

the research and reflections conducted by the semiotician Algirdas Greimas.

42. Marialaura Agnello, *Semiotica dei colori*, Carocci, Rome, 2013.

43. In the semiotics of colour the reductionist hypothesis arises in contrast with the ideas of linguistic relativism according to which perceiving a colour means grasping its meaning starting from the place, time, condition and situation in which it is perceived and interpreted. To refute this theory, between 1967 and 1968, B. Berlin and P. Kay undertook a research that led them to the publication of the volume *Basic Color Terms* (1969), going so far as to demonstrate how in all the languages of the world, beyond the possible lexical differences, they found eleven fundamental terms (white black <red <green yellow <blue <brown <green yellow orange gray) to which all the others can be traced. This basic lexicon is based on universal biological and physiological constraints, it is organised according to an increasing logic of complexity, of ways that progressively cross from languages—which have only two-colour terms—to richer ones.

44. Carl Gustav Jung, *Il libro rosso. Liber novus*, edited by Sonu Shamdasani, Bollati Boringhieri, Turin, 2010.

45. Barbara Hannah, *Vita e Opere di C.G. Jung*, Rusconi, Milan, 1980, p. 21.

46. C. G. Jung, *Il libro rosso. Liber novus*, ivi, p. 64.

47. Steven Bailey, (1965), is a scholar and essayist who combines his twenty-year practice of vipassana meditation with studies of Tibetan Buddhism.

48. Reiko Goto Collins, Tim Collins, *Art and Living Things – The ethical, aesthetic impulse*. In Emily Brady & Pauline Phemister, *Transformative Values: human-environment relations in theory and practice*, Springer-Verlag, London, 2012, pp. 121-133.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Brené Brown is a professor at the University of Houston, where he holds the chair of the Huffington Foundation. He has spent the past two decades studying concepts such as courage, vulnerability, shame and empathy.

BASAK SENOVA

A PERSISTENT PARTICIPATORY ACT



My first encounter with Egle Oddo was during an exhibition opening at HIAP's Gallery Augusta, situated in the fortress island of Suomenlinna (Helsinki), in February 2017. I was a resident fellow at the Academy of Fine Arts, Helsinki and since it was a joint programme, supported by the Saastamoinen Foundation and HIAP, I was staying on the island with other resident artists, curators, and writers. Right after the opening, Egle organised a spontaneous dinner at Malaysian artist and activist Shieko Reto's studio and cooked an amazing Italian meal for 40 people in two hours. I not only witnessed her capacity for organising such a pleasant and productive event in a very short period of time, but I was also incredibly impressed by her ability to communicate with a variety of people in the diverse environment and context that she had created. In time, I was able to associate this ability with a well-structured artistic methodology that generates each of her artistic ventures and projects. While organising and shaping an environment and attaining context, she welcomes people's contributions, expressions, and reactions. Thus, she performs within this environment by producing a shared action or object. This participatory approach clearly requires a fine balance between directing and letting go; experimenting and anticipating; including and excluding artistic, social, and political dynamics.

This remarkable dinner in 2017 was followed by a series of studio meetings, and I finally worked with Egle in the framework of the *CrossSections*¹ project from 2017 to 2020. *CrossSections* was an interdisciplinary platform for explorations into artistic research and education through dialogue and production. My objective was

to create collective, interdisciplinary, and critical research platforms and networks that integrated the production process into knowledge exchange and distribution models in the context of art. *CrossSections* also suggested different forms of engagement to ignite change and new ideas in ways to acknowledge and internalise project management and its content. Since Egle creates her environments in like manner, her methodology corresponded well with the project. Furthermore, she played an important role within *CrossSections* in proposing models of collaborative intelligence, engagements, and commitments under the changing conditions and terms of the project. The way she developed ideas and produced works went through *dialogical conversations* within the group. The participatory nature of her artistic methodology is based on her capacity to apply *communicative protocols* that address a well-planned accessibility for the audience and the public at large.

