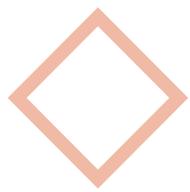
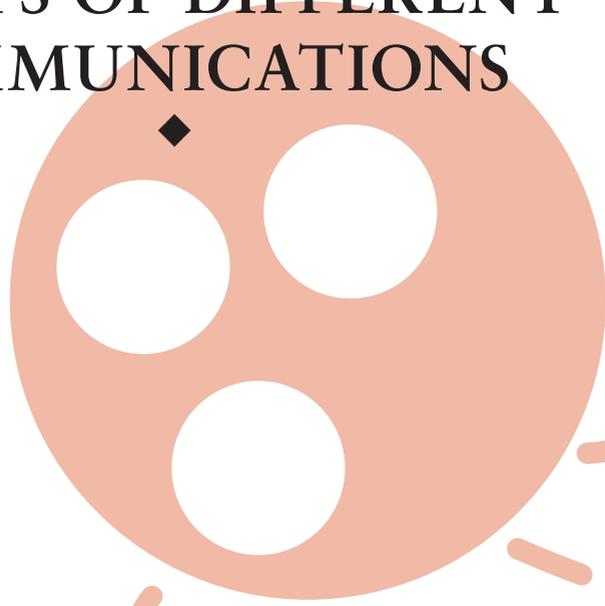


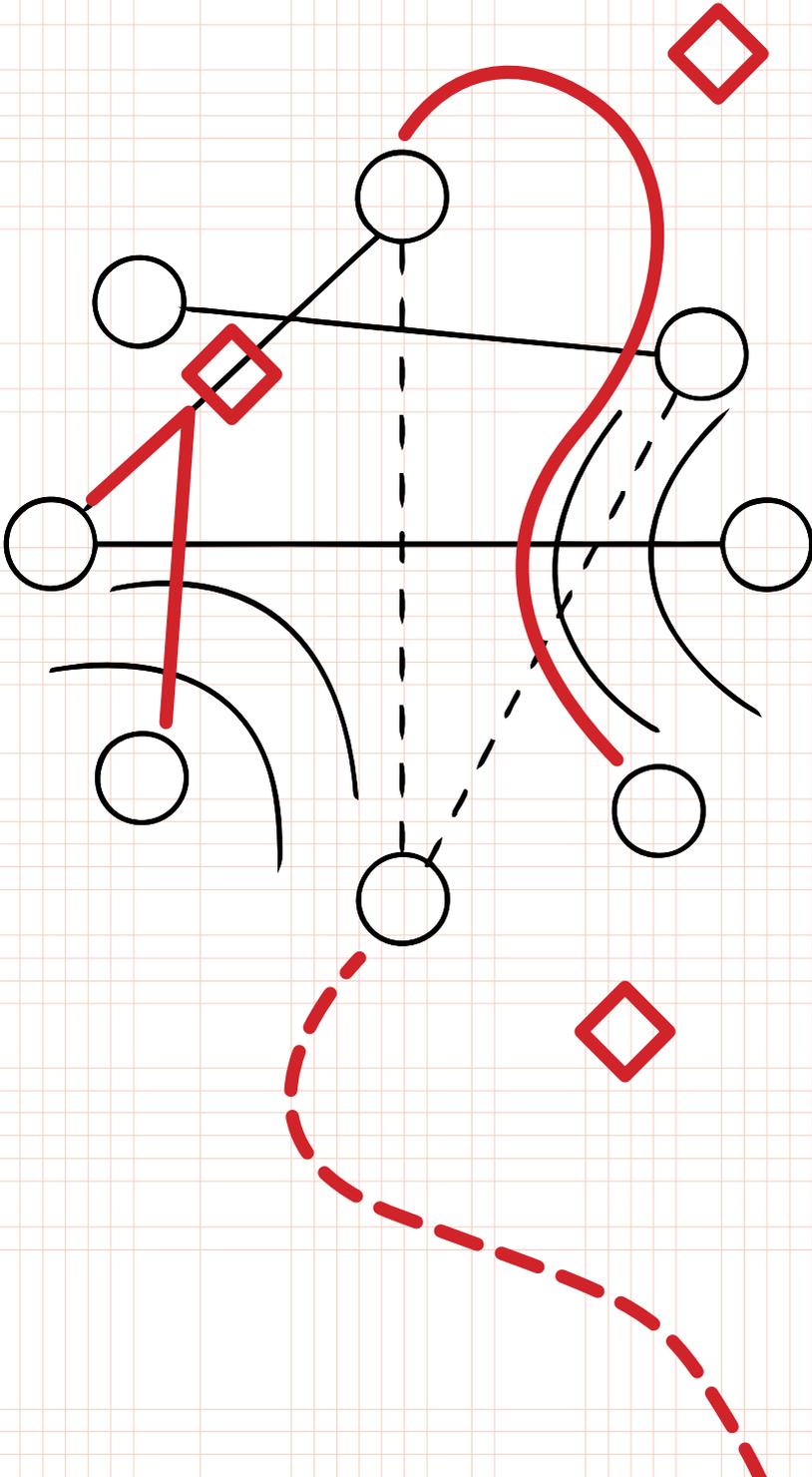
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**GROUPS OF DIFFERENT
COMMUNICATIONS**



GROUPS OF DIFFERENT COMMUNICATIONS

The following text is primarily consisting of thoughts and reflections from experiences of various, and sometimes quite different, group practices, I have been part of during the last few years of my life. Many of these groups are creative in different ways, we meet in order to create or work together and most of them I consider as parts of a practice. Throughout this text many different terms are moving in-between each other (terms such as 'utopian other'), I have sought not to explain these too much in order not to weigh them with a certain definition that arrives from my own personal experience. Therefore, you might get feelings of being lost within these terms. Although, I hope you will enjoy playing with them – lost and not lost – as did I.

The group has different ways of communicating. This drawing is an example. The lines represent a sort of direct communication between two persons or entities (in the following I write persons but it might as well refer to entities as such). One could also draw such a line from one person to all the others to make a representation of when something is being said directly. The dashed line represents an underlying form of communication. This is for example non-verbal gestures, such as body language or directed attention, etc. This form of communication in a way always exists between people, for example while a more direct communication is happening. In a way, there are always constant dashed lines between all persons in the group. Here, the dashed line represents when an underlying communication between two persons is more dominant than any other. The last form of communication is the interferential, it represents communication that spreads from one person into the room and echoes back from each other person – not as a new sort of communication but as the communicating persons idea of what could be communicated back. Interferential communication has no set form; it can be spoken out loud or come out through very minimal body language – or anything in-between. It is the comprehensive existence of being together in a room, undefined*. All three forms can have overruling characters, they can embody more or less power, this is not being shown here.



Power is always a present element in any room of social situation. Whether it being (merely) the power to raise a voice, or whether it being the power to take over the power of others. Domination and authority are not always problematic – they can help the group. The crucial issue is how the group recognizes these elements, and how these elements are problematic to the extent that they become harmful to the group as a whole as to its entities. Even if power is unstructured, informalized and not spoken about, there is always an underlying play of power. This play can be a very simple, not necessarily harmful, one, where the persons of the group are playing with different forms of communications – *with* each other not *against*. This form of play can too become harmful to the group. The difference between harmful and not harmful is whether any one or several persons in the group try to seek power as authority by domination that evokes a type of competition, to this we will return.

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There are no arrows in the drawing since all communication goes in two ways. Communication emerge as a circle; it is a play in itself with no beginning nor end. Imagine a conflict and try to figure out ‘who’ started it – it is almost impossible in every example and this is because of the circular character that communication has.* Therefore, in quite many groups the type of communication would be mixed. Of course, there are differences between groups, and of course, there are many more ways of communicating in groups. The point here

is that there are always different processes of communications going on at the same time. One question for a group could be whether it is good for all to strive to use only the same type of communication, and if so could this be called a synthesis? Many groups come together in play, even though topics are often serious and relating to work there is play. The situation of play, as in playing a game, can appear spontaneously; the situation playing a game creates is a situation of freedom framed by the very idea of several people being free together. Play is a constant negotiation and it searches borders that are common to the persons in the group as well as those that differ between the persons in the group. Therefore, we call it a ‘play of power’, but power is not central to play, it is the act of playing being it underlying or known to the persons in the group. A play of relations that is played by communications. If the drawing was not a fixed drawing, it would allow the group members to move and touch, but for the sake of the visual a communication could here represent a touch. Why is play happening and why on so many levels? Can playing with forms of communication be a way to get further and further away from the scene where every person uses the same form of communication? Is playing a game always to loosen up in structures? To get the plane of persons and energies flattened

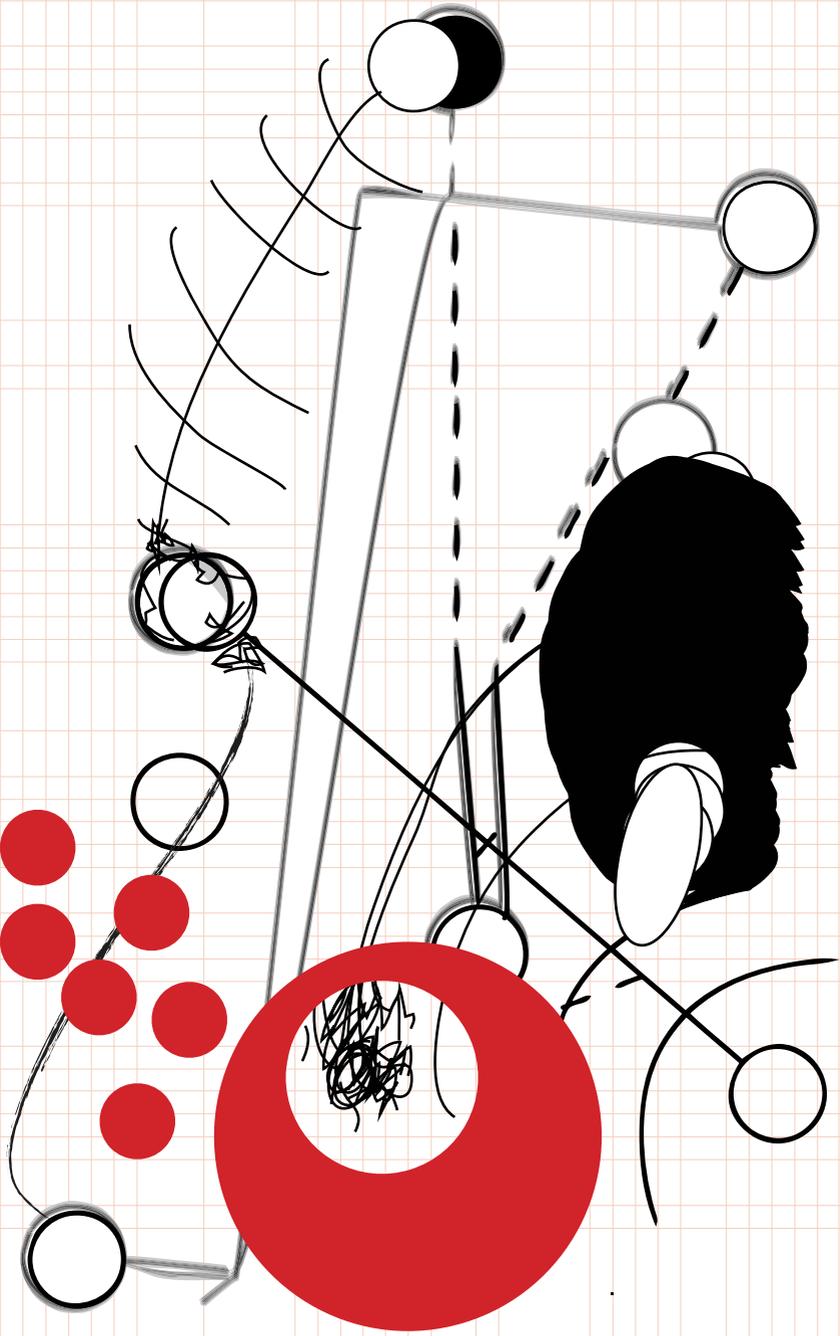
more and more out? To make things so diverse and complex that if any person in the group tries to direct some sort of 'single direction', everyone becomes even more confused and stress starts to shape the process of the group? Can play be serious, and when a group meets with a serious agenda, can play still have a space? If so what space does it inhabit – or what function does it take? Since there is always play in group relations, when is this play the main element, or when is it repressed? Can play be idealized? How, and what happens then?

