

“Love is the only opposite of fear. Only in the moment of love there is no fear” artist JCJ van der Heyden states.

At this point in time even I agree with Mother Tessa Bialecki—yes, with the nun of all people—that the week started with the notion of negativity, frustration and anger and ends with a positive and enriching outlook on the future. Francisco Varela states that society does not provide space for children and adults to experience what it means to be able to respond. Being “responds-able” is a slow process of learning what it means to feel like someone else. “What does it mean to accept your own ignorance?” they debate. Someone important to me, once asked me how I have grown so cold. Through self-justification, in times of anger and pain, I only really accept now that I have done wrong and indeed missed out on the notion of feeling fully alive for a couple of years.

“You know, Huston, it is rather embarrassing to have spent one’s whole life thinking about the human condition, the human problem, and find that one really has nothing more profound to say to people than: try to be a little kinder.”

— Aldous Huxley

image by Vika Ushkanova



“Well, are you being a little lazy with yourself lately?”

On the 5-Day Intensive

Andrea Karch

Consumerism, economy, democracy, injustice, globalization, the image, the truth. Doesn’t this sound like an all too familiar array of buzzwords to you? I am not talking about the Hashtag #2k17 though, not yet at least. But about the “5 Day Intensive—Learning tomorrow’s Language” with Louwrien Wijers and Egon Hanfstingl. The retreat in the man-made woods consisted of the screening of “Art Meets Science and Spirituality in a Changing Economy“. Which is a rich collection of video material including the recording of an intense five day symposium that took place at the Stedelijk Museum in 1990. The panel of participants was made up of conceptual visual artists like Lawrence Weiner, Marina Abramovic, and Robert Rauschenberg, representatives of the natural sciences such as the physicists David Bohm and Fritjof Capra, economists including Stanislav Menshikov and H.J. Witteveen as well as spiritual leaders like Mother Tessa Bielecki, Raimon Panikkar and the Dalai Lama. But first let me repeat: It took place in nineteen-ninety. My year of birth.

M. pours coffee. C. pours tea. E. hands the cups over to us sitting in a circle of wooden folding chairs. 13 cups. Steam. The sun is not there yet. Shade. Our feet are wet. The smell of the moist forest-like ground. We are silent.

“Do I need a purpose in life?” Raimon Panikkar asks. Panel number one of five starts. The participants speak about ideas of connectivity and coherence. “The implicate order” means that everything is connected. It is a construction of thought with the aim of thinking together and viewing culture as a shared experience in which all of us play a part. “Culture is inherently participatory” one of the scientists says and gives the example of an impressionist painting. It resembles the idea of an implicate order in primary colors. The pattern of single dots that is perceived when standing closely in front of the image can be unfolded by taking a few steps backwards thus connecting the single dots to the full picture. The dots are metaphors for issues like injustice and the evil but also for suggested improvements through cultural exchange or education. The painting itself is an allegory of the will to produce results that are beneficial to the world population rather than the production of situations that are actually unwanted. Like war, hunger, pollution. Situations that create unhappiness instead of being an investment of our resources in sustainable and world wide happiness.

“Genuine compassion is the true essence of responsibility”, the Dalai Lama states. It is the dilemma of a compassionate society versus the single, competitive, individual. Quantum physicist David Bohm suggests that we need to change our fragmentary way of thinking. The breaking up of our surroundings into nations, religions, families and people instead of looking at them in coherence. He calls people to engage in a dialogue that is not merely about the exchange of opinions but about actually “listening deeply and without resistance to the views of others”. He continues, “If we want morality, we need to think about why we can’t have it. What drives people?”

A break. We leave the tent for a breath of fresh air. The sun is high now. We lie down on the field of thick, green grass. A slug leaves behind a trace of shiny, silver, slime. It’s body—a highly patterned surface. I try to suppress my disgust.

I wonder what I am doing here. I don’t do Prana. I spend most of my time, shoulders rolled downwards in a sunken posture in front of a 13“ laptop. The joints of my fingers are tense. We talk about chewing consciously, about a sattvic food diet for healing. I am supposed to put my tongue underneath my gums and to put my feet on the ground. My back hurts. I am getting a little enraged and wonder if people actually still believe in these things. Love, compassion and an economy based on understanding rather than exploitation. Aren’t we listening to merely semantic ideas that simply do not apply today and that apparently did not apply back then either? The panelists’ strive for harmony, peace and happiness feels alienating and top-down to me. It makes me think of lifestyle trends like “Mindfulness”, overpriced Chia seeds and Kale crackers, yoga studios that advertise a “quick and effective workout”. The self-optimization of the neoliberal body—the living promise of success that casually sips on their Dry Martinis in their offices’ Spa areas or at the cities’ gallery openings.