

The project presented on this webpage explores the use of micro-phenomenology in the context of art education and dissemination. The following is based on interviews that Katrin Heimann led in June 2022, a full year after her micro-phenomenological intervention into Olafur Eliasson's artwork *Life* at Fondation Beyeler. It offers a summary of the feedback from the different stakeholders that were involved with the intent to give an impression of the impact of the intervention to those who might, in the future, consider employing it themselves.

If you are a stakeholder interested in conducting a similar project within your practice of art education or creation, feel free to contact Katrin Heimann (katrinheimann@cas.au.dk) for further information.

Stakeholders:

Corina Bezzola and Gert Handschin, teachers at the ZBA (Zentrum für Brückenangebote), brought students from three different classes of the integrative profile as interviewees into the project. They reflect on the impact of the project on the involved students; the potential they see in it for classwork, and under what circumstances they would want to get involved in similar interventions in the future;

Janine Schmutz, leader of the art education team at Fondation Beyeler with whom Katrin Heimann worked. She portrays how the project affected the members of her department; her own thoughts about how to prepare a team for a new exhibition, and which further collaborations with Katrin are planned on this basis; Finally, Anna Engberg-Pedersen, Head of Research & Advocacy of Studio Olafur Eliasson, reports on the expectations that the artist and his studio team had regarding the project; how these expectations were met, and which future projects involving micro-phenomenology are currently being considered at the studio.

1) *What were your expectations going into the project?*

Corina Bezzola and Gert Handschin, teachers:

Due to personal contacts to Janine Schmutz, we had previously worked together with the art education team, made very good experiences there and were thus in general open and excited to collaborate. However, we had never worked in this context with researchers from outside the institution. Talking to Katrin made us teachers excited but given the mixed reaction of the students to her 30 min zoom presentations of the project preceding her stay in Basel, we were a bit doubtful about whether all the students would really get something out of it, language- and interest-wise. So let's say we did not know what to expect, but just gave it a shot.

Janine Schmutz, art education team Fondation Beyeler:

To be honest, my team was initially quite sceptical towards the intervention. Having so many exhibitions over the year and many stakeholders to serve, we are often working under immense pressure. To dedicate several hours of their time for an interview with a previously unknown researcher was therefore first and foremost perceived as a burden by my team. However, this attitude significantly changed after the first few had been interviewed by Katrin. All perceived this as a really interesting experience and thus became very open to working with Katrin and the method during her stay.

Anna Engberg-Pedersen, Studio Olafure Eliasson:

The studio first got to know the method and its developer Claire Petitmengin in 2014 at an informal gathering of researchers in Paris. Following this, we were fortunate enough that Claire took the initiative to visit Olafur's exhibition at Versailles with a whole group of practitioners. In the autumn of 2015, we thus received a first sample of transcripts that showed us the kind of reports this sort of guided introspection would allow; how it facilitates exploration and articulation of art experiences. And these reports spoke to us: Olafur was always very clear about the fact that the artwork is not just there – it's really in the encounter between whatever he has done, the visitors, and the site that the artwork emerges. Importantly, however, he wants this interaction to be genuine; he doesn't want the museum to explain to visitors what they are supposed to see and to experience and do. But while this works for some people, others may feel left alone because they just don't know where to look and what to think. So in the context of Life it seemed exciting to bring micro-phenomenology to the museum as a way to empower participants to explore their own experiences. Additionally, the minute you put words on an experience, like in an interview, it becomes shareable. In this sense, the method offers a way for us – at Olafur's studio – to access what the work in fact does.

2) *How did you experience the intervention itself?*

Corina Bezzola and Gert Handschin, ZBA:

Speaking from our own experience of being interviewed, to participate in these interviews is very beautiful. It's surprising, moving, very intense, more than what you'd normally be aware of experiencing in an art exhibition.

To allow students to have such experience, entering into a 1-to-1 interaction with a researcher that is interested in nothing but their encounter with an artwork, feels like absolute luxury. It's so empowering, just something you cannot give them usually as a teacher. You are bound to class work or maybe work in smaller groups. But that is so far from this offer.

One should point out also that this specific artwork and the context created by it seemed just perfect for the endeavour: Life literally tore down walls, enabling an aesthetically interesting and extremely open and rich environment. This made it possible for each student to find an entrance to it that could be explored in the interview. And it created an environment in which we could be and stay and talk and share the experience as a group.

What happened was that, on one of the days, almost the entire group, the class, installed itself under a tree in the park, chatting, while always one or two were interviewed. In the breaks, Katrin joined the group again and shared more about her research or picked up on some of the experiences that came up in the interviews. The students seemed very engaged in this interaction, enjoying her passion and enthusiasm for the art and all the topics that it touched upon. They were not obliged to stay there at all, they just did so.

These interactions allowed us also to engage the students in further discussions in class. In particular, in the weeks after the encounter they by themselves picked up on topics such as the relation of human to nature, our (ab)use of it, and how perceiving with all senses and articulating this experience – as it is done in the interviews – might change this interaction.

Of course there were some students who were more and some who were less excited about all this. But we had expected as much. In this sense, we really enjoyed the collaboration!

Janine Schmutz:

For all those who participated the intervention has remained in the back of their minds. To really explore: Where do I, me as an individual, want to go here? What is actually happening with me in this exhibition? And how to express this in language? That's work for which we as art education team have far too little time usually.

Attending such processes via Kat's intervention has offered us new ways of reflection:

First, there is the score: Go find something, no matter what and how small, that interests you! I noticed really positively that the attention to the work is simply a completely different one when you look at it with such a small and feasible focus – spelling out all it contains.

And, also, when speaking about it, a lot happens again. Reproducing, transforming the experience into language, that makes a difference.

Maybe also because one remembers better: If you can actively participate in an experience, you remember it better. And the score and the interview, they allow a stronger participation, so to speak.

And finally, there is the comparison with the others: You realize how differently everyone has perceived the work of art.

That already starts in your own interview: By focusing on such a small aspect you realize how many different perspectives there would be. And if you then look at the other interviews, you realize: Aha, these other experiences really exist.

That seemed especially relevant for *Life*, an installation specifically working with different perspectives. One is surrounded by the installation, exposed to its versatility in terms of where you are and when.

To our experience as museum educators though: Without any intervention at place, many visitors were thrown in at the deep end. There was no text, no audio guide offered offline to guide you. I think that's generally good, not to explain everything away. But many visitors were also lost – especially if they couldn't find the virtual platform.

Your score helped to find an entrance while keeping the process open for the individual stance. This is clearly different from a text explaining the artist's intentions or offering interpretations. And it is also different from a guided tour, in which these questions are asked, but you don't have the chance to really follow your experience as in an interview.

Anna Engberg-Pedersen:

We were very happy with the project, both with the interviews and the feedback of our collaborators. The interview reports show how important it is for us to do this kind of work: they add that layer of understanding of how the artwork is activated and filtered through all these different minds and bodies. And that's incredibly valuable. Because what we do at the studio, whenever we develop an artwork or an exhibition at this scale, is go through all these questions: What will people think? How will they move? What will they see? We ask those questions very early on and they ultimately help us make the artwork or exhibition, they contribute to our creative process. And it is therefore hugely exciting for us to then hear what, in fact, people see, feel, experience, on their own and with others. The interviews give us glimpses into what is going on in visitors when they spend time with the artworks.

Interestingly, it's maybe less about what exactly individual people say, but more about the plurality of experiences from positive to negative experiences: dislike, discomfort, surprise, something not within your comfort zone. It's that breadth of experiences that is the most interesting because it shows you know how different the artwork is, depending on who's interacting with it, the backgrounds of the visitors, and so on. To be able to communicate an exhibition in such a way that you leave space for these differences and engage actively with them – that is something we have been thinking about a lot at the studio. And this is why we have co-developed this webpage: as documentation of what it means to bring people into this open non-judgmental space where there is simply someone listening and gently guiding participants through their own experiences, empowering them in their process of discovering the artwork. This needs to be communicated!

3) *Which future do you see for the method in your work?*

Corina Bezzola and Gert Handschin:

The project was very exciting for quite some of the students as well as us and will accompany and inspire us in our pedagogical work in the future. Besides allowing our students to have this intense 1-to-1 contact; to experience being listened to in the way these interviews offer; and finding yourself capable of experiencing art, it is of course also exciting and exotic to have a real researcher from abroad doing this, investing her time in this, in them.

In this spirit, we are already in discussions of becoming part of the collaboration between Katrin and the art education team of Fondation Beyeler. One thing to work on is definitely how to better introduce and further frame the project in class to make it accessible to even more students and we are developing this together with Katrin while writing these lines.

Janine Schmutz:

We see a lot of potential in the method in an art education/dissemination context. In particular, we are thinking of the intervention as a training for team members and tour guides, allowing them to explore their own experience with a piece and gain insights about how (differently) others might perceive it. This seems especially relevant for exhibitions for which we anticipate hugely different, maybe even dividing experiences that need to be met – in a guided tour, through dissemination material. In this spirit we are currently planning collaborating with Katrin again at the very start of an exhibition to get this knowledge into our process. And we are looking forward to this!

Anna Engberg-Pedersen:

We are currently thinking about a few micro-phenomenological interventions in other museums. Katrin's work has again shown the potential of micro-phenomenology in an art's context. There is, of course, the challenge that doing the interviews takes time and there's the need for a trained interviewer to be present. There is also the question of how to communicate the intervention so that the very special experience of being interviewed gets transported to others who have not been involved. We are currently collaborating with Katrin on finding solutions for both of these points.