This diagram in one way represents a form of meta-communication that can hold a group process frozen – make it locked in circles or that can fix the group's attention to itself thus weakening its links to its surroundings (the 'vacuum-effect'). This form of diagram also alludes to, or at least give the false image of, that communication and group processes can ever be static. This is an assumption we should leave, since it never is the case. Perhaps through militancy, and/or ideologisation, a group structure can be put on hold – be fixed. It puts a set of fixed agreements to rule over what would else have been a basic trust pattern, emotional bonding, and excludes communication as a living thing that has in itself, through the persons in the group, a changing life full of desires. However, can any group ever be really fixed? Are the known structures of 'group

fixation' only formal in a representational way, do they actually count in lived life experience? What then, if this trap of the ideological set of rules, fixation, can be avoided, would bringing a group of persons together, continuously, to address a certain subject, in order to do a certain activity or for the sake of creating a certain space around them, be enough to sustain a concentrated group process over time? How, if there is only lived life experience to direct it, can a group then ever meet the challenge of sustaining a directed group process for longer than any person's life? Is direction desired, or is it thought needed?

Here we can talk about 'getting into depth together'. As when one person is sitting alone, late at night, reading into a subject for hours and hours, being entirely caught up with the process of getting deep so sleep has to wait. Time stops around this person, or it is accelerated and the moment to shift place comes sudden. Is it possible for a group of many persons to get deep into something in the same way as it would be for two persons in a dialogue? If the idea was that all persons should strive to synthesize their communication into the same form, to achieve the clearest dia/polylogue possible, then would it not mostly be easier for two persons in a dialogue? Depth is not a form of synthesis. There are always many different communications. Getting deep together in a group is to get deep into these differences – to get to know each other and each other's tempers, desires and limits. Note the difference be-

tween domination-competition and ‘to know each other’s limits’. It is a difference between dominance, the desire to rule (fascism is only one example), and giving space, among other. Getting deep together would mostly take longer for any group of several persons. However, what is it actually to get deep into something? Can depth be achieved by a group of persons using various forms of communication? In order to get deep into something with one or more persons, one has to emphasize concentration of directions – of flows. The feeling of depth partly arrives from the feeling of overview of what is to come in the process. That is to say, not an overview of everything that happens, that would be impossible, but a clear direction of movement in rhythm and breaks (disjunctions and conjunctions), and a perception of what is not yet in the room but perhaps soon will be. Getting deep is not a position it is a direction.



When an orchestra is playing a piece of music, everyone plays instruments differently but the piece is the same. There is a rhythm that binds every musician together in a shared time, with a sense of same direction and a shared idea of what is to come. This shared idea is never the same from player to player, like different tones represent different colours to different people, but it is an imaginary and it is a sort of concentration. This is a sort of group imaginary that takes its point of reference from the space the group is in and goes on to what is to come – a sort of ‘group future’. But it is also a utopian imaginary, leading to the ‘utopian other’ of the group. So is the image of the orchestra real in terms of groups with more free structures – perhaps with no structure at all? Let us say the orchestra is rehearsing and there is a freedom to stop the piece, to discuss its quality and if there should be changes in it. Then the musicians only play to each other for each other’s feedback – but bearing in mind that sound spread uncontrollably. A direction inwards in the group, amongst the persons in it, but with an awareness of the outside too is in place. There are different sorts of communication here, played music, physical gestures and mimics and critique. Critique, not in the way of ‘good vs. bad’, but of which way could we go now? Is the direction the group is taking the one the group desires? Is the group’s desire ever the same as that of any one person in the group? Or is it always a ‘plural desire’ – not always containing the full group? Can an orchestra work as a group

♦ 8 ♦

with subgroups in it? Does it ever do anything else? How can this be expressed by the group externally, as by the persons in the group internally? Will external and internal desires ever be the same kind of desires – for the person or for the group as an entity? The orchestra is a situation where a group of persons is getting deep into something together, where different communications are used but where there is a common flow in a certain direction and a shared idea of what is the common unknown, the utopian other, the unsaid in the room, the next moment to come. Can a group of several persons be deep together then? Is the dialogue always more efficient in terms of depth than the polylogue? Can one dialogue take over the whole process of a group and thereby begin to dominate the polylogue? What if the group process consists of many dialogues, which weave together into an assemblage of a polylogue?

