

## **A RATIONALE FOR AN EXHIBITION**

### **BEING · HUMAN · TODAY: ART, EDUCATION AND MENTAL HEALTH IN CONVERSATION**

Education, mental health and the arts all share a concern for human beings and how they live their lives. Living one's life, and living it well, has always been a challenge – life never simply happens – but what the particular challenges are differs from time to time and from location to location. We've been intrigued by a phrase from Zygmunt Bauman – 'the trouble with being human today' – as it nicely seems to capture that living one's life is a challenge, even more so if, in living one's life, one tries to be human, and also that 'our' present 'conditions' may make this into a particular 'trouble.'

One reason why we are interested in what exactly the trouble with being human today is, is that we feel that in the practices and domains in which we work things have radically changed as well. In both education and mental health there is a strong pressure to think of being human as a technical problem that in some way can be 'fixed' by powerful, research-based interventions. While such fixing may be possible, and may appear to be quite successful from one perspective, it clearly runs the risk of turning students and clients into objects – things to be acted upon, rather than human beings to be acted with.

Yet the turn towards the person or individual in education and mental health – which is often presented as the 'solution' for instrumental 'fixing' – is also not without problems. A main problem we see, is that such strategies often just put individuals with their desires in the centre, and forget to ask how such desires relate to the real social, physical and natural world. Put briefly: in neo-liberal regimes that are all about the self, a 'reality check' is often absent, because it is seen as limiting, authoritarian, and so on.

Against this background we have begun to explore under what kind of conditions the 'I' can actually still 'arrive' in our times, looking for an alternative for both turning the 'I' into an object or making the 'I' untouchable.

The arts are, in a sense, in a different position – they are not a 'helping profession,' so to speak. But interestingly the arts are nowadays often called upon to address questions about being human today, and one concern there is that the arts are seen as an instrument – again either to 'fix' or to allow for expression without limits.

Over the past 18 months we have been engaged in slow conversations, workshops, dialogue-seminars, presentations, reading and writing and this has helped us to get a clearer sense of how each of the three fields we work in seems to be caught up in a similar dynamic; and we've also slowly been trying to find our way 'out' of the situation, by asking questions such as how the 'I' might be able to 'arrive,' what it means to take a radical first person perspective in all our endeavours rather than theorising it from the outside, to what extent living one's life is in one's own hand and to what extent life and the world are given to us – and how that would make a difference – and what this, in turn, might mean for our work as educators, therapists, and artists, also wondering how 'clear' those labels still are.

Rather than writing another book or another set of journal articles about this, we have felt, rather early on, that the form of an exhibition might be a better way to address these issues, share these concerns, make them shareable, and through this broaden the circle of those who share our concerns and may wish to share in moving forward. This is now going to happen in February 2021.

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