P. (eds.), *Proceedings of the First International Conference on Design and Emotion*, TU Delft.
Sanders B., Stappers P. (2008), "Co-creation and the new landscapes of design", *CoDesign*, 4, 1: 5-18.

Sangiorgi D. (2009), "Building up a framework for service design research", *Proceedings of the 8th EAD Conference*, Aberdeen, Scotland, 415-420.
Sarantou M., Miettinen S. (eds.) (2023), *Empathy and business transformation*, Routledge, New York.
Schillig G. (2015), *Immediacies of Experience: Textile Spaces – Spaces of Communication*, in Perren C., Mlecek M. (eds.), *Perception in architecture. Here and Now*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Cambridge, 58-69.
Sennett R. (2012), *Together. The rituals, pleasures & politics of cooperation*, Penguin Books, London.
Smeenk W., Sturm J., Terken J., Eggen B. (2019), "A systematic validation of the Empathic Handover approach guided by five factors that foster empathy in design", *CoDesign*, 15, 4: 308-328.
Smeenk W., Tomico O., van Turnhout K. (2016), "A systematic analysis of mixed perspectives in empathic design: Not one perspective encompasses all", *International Journal of Design*, 10, 2: 31-48.
Smith D.W. (2016), "Phenomenology", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/phenomenology/ (consulted 03/02/2023).
Staszowski E., Tassinari V. (eds.) (2021), *Designing in dark times. An arendtian lexicon*, Bloomsbury, London.
Stein W. (1917), *On the Problem of Empathy*. Translated by Waltrude Stein. ICS Publications, Washington DC.
Stueber K. (2017), "Empathy", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at *https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2017/entries/empathy/* (consulted 03/02/2023).
Surma-aho A., Hölttä-Otto K. (2022), "Conceptualization and operationalization of empathy in design research", *Design Studies*, 78, 101075.
Sustar H., Mattelmäki T. (2017), "Whole in one. Designing for empathy in complex systems", *Nordes,* 7, 1-8.
Titchner E.B. (1909), *Lectures on the experimental psychology of thought-processes*, The Macmillan Company, New York.
Toadvine T. (2016), "Maurice Merleau-Ponty", *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Available at https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/merleau-ponty/ (consulted 07/02/2023).
Tucker D. (ed.) (2014), *Immersive life practice, Chicago social practice history series*, The School of the Art Insitute Chicago, Chicago.
Turkle S. (2011), *Alone together. Why we expect more from technology and less from each other*, Basic Books, New York.
Turkle S. (2015), *Reclaiming the conversation. The power of talk in a digital age*, Penguin Books, London.

Weibel P. (2009), *Context art: towards a social construction of art*, in Doherty C. (ed.), *Situation*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
Young-Bruehl E. (2006), *Why Arendt matters*, Yale University Press, New Haven.
Zahavi D. (2001), "Beyond empathy. Phenomenological approaches to intersubjectivity", *Journal of consciousness studies*, 8, 5-7: 151-167.
Zahavi D. (2010), "Empathy, Embodiment and Interpersonal Understanding: From Lipps to Schutz", *Inquiry*, 53, 3: 285-306.
Zahavi D. (2014), *Self & Other. Exploring subjectivity, empathy and shame*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
Zyman D. (2017), *Shifting agencies*, in Zyman D., Ebersberger E. (eds.), *Olafur Eliasson. Green Light – An artistic workshop*, Sternberg Press, Berlin, 65-74.

The issue of empathy as an embodied, dialogic experience that potentially enhances the value of human relationships, constitutes the core of this book, which is mainly addressed to explore whether empathy is *designable* and how.

The emerging collaborative approaches to design call for a rethinking of how empathy is usually accounted for in this discipline. Empathy is not only a designer's skill to step into the other's shoes; it can be a dialogic experience that supports the unfolding of meaningful relations, laying the groundwork for collaborative design processes.

This book traces a theoretical framework for changing perspective on empathy in design, by integrating a phenomenological account. One that focuses on empathy's specific nature of intersubjective experience that introduces the other into one's own personal horizon, paving the way for the acknowledgement of otherness as a value.

Empathy may unfold spontaneously within relational contexts, while still requiring its facilitation and support. If empathy is *un-designable*, enabling conditions for its emergence can be set up. This study argues the case for a possible role of Art in suggesting strategies and models towards the successful setting of these enabling conditions.

In this perspective, an array of art practices – immersive, collaborative, and participatory – are analysed and squeezed to extract principles for designing the empathic experience. Principles converge then into guidelines, intended to offer a set of meta-design tools for fruitful collaborative processes.

Alice Devecchi is PhD in Design. She is a researcher and teacher in History of Contemporary Art. Her research interests lie on the boarder of the two disciplines and explore their mutual exchanges and interconnections. She wrote *Giocare in casa. Il senso dello spazio e del movimento* (Il Verri, 2012). About empathy and design she co-authored (with L. Guerrini) some influential publications, among which *Empathy and design. A new perspective* (2018) and *Empathy for resilience* (2019), awarded with the Best Paper Award at Cumulus Conference Rovaniemi 2019.

FrancoAngeli
La passione per le conoscenze