In order for this to take place, the group of musicians must each desire to play the same piece, before this, they must desire to even play, to even be in the same room. It takes practice to play music, desire comes from somewhere else. Is desire then a random phenomenon? If, then the group would be well off continuing each person with their own way of communicating (direct, underlying, interferential, etc.), not choosing to concentrate but just to wait until some-

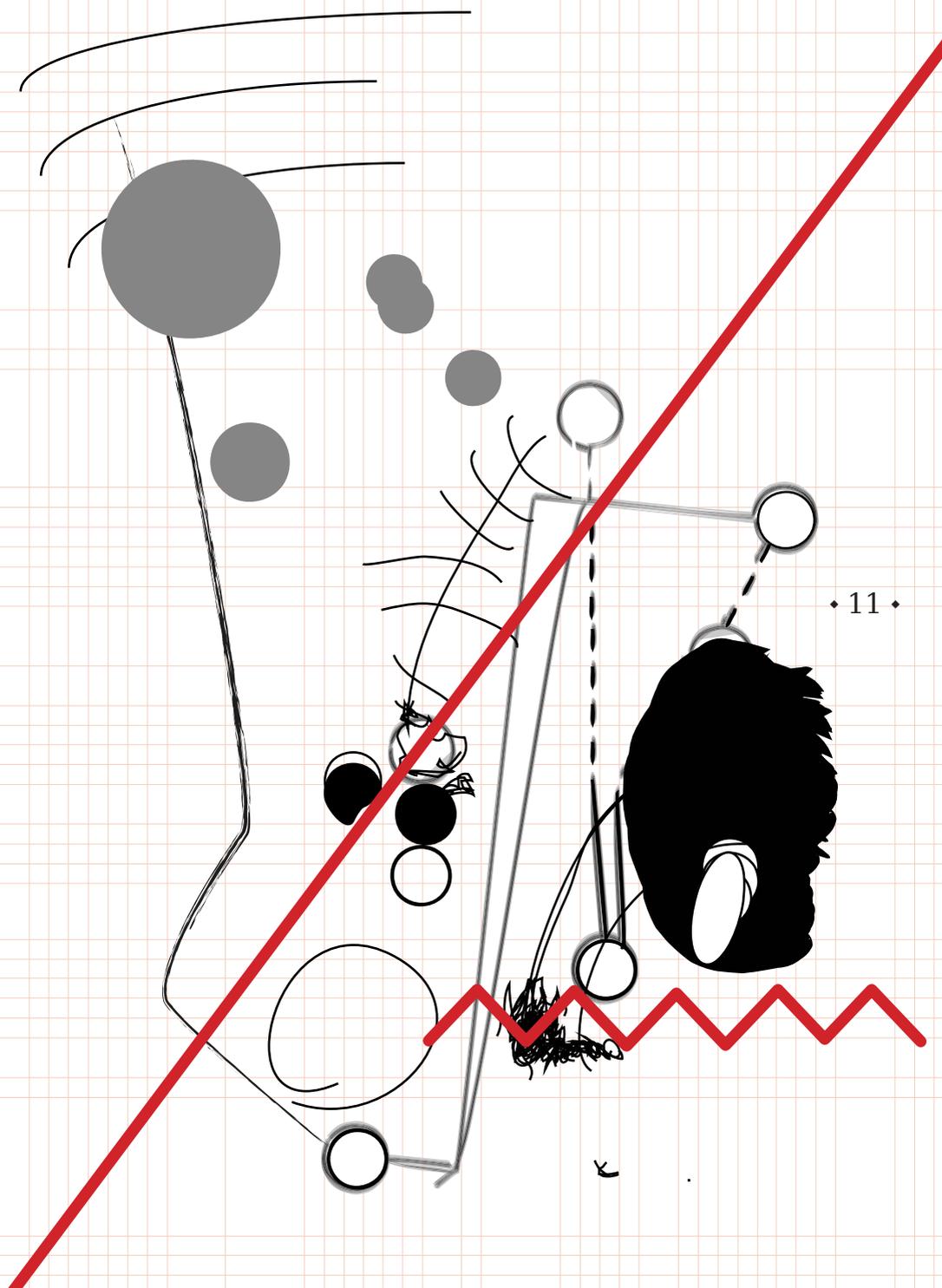
thing random but meaningful turns up. As in waiting for the bus but not knowing its timetable. Again, a situation that goes away from the bipolar notion of 'good and bad'. This state of the group will keep each person in the group very close to the limit of stress. Stress as a state where everything that cannot be seen becomes of imaginary importance, this importance is often an illusion and stress becomes a factor of disruption. However, if each person in the group is on the limit of stress, perhaps every now and again dipping into stress, disruption becomes a part of the group process. Disruption will be a factor blurring the very idea of what is meaningful to the group and then what was random and meaningful becomes random and disruptive. It is hard for a group of persons to maintain a sense of what is meaningful over longer time, therefore concentration in-between the persons in the group and the sense of direction can easily be disturbed. A common sense of direction demands that every person in the group synthesize their own flows with the others. This can become demanding if there is disagreement about the common, shared flow. Stress is bound to flows in time and space as well as to amounts of energy and events happening, being of importance to the group as a whole, but also to each person's self. Getting into depth as a group is a precarious thing – it makes fragile compositions. For

not only does the closeness, for each person, to stress present a kind of unsafe ground under their feet, every disruption challenges every person on the emotional level. To share a sense of direction with a common unknown in it takes that each person in the group strips off their defences, their sense of cognitive privacy might have to move as the boundaries of every person in the group start to entangle with the others. It here again becomes a fragile situation, the energy released from the feeling of depth that is then being shaken by random disruptions every now and then. However, as the group is moving on, the shared sense of what is to come, of the utopian other, is expanding exponentially. Imaginaries are sent back and forth between the persons in the group in the shape of different communications, and every time one person uses one form, they are using several other forms. The interferential form of communication will start to be the dominant, the most flowing form.

Here is a trap, for in order to use the interferential form of communication as the dominant, every person in the group must know the others very well, their limits, desires, habits, etc., or else domination will shift in-between the persons as competition. When one person in the group begins to dominate, take up more space, without the other person's agreement, the whole process becomes a game of territory. The shared sense of direction towards the unknown other will be shattered in a game of who has the better sense of direction, or who 'gets there first'. Competition in a very

subtle form takes place, but it is a competition not over any specific thing, only over symbolic territory.* One could argue that this form of competition is the very worst, since symbolic territory, when being something that is fought to win territorially, is very vague and even hard to really grasp for the person holding it. Symbolic territory is an element that in itself plays tricks with the person, who thinks they hold it, it is a sublime space for 'trolling'. Once this form of competition has started, it is very hard to get rid of because it starts a process of drawing up territories in the imaginary realm of the group. This process can become very fixed, and as it continues it colonizes the realm of the unknown imaginary, it starts to draw lines, territorialize the uto-

pian other of the group. Since this is a field not yet known, spoken out in the group, only felt, it is extremely hard to loosen up once tightened into territories. A way to do this could be for the group to move backwards in a sense, back to the sense of play, back to when the sense of direction was not agreed upon yet. This might have to be tried many times before it succeeds; perhaps it never succeeds for the group. It will create a period of a feeling of moving back and forth and of not really making progress. But once the group is in that place, where communication can be played with, and where the sense of direction is forgotten, the group can start to get deep together again.



This is part of the practice of 'changing the room'. Stress in itself can arrive from when a room is changed by random or indirect factors around the persons in the group. But the group can together work in a conscious manner to change the room around it, to change the common process of flows. However, does almost every group not do this manoeuvre every now and again? Could it not most often be the case? Is it then just a subtle form of competition over space in the imaginary realm that creates this movement, into territorialisation, back to play, back and forth? As an oscillation, happening in such a way that it is never realized as an element that can be changed. If then what role comes desire to play in the long run, when the move that deterritorializes the common imaginary of the group becomes a reoccurring event, and thus not really new to anyone anymore? When deterritorializing, thus displacing, the group imaginary is a common part of practice how can the group get deep together, how can it have any feeling of direction without a feeling of alienation?

♦ 12 ♦

Perhaps it would be good to ask the question: Why did the musicians get together to play in the first place? It seems problematic to talk about desire as an automatic mechanism that is set into motion at random. Further, it seems a bit dry to use the image of an orchestra, since it can get a bit too formal – strict in rules and structure. Ensembles can be informal. The idea of an ensemble moves away the expectation to hear music from someone not playing. We here have a unity consisting

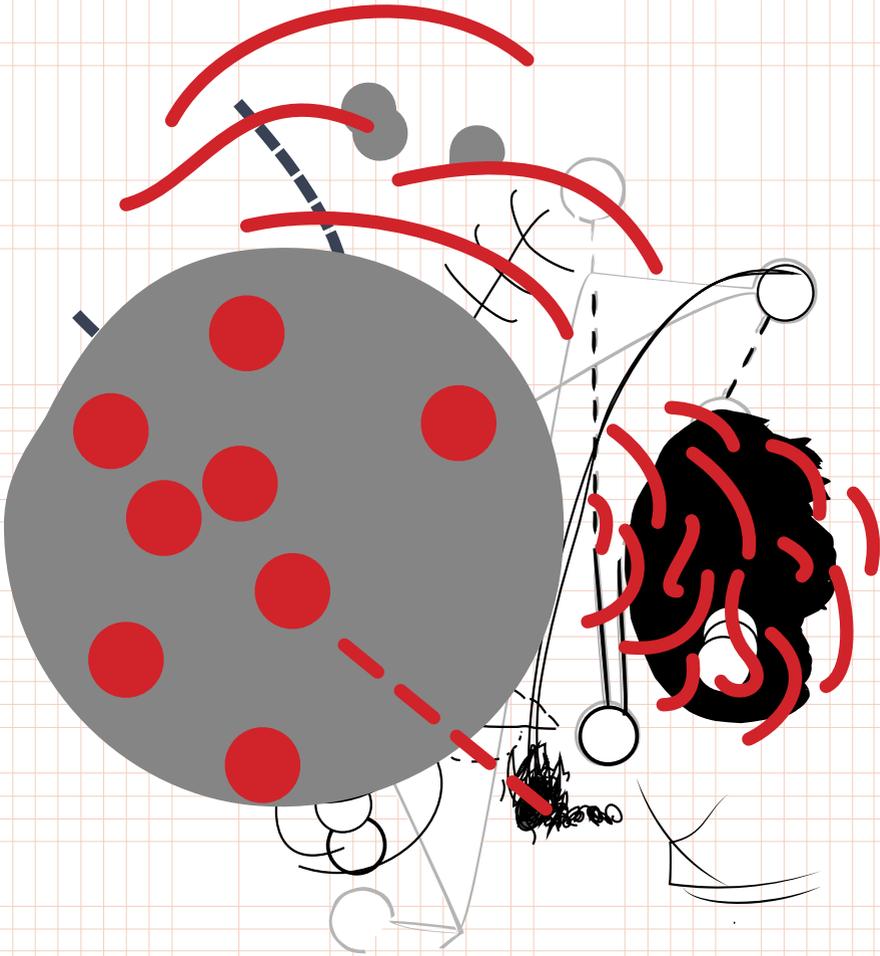
of different parts, entities that make the unity by having a practice. How different is the listening experience between a group of improvising musicians? How different is it between the group of musicians and listeners? Now that music, or practice, in itself is not the main issue of the group (as in the orchestra) we can bring in friendship. If an ensemble is formed of a group of friends, all communicating in different forms, all at the same time to several others, what does it do to the sense of direction and the common, unknown imaginary of the group? First, the desire to come together and play arrives from somewhere else than the piece of music itself – perhaps it is the desire to improvise something and nothing else. Ensembles and groups often come together with an intention and in many groups a common intention is often directed outwards. The difference from the orchestra is that this common intention is not always given in advance. Second, since there is something else important in the room than the piece of music played, there is already an 'other' in place. This other can be referred to again and again as something to disrupt the sense of direction, which can both serve as randomizer but also as a reminder that there are other processes than the one the group is playing. This could be serving to unfix the group's imaginaries, to make them less static and to create a more flexible sense of creativity

within it. Third, friendship plays a role in sense of time. When a group of persons are friends there will always be an 'after', after the piece is played, or after a round of communication is exhausted or timed out. Friendship is something to which no one would like to see the end. Once a person starts to imagine an end to a friendship, it over short time ceases to be friendship. When a group has a common sense of direction and a shared unknown imaginary, utopian other, there is always some sense of that this unknown other is in the future (perhaps just a second but still the future). When friendship is playing a part, it always serves as an object in the horizon of this imaginary future. The next shared moment will perhaps come very soon and there will be a heightened sense of direction, but once this moment is digested, friendship as a feeling is still present. Further, friendships always have pasts as well. Perhaps a good way to look at friendship is as empathy in play?

However, bringing in friendship also brings in something very close to each person in the group, to each person's life, their other life outside of the group. It would be quite certain with a group of friends that they do not all always see each other only together. There are differences in different friendships in the group. When a group has a feeling of friendship between each other and the friendships are different, it is not necessar-

ily a problem. But what happens if this difference in friendship becomes subject to territorial competition? And what happens to the common sense of direction and the piece of music played when friendship becomes territorial? If this territorialisation happens in friendship, could the group then use the same method of going back to the very basic mode of playing as mentioned above? What happens when the common sense of direction for the group becomes friendship itself? If there is inclusion in the group, there is exclusion as well, is then life on the inside not always different from that of the outside? Is it always the practice of getting deep that creates the vacuum? Or is it rather a sense of rhythm, repetition, and language that gets its grip on the group, and thus the persons of the group experience shock when presented to different other rhythms and languages? Is rhythm and language inherent in the process of getting deep together in a group?

Becoming friends does not mean to become more same. There is always a distance between two bodies, and flexibility in terms of distance is very central – especially for contemporary urban life. Friendship can mean many different things now, it both loses and gains its meaning through distance and flexibility – thereby becomes both strong and fragile as time passes.* Sharing an imaginary unknown as a group of friends does not mean that this unknown has to be the same for everyone – there are many ‘others’ after all. The person, the sense of direction and the ‘friendship other’ is not a triangular diagram, easy to read, it spreads itself out and becomes many representations of possibilities. What friendship can do is to act as a core and to serve as a base, so the senses of directions can be followed over and over again – but there is always a base to return to. Here trust and admiration play central roles. When a group of friends has trust in each other, then there is a possibility of more senses of directions to be followed, not by everyone at once, but by each person. It makes it possible to actually imagine utopian others as possibilities in process, moving and intersecting. Always turning back to the base. Trust too plays a role in the feeling of friendship being without any end, it takes that each person trusts the others’ feeling of friendship. However, the persons in the group too need to have a form of admiration, to admire each other’s personalities or skills, to desire each other’s presences, for trust not to be a purely mechanical element that has to be implemented in the need for the group to stick together. When there is a desire to trust each other out of admiration, curiosity or love, the base of friendship becomes strong – in the sense of its capability to change rooms, to break flows, for the single person to stop a destructive, territorial-competitive process before it gets into a spiral of non-awareness. Trust too gives space for each person in the group to act solely on their own, which again gives desire space to play in. This too is important in relation to when one person takes up more space, takes over a sense of direction, even when territorialisation is in play. Is it even possible to have friendship as a base to return to after having followed various senses of directions at once without trust and admiration? What happens when trust is imposed onto the group?



Is trust perhaps a double-sided blade, one that liberates, gives time, and one that fixes when used without attention to love? How can trust be felt, and how does one begin to trust someone else? The question is very much about time (and repetition) the group needs time to be able to build a common trust. Then trust is too a form of letting go of fears, or a door to awareness that does not fix flows. Take the ensemble as an example, every musician has to trust the others' abilities to play, for how else can the ensemble ever start to play? In the case of the orchestra, trust is mandatory, and it is very often inserted by a structure of rhythms. The same goes for the ensemble. But if friendship has rhythms, do these rhythms help the persons in the group to trust? What if the rhythms are always disrupted or if there are many different rhythms present at the same time? Does the group have to agree on one rhythm of trust? What if there are different rhythms of trust, is there then no common feeling of trust in the group?

♦ 16 ♦

When there is a group of friends playing in an ensemble with a common sense of direction, this direction comes to play an important role for all persons in the group. A subtle competition can take place here, not in the territorial sense, but for example as every person in the group becomes nervous that the sense of direction is going off and then tries to move it 'back in place'. This becomes an element for every member as the sense of direction is never exactly the same for each person. It varies a little bit, and as the

sensitivity towards it is heightened by each person, it becomes apparent and an issue to address. Since friendship plays a role in the group and since friendship is too the 'other' in relation to the common sense of direction, there becomes a condition of stress for each person in the group to maintain both. As attention shifts towards the very subtle competition of direction, stress moves in. Here, trust is a pilot and admiration can be a form of blindness as well as an enforcement of the group's feeling of wholeness. When stress has a role in a group of friends, emotions can spread into the room at random. Since the feeling of friendship is already emotional, stress shakes the foundation under it, changes the room around it. Stress gives an unstable feeling of friendship. Possibly, it can challenge the very friendship itself. Stress in this form is the body being aware that there are more things to consider than possible and it then goes into an automatic mode of a fighting competition – aggressively breaking flows but not necessarily territorial. This can last for longer and shorter periods but most often ends in clashes between persons. Here, either the persons in the group will be shattered or friendship will be reintroduced in a stronger form.

Friendship is always emotional and it always demands fragility of a person, even though it has no perceived end – maybe even because of this. Friendship

can never be the sole focus of direction for a group itself, since the group is friends. The imaginary other would be something already present in the room. As for a group of friends that meet just for the sake of meeting. Yet, something is always happening on the level of the imaginary. Here, the same process takes place as if there was a common sense of direction for the group, it just moves very, very slowly. It takes that the persons of the group spend huge amounts of time in each other's presence for an imaginary unknown to take place and be created by the group. There will be very little direct communication about this imaginary other, and the sense of direction will disperse into many moments of senses of directions. Quietness will be an important player for the ensemble, as will bodily motion and momentary losing of the senses. The possibilities of others become numerous and "hang the jerk that invented work"*** becomes a silent form of activity carried out by a group of persons who act out of love, 'getting deeper into something' becomes a span of time shared together getting deeper into each other while playing with the common imaginary. Dialogues will be played as inherent parts of polylogues, many pieces of music at the same time. Can this state of group-being become real life? Or is it always necessary to work with a common sense of direction towards a shared imaginary? Is it

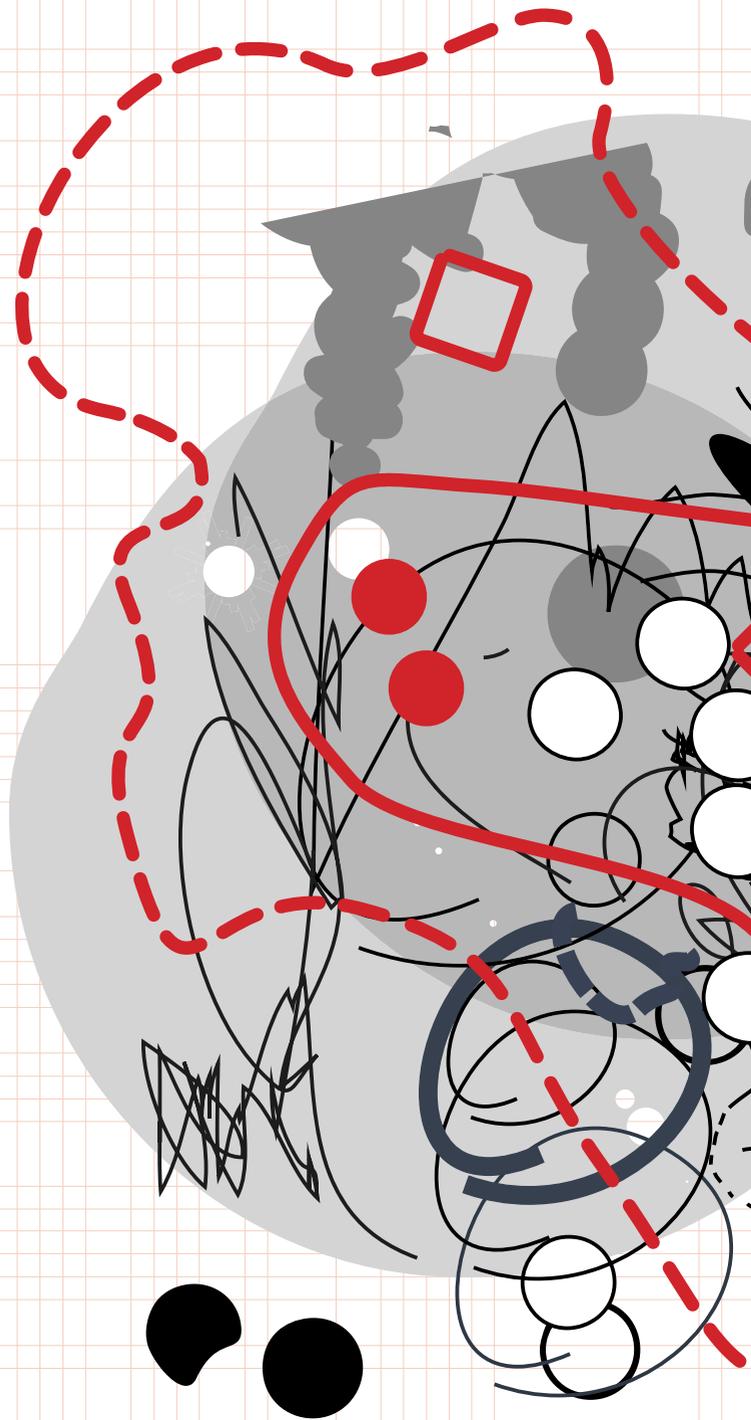
too much, as a group of friends, to take the sharing of the imaginary for granted? In other words, does a friendship mean shared desires by definition? And does the group of friends have to share desires in order to follow different senses of directions into different shared imaginaries? Can friendship be a synthesis of rhythms? If the difference in rhythms creates more space for the imaginary, and many senses of directions are being followed on different bases of trust, can the group be said to be moving as a group? Then what constitutes the group of friends if not a desire to meet and spend time together? If this time in itself is a process of friendship, does the shared imaginary even need any sense of direction in order to be shared? Is the notion of having a practice, an activity for the group of friends, not a main element for the group to be able to meet over longer time and for it to become closer to its shared imaginary? Even though friendship is an important element in play, is a form of activity for the group not crucial exactly to direct the group of friends away from friendship itself as the sole purpose of sharing time? What kind of awareness does it take to keep each person's stress away from disrupting the group as a whole? Is it possible to maintain such awareness over time? How will the group of friends relate to the outside world? Can the outside world become unimportant in total? How will it communicate its imaginary to others? Can this be done broadly or does the group of friends have to make friends with other groups, in the same