Egle applies these protocols while creating living sculptures by developing *evolutionary gardens*. As zones for biodiversity, these gardens mostly function as living seed repositories. In the course of the *CrossSections* project in 2019, I invited her to create one of her gardens in Tunis under the framework of the *Climbing Through the Tide*² exhibition. Soon after Egle received photo documentation of the plot of land assigned for her garden, she studied and shared the images with botanist Prof. Anna Scialabba.³ The professor immediately suggested investigating the presence of *extremophile*⁴ plants as the result of her observation, and introduced her to Assoc. Prof. Karim Ben Hamed, whose work is based in Tunisia. With this scope, Egle initiated interdisciplinary collaborative research with the Centre of Biotechnology of Borj Cedrja in Tunis and made a series of successive research visits to Tunis.

The plot of land—the garden at the B7L9 Art Space—was seemingly significant, quite problematic, and filled with debris. Nevertheless, Egle observed the flora and invited Assoc. Prof. Karim Ben Hamed to determine the presence of *extremophile* plants, which were growing wild in the region. Thus, they succeeded in documenting their existence in the garden. These plants present a specific resilience to all kinds of extreme conditions and can even survive in geochemically toxic soils. In some cases, they are able to remediate the soil and heal it for the re-population of other plants. *Halophytes*,⁵ in particular, have been used for cancer treatment research.

Egle arrived in Tunis weeks before the other artists of the exhibition and started to work in the garden. I witnessed how she transformed her working process into a communication tool to initiate dialogues with the public. Not just the habitants of the neighbourhood, but the art community of B7L9 also became involved in her working process through the various communication channels she used during gardening. This participatory process concluded in a performance titled *Seed Bombs Kill Only Boring Gardens*. In this participatory performance, the public was invited to build a set of egg-shaped clay and soil objects containing local seeds. Then several artists, neighbours, visitors, and children participated in the act of throwing the seed bombs⁶ over the other side of the wall, outside the garden into the wild.

One can trace her intention while explaining her performance in the exhibition guide: “When offered, exchanged, and planted, the seeds become a symbol of reciprocity in inter-cultural and inter-species relationships, becoming also part of a nomadic population that does not exist in a continuous, unchanging, centralised form like a seed bank, but is widespread, living and acting in the hands of various communities.”⁷ She also contributed to the

exhibition with a living sculpture, extracted from her on-going project *The Ark of Seeds* (2019).

Her engagement with the local seeds and the public continued throughout the lecture-performance *The World in Common*, in collaboration with Karim Ben Hamed, during the public programme of the exhibition. While the professor gave a lecture about populations of local *extremophiles*, she performed by conversing with him and participating in his lecture with the act of drawing. Her goal was to preserve the *extremophiles* in the garden and to bring them close to the public by utilising an interactive process to create ecologically conscious communities. Especially in this specific context, I sincerely think that her project became even more crucial and sustainable when she used her participatory artistic methodology as a tool to touch individuals for a better course in society.

At the same time, through her botanically mediated perceptions of *habitat*, *labour*, and *aesthetics*, Egle created an interdisciplinary workgroup that has been operating under the project name *The World in Common*.⁸ This work group has been interested in addressing the cultural intersections emerging among populations that inhabit diverse biotopes through various types of interdisciplinary knowledge. At the end of 2019, I worked with Egle together with cultural manager Johanna Fredriksson and artist Antti Ahonen for an iteration of this project at MACRO – Museum of Contemporary Art Rome. Inside Atelier#1, Egle built an imaginary biotope, a sensorial context merging various spheres and interconnected meanings.

Egle was present in the venue for the entire duration of the exhibition and shared an *experience* that addressed the five senses. Along with performances, actions, dialogues, soundscape works, and a lecture, Egle continued her multidisciplinary research, combining visual arts with botany, biology, and anthropology. She materialised it through a scripted action consisting of

different phases: visiting the Botanical Garden la Sapienza to get information about the collections and to converse with the botanists; obtaining authorisation to collect germplasm in the botanical garden; and collecting germplasm such as leaves seeds, branches, pollens, fruits, flowers, and grasses⁹ to be added to her collection on display at Atelier#1 at MACRO. The vegetal samples filled up capacious bags, and were transported by Egle to the Museum with a ritual walk on the streets of Rome. The ritual continued upon her arrival at the atelier as she categorised and organised the samples by following various inputs. The atelier was a glass cubiculum, and the act of categorisation in this setting was not limited to reproducing a taxonomic order but was intended to integrate her observations of the audience's response to their colours, scents, and tactile textures. By rendering all these actions and reactions in a continuous flow, the atelier had become an incubator for the public gaze.

In the meantime, I asked Egle five questions for five days and wrote each of the questions on the glass incubator at the atelier:

1. *How do you define the act of removing the germplasm from scientific repositories and natural habitats, and repositioning it in this incubator at MACRO?*
2. *Are seeds able to inherit memories from their biotope?*
3. *How do you feel about the communication between the germplasm elements in the atelier and the audience?*
4. *How do seeds guide us to understand the sociological, geopolitical, ecological, and cultural emergencies in the contemporary world?*
5. *Who is the audience?*

Her responses were in different formats: a dialogue, a performance, an action, a drawing, and an installation. Each day, her response guided me to the next question. Egle had very long and deep conversations with the visitors,¹⁰ once again applying

her artworks as a tool to communicate about the urgent political, social, ecological, and cultural issues. Her artistic approach suggested tactile experiences through investigating and discussing the experience of touching plants and seeds. Later, she clearly explained how this experience changed her perception in an article: “In neuroscience and in several biological studies, touch is considered the fundamental tool to express and understand affection. Plants are also known to communicate via touch, based on the various chemical exchanges elicited by touch occurring between plants, insects, and mammals for whom the oxytocin systems may enter into dialogue with touch. By taking tactile experience at the heart of each research process, I started to observe and experiment with different ways of touching the plants and seeds, and how plants touch humans. I built a series of furniture and tools that would facilitate this interaction.”¹¹

By following the same logic with her repetitive ritual-like actions, Egle also collaborated with a young musician, Maya Muratoglu. Egle asked her to record and collect sound samples from the MACRO Museum, especially from Egle’s atelier while she was talking, performing, and working. Since Maya has absolute pitch, she translated these soundscapes into musical notes and sang the short partitions to the audience each day, finally performing together with Egle. It was an amazing indication of her unique talent to involve and engage participants with diverse profiles into her project by using multiple strategies and participatory methods. For instance, we gave a joint lecture in the cinema hall of MACRO, which ended up as a conversation with the audience regarding the objectives of *The World in Common* project.

Performative habitats is an expression coined by Egle in 2019, during the preparations for Rome. It designates “dynamic sensorial situations performed together by different life forms in a given

biotope”.¹² Egle then transformed and processed this expression as her on-going research and project. Curated by Lori Adragna, *Performative Habitats* included a series of exhibitions, actions, events, and lectures in Zagreb, Palermo, Rome, Vienna, Tunis, Mänttä, and Helsinki. The project continues by merging biology, botany, and natural sciences with the varied languages of artistic disciplines, and establishing production methods that are sustainable for the environment at a historical moment that sees climate change among the primary emergencies.

In April 2021, one of the iterations took place as a lecture performance by Egle in conversation with the philosopher Leonardo Caffo, for the *Octopus Programme*.¹³ They staged a lecture-performance by scripting a conversation on the implications of artistic and philosophical research. The performance was enriched with the contributions of VJ Random Doctors, Antti Ahonen, and Timo Tuhkanen.

In this venture, the discourse on *extremophile plants*, with an interest in *halophytes*, has been the climactic point of our discussions to instigate distinct types of collaborative models, and now her research expands further into new projects. I have closely observed that Egle has developed and composed a unique participatory artistic methodology which is very well-structured, considerate, responsive, and persistent in action. This methodology reveals a very particular relationship between the artist and participants as a potential to create a difference in the perceptions, responses, and actions regarding the political, ecological, social, cultural, physical, and even psychological urgencies of our era.

1. *CrossSections*, developed and curated by Başak Şenova, was designed as an interdisciplinary platform for explorations into artistic research and education through

dialogue and production. The project employed an open format to reflect upon *process* with the intent to articulate critical reactions to the political, economic, and social disturbances facing us today. Over the course of three years (2017–19), the artists, together with other scholars and cultural workers, have organised various meetings, accompanied with residencies, workshops, exhibitions, performances, and book launches in Vienna, Helsinki, and Stockholm. Participating artists included Heba Y. Amin, Nisrine Boukhari, Benji Boyadgian, Yane Calovski, Ramesch Daha, Ricarda Denzer, Nikolaus Gansterer, Inma Herrera, Barbara Holub, Otto Karvonen, Ebru Kurbak, Bronwyn Lace, Marcus Neustetter, Behzad Khosravi Noori, Egle Oddo, Isa Rosenberger, Lina Selander, Tamsin Snow, and Timo Tuhkanen.

2. *Climbing through the Tide* (2019) was the inaugural exhibition of B7L9—an experimental art space, developed by the Kamel Lazaar Foundation—and brought together 50 artists from 21 countries in a rural land whose landscape has morphed organically amidst the political vacuum in the revolution aftermath in Tunis.

3. Egle Oddo signed a framework agreement with the STEBICEF Department at the University of Palermo in 2019, based on the collaboration facilitated by Prof. Anna Scialabba. The agreement has been ongoing in 2021.

4. Extremophiles are plants evolutionarily adapted to thrive in environments characterised by a high degree of abiotic stress, namely extreme biotopes. See also: Koki Horikoshi, *Extremophiles Handbook*, Springer, Tokyo, 2011.

5. Halophyte plants are a type of extremophile plant resistant to salt stress.

6. To prepare these seed bombs, Egle exclusively collected natural local seeds belonging to the public domain that were not patented and had not been subject to laboratory alterations.

7. *Climbing through the Tide* (2019), cit.

8. The core group of *The World in Common* is formed of Professor of Botany Anna Scialabba (University of Palermo); Antti Ahonen (independent researcher and photographer); Assoc. Prof. Karim Ben Hamed (Centre de Biotechnologie, Technopole Borj Cédria); Assoc. Prof. Dr. Basak Senova (independent curator, designer, and Visiting Professor, University of Applied Arts Vienna); Egle Oddo (independent researcher and artist); Emmy Verschuren (biologist, Institute for Molecular Medicine Finland, University of Helsinki); Professor of Botany Gianluigi

Bacchetta (University of Cagliari); Johanna Fredriksson (independent researcher and cultural manager); Myles Byrne (independent researcher and IT specialist); and Pekka Tuominen (anthropologist, University of Helsinki).

9. An important detail is that since it was autumn, Egle collected these samples not off the plants, but from the ground. Hence, this was the only reason why the exhibition was planned to take place in November. It was a way of establishing a direct relationship between her installation indoors and the natural environment subject to the changing seasons.

10. MACRO Asilo and the programme facilitated by Giorgio de Finis attracted a broad range of visitors of all ages: teenagers, school children, older generations, families, tourists, artists, students, scholars, and special groups.

11. Egle's quote from our article: Egle Oddo, Basak Senova, *Extremophiles: The Act of Performative Habitat*, in *Antennae: The Journal of Nature in Visual Culture*, issue 53 *Vegetal Entanglements*, edit. Giovanni Aloï, 2021.

12. As defined by Egle during our dialogue in Rome.

13. *The Octopus Programme* led by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Başak Şenova is a guided research-based educational programme that encourages artistic research and production-based collaborations across academies and art institutions, students and professionals, diverse presentation modes, and processes of research and documentation in different geographies. By merging the viewpoints of academic entities and contemporary art institutions (museums and art-centres in different scales) along with mixed facilities and activities, the Octopus Programme involves 15 artists, 9 curators, and 10 institutions from Europe, the Mediterranean, and Africa. The programme was initiated in 2019/2020 by University of Applied Arts Vienna and the Kamel Lazaar Foundation with a pilot phase which linked Vienna and Tunis. The main phase is taking place in 2020-2022, and the partners are University of Applied Arts Vienna; Kamel Lazaar Foundation, Tunis; Konstfack – University College of Arts, Crafts, Stockholm; Index – The Swedish Contemporary Art Foundation; The University of Pretoria, Pretoria; The Centre for The Less Good Idea, Johannesburg; Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center in Ramallah; Birzeit University, Birzeit; the Palestinian Museum, Birzeit; SAHA Association, Istanbul; Publics, Helsinki; and Saastamoinen Foundation, Helsinki.