

Dear participants of the Unthinkable Experiment, Chapter Freedom,

During three wonderful days in August, the Transdisciplinary Team (TT) delved into your thought exercises and reflections on freedom. We read and discussed the contributions of the five participating groups with great interest and growing amazement. Not only have you chosen five totally different ways to approach the concept of Freedom, resulting in an inspiring wealth of ideas; you have also selected a great variety of communicative forms to share your thoughts.

For an overview of the discussions and ideas that your submissions triggered in the transdisciplinary team, please see the document [‘Chapter Freedom Workshop Transdisciplinary Team Summer 2021’](#) on the google drive. This document is our analysis of your input, based on the contributions we have received from each of the five reflection groups. In this document, you’ll see how we’ve come up with ‘recommendations and tools’, which may help you continue your thought process.

The videos that some of the TT members have made will also be shared with you in this second phase to give you more insight into what we found so exceptional about the work you did in July. At the same time, they also contain possible input for the next stage of the reflection process.

The below outline is a proposal by the TT to take the next step in this process. It goes without saying that you are free to choose a different path.

The TT proposes to reform and reshape the groups around four different themes that we discovered and selected from your work. A fifth theme we identified, can be integrated across all groups. Koen Vanmechelen linked each theme to a work of art, as a tool for reflection and regrouping and as a source of inspiration for this next step. You’re not required to re-group with the same people you worked with during the first session in July. Feel free to let your choice be determined by Koen’s artwork, by the nature of the content, by the TT’s questions, by your emotions, or just by your gut feeling...

How you arrive at new insights – or how you deepen previous insights – is entirely up to you. You can ask experts, who will be available at certain times, both online and in person. We hope also to provide you with some inspiration via the activities that are included in the programme for The Unthinkable Experiment, with film, speakers, debate, music, get-togethers... In addition, we provide a diverse range of input, in the form of a toolbox. These are organized under each theme and can contain books, literature, music, or other sources, which may serve as fertile background for your reflective work.

It's entirely up to you how you - individually or as a group - want to share your thoughts with us and the other groups. All that we ask is that by Thursday, 16 September 2021, 1 pm, you pour your findings into a medium that we can store in the Library of Collected Knowledge at our Open University of Diversity, which is

located in the villa here at LABIOMISTA. That medium can be images, text, audio, video – a combination of the above - or any other means of communication in the broadest sense of the word, chosen by you... Your submission on Thursday will serve as ‘an opening chapter’, a ‘begin work’ that can trigger further development and discussions as we continue The Unthinkable Experiment over the years.

As potential starting point for this next phase, we propose to regroup around the following main themes:

### **Uncomfortable**

Here’s **the paradox of freedom**: when you define it, it seems to shrink. Freedom seems impossible to capture in words. The narrative circle is an interesting attempt to rationalise the concept of freedom. The circle doesn’t resolve the paradox, but rather seems to amplify it – by arriving at the status quo again and again. Can the sense of freedom, a dream, or the imagination break those boundaries?

Is freedom inherently human? How we experience freedom is dependent on whether we’re aware of ourselves in our environment, and able to communicate and reflect on this. Quite rightly, you ask: Can an atom be free? Or does freedom require a narrative to be told and understood?

Can we break out of that narrative circle made up of language, and escape from Plato’s cave to better understand freedom? Does humour have any relevance in this respect? Are we, or are you, able to conceptualise freedom without getting caught up in its very definition? The question then would be whether the narrative circle will turn into a single line, or a growing snowball... Make the circle versatile/fertile.

### **OSOTWA (Kitovu)\***

**Community.** Freedom can’t exist without three preconditions, and the balance they require: our own responsibility, empathy, and solidarity. You have elaborated those preconditions from a very personal approach. But how do they relate to *each other*? Do they also reflect a wider framework, such as human rights or social justice? In other words, how could a different kind of balance produce a different kind of freedom; and which one is preferable over the other?

Your concept of freedom is embedded in a world that is virtually ideal. But the reality is different: the world is blighted by chaos and conflict. If you look at the reality of our world, how do you deal with chaos: can a savage world without structure also generate freedom, and what kind of freedom are we talking about in that case?

You also discuss the room, and whether or not it’s empty. It isn’t: it’s filled with heritage, with the riches of history and with the intellectual work of those who went before us. Like them, each new generation asks itself how you can learn to be free, and how those preconditions should be (re-)balanced.

\*Osetwa (Kitovu) means ‘umbilical cord’ in the language of the Maasai

## **ECCE HOMO**

**Diversity.** If we start from a concept of freedom based on the perspective of protection and acceptance, it becomes difficult to both embrace complexity and diversity, and also protect ourselves. The world is continuously changing. People migrate, technology evolves. Time and again, people look for ways to curb dangers, to prevent contamination. As a result, freedom is constantly under pressure from all kinds of influences and forces, such as religion and capital. These threaten to reduce freedom to ideology, leaving our concept of freedom in constant danger of extinction.

How can we learn to deal with balance and fluctuation but also chaos and contamination, so we can stay on the side of the panarchy cycle where our freedom increases? How can complexity help us to... simplify complexity? How far do you want to go for your freedom and everybody else's? Perhaps you can also consider: the importance of breaking out of the cage, the joy of bridging gaps, the art of interaction, and the pleasure of contamination?

## **Breaking the Cage**

**Society.** "My freedom doesn't stop where someone else's freedom begins." This is a statement that breaks with the current cliché of repressive freedom, of freedom as defined by the least tolerant. Why should we conform to such a flawed notion of freedom, and how can we quantify – and perhaps even maximise – freedom with a set of paradoxes and dilