

A Guide for radical tenderness as a working method for participatory art

First PART: Principles

1. Radical tenderness is not a product

Radical tenderness cannot be sold as a product, i.e. as a bath foam or a vanilla smelling candle for self-care and self-contemplation, neither can it be subordinated in a value system that underlies a market logic. Radical tenderness is a collective practice, that offers poetic and aesthetic approaches to occupy tenderness in ourselves and in the spaces we move through, build and inhabit. It is tender, because it suggests a specific state-of being, that is present and available as well as a specific quality of our interactions, that is gentle and kind, that acknowledges our interdependencies and celebrate our vulnerability. It's radical, because it aims to liberate and emancipate our bodies, minds and communities from capitalist and neo-liberalist processes of disconnection, exclusivity and separation, that keep us busy and alone. Though it might depart from you as an individual, radial tenderness is not an individual practice. The value of it can only be defined by each community itself, departing from their interest of in-tenderly-act with each other. Everybody should be able to join the artistic process if interested. This means, that the whole process of practicing radical tenderness has to be at no cost for the participants. There have to be found other ways to finance to project.

2. Radical tenderness is not an instrument to “solve social issues“

By working with radical tenderness, its activist approach is acknowledged, that aims to critically question the interests and decisions of the executing power regime, which includes the setting of institutions and fundings the project might be placed in. Radical tenderness aims to question and intervene in those setting and spaces, in order to oppose the dominant structures. Whereas the process can have a social impact on the working context, it cannot assume the responsibility to “solve social issue“ governmental institutions carry the responsibility for. The participation has to be by free choice, in order to oppose institutionalized procedures of exclusion.

3. Radial tenderness is not following one agenda only

Everybody has their own and personal interests and agendas. The idea of working

with radical tenderness is not to “help” somebody, who probably isn’t even in the need of being helped. It is rather about creating a critical thinking of who we are as citizens and how we interact with each other. To work with radical tenderness means to acknowledge that we are all part of an eco-system of interests and that these interests can differ from each other. It emphasizes on the transformative potential of the tensions that can emerge in those difference. Every participant should feel free to express themselves, to question their opinion and be heard equally. This also include to agree that you don’t have to agree, embracing dissensus and in between spaces of tension as a potential for artistic creation. Radical Tenderness acknowledges that the world isn’t binary.

4. Radial tenderness doesn’t aim efficiency

Working radically tender means to avoid the economic principle in time of neoliberalism, where time has to be used efficient and productive. It takes time to attune to our bodies and environments. In this thinking, radical tenderness also means to simply spend time together, without a clear purpose but on a common ground, in order to correspond adequately to what the process is asking you for. Embracing the uncertainties during the process, without knowing where it is heading to, is part of it. Wasting your time radically tender together, can produce a different kind of value and work. Slowing down is resisting the haste of our daily lives. Radical tenderness aims to create a temporary autonomous space, where things can appear, in the time they need to.

5. Radial safety doesn’t assure safety

Practicing radical tenderness in participatory art making and group learning processes also means to create “brave spaces“, regarding controversial issues. By creating a “brave space“ the facilitator embraces a critical thinking regarding the creation of “safe(r) spaces“, as the idea of safety is often conflated with the feeling of comfort, which makes it difficult to talk about more provocative and controversial issues. Issues, that have the (enriching) potential, to make the participants question their own position and confront them with questions, that might lead them outside their comfort zones. The aim to “be safe“ during group learning and art making processes, emphasizes a white perspective of dominance, because to actually be confronted with one’s own privileges and their relation to the structural oppression of other’s, can create discomfort. “Brave spaces“ instead, stimulate individual as

well as collective learning processes that can create discomfort, where the participants can risk to give up a former condition in favor of a new way of seeing things. This emphasizes the need for courage, rather than the illusion of safety.

6. Radical is not assuming that everybody is in the same boat

By creating interventions in public space, we have to be aware to include all kinds of bodies, acknowledging that for some people it is easier to practice radical tenderness than for others. Some people don't have the conditions to practice it, because they don't have the resources to invest into their interactions, such as free time, social acceptance or trust, latter can be created by spending time together. The facilitator should acknowledge, that most bodies don't conform to the existing norm, that not all voices are equally heard, that not everybody is equally comfortable being exposed in public space. Radical tenderness means to find creative solutions and open spaces, where everybody feel comfortable to move (in), with the devices and the time it takes.

7. Radical tenderness is not written by one person only

The authorship of each process and creation that emerges within radical tender spaces, should be shared. Existing power structures in the group should be addressed and communicated as transparent as possible, i.e. who is paid and who isn't, which name is getting more attention from the public, which isn't, etc. The authorship of the process, as well as of possible outcome has to be shared and made visible in an adequate form.