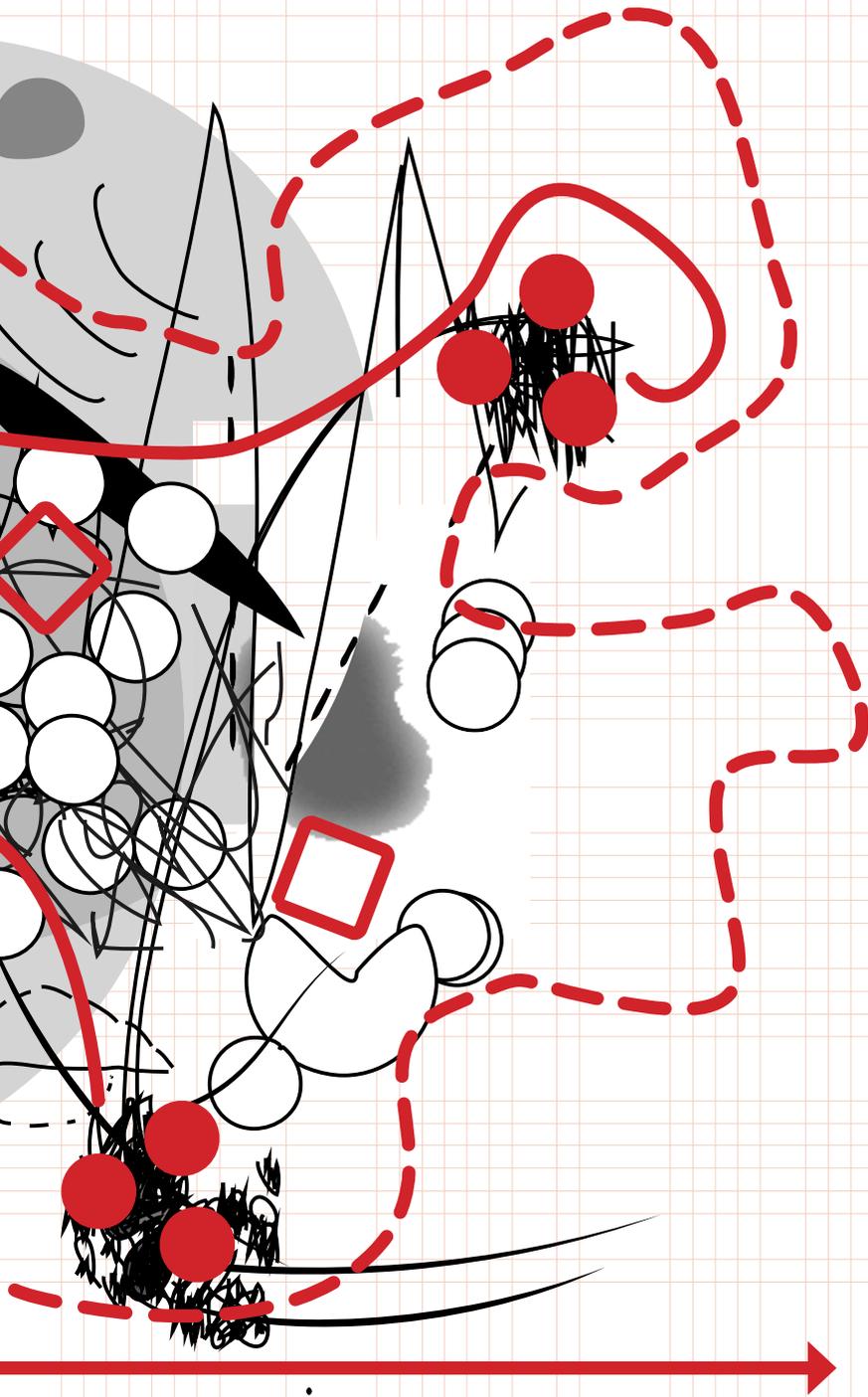
way that each person in the group made friends with each other, and only then, being several groups of friends, the different imaginary unknowns can be shared outside of the one group. Is it a point to say that the one group of friends could only share this level of emotion, these many senses of directions, all these different utopian others, with other friends, other groups of friends, and not with everyone, as in the common 'all' that is called society, the broader public sphere, institutions and markets (often realities for groups*)? When friendship becomes the centre of the group it also inhabits the periphery and what is outside of it. Or is friendship always in that periphery and what is central is always the real 'other'? Centre here is a centre of deterritorialized intensities, prone to capitalist exploitations etc., and the periphery is a place to hide. Friendship is neither temporary, nor a thing that can be moved or forgotten about; friendship desires friendship and repels what is outside of it. In one imagined utopia, there is nothing outside of friendships in groups. This is friendship as the last form of relation outside of capitalism. What does it take for it to make it stay outside of capitalism? Is it important to stop creating knowledge about friendship, since it is a process already in the periphery? Perhaps friendship could sustain itself through all its broken flows, vacuumy internalizations and shifting emotions? Could the synthesis of rhythms in friendship spread enough to make enough persons actively follow the same flows? Would this not exactly

give a way for capitalism to disrupt friendship (moving it into the centre) – when the activity becomes about more people than can be, even vaguely, perceived by one person? Perhaps the slowness of friendship would stop it from becoming a movement as such? Many social movements started with friendships*, but perhaps the underlying play of friendship makes it muddy for theoretically aware analysis to penetrate and thereby this fact is often ignored or underemphasized? If anything is friendship not already a countermovement to something, to a crisis of relations that plays on capitalists logics of accumulation and desire? Friendship, as one of the precious others in this world, must always play, and always play on other imaginaries. How can these imaginaries be found? And can they not be coded into capitalism? If friendship then play more and more towards the internal communication of a group, performing an activity together of little importance, does this not develop inter-group communication into plural directions? If one could only see all the shared imaginaries, the utopian others, of all friendships in the same glimpse, would it not lead to a total disruption of all senses?

“If it were left and in a way it was left, if it were left then the meaning would be that there was hope and hope which is active does that there is some one to stay there and say it and doing so why should it determine a passage, it should. When it should and there is more there then certainly all of them are the same that is to say there is a difference. Any difference is greater.”

Gertrude Stein, from *Publisher, the Portrait Gallery, and the Manuscripts of the British Museum. Geography and Plays.*





* Quotes of Martin Haufe

** Line from Big Rock Candy Mountain in one version, presented and sung by Anna Davin at Collective Misunderstandings Symposium pt. 1, arranged by ATB. Here, Howard Slater shared thoughts on both ensembles and hope. For more on the ensemble, see: Howard Slater, for example: *Listener as Operator (Mute)*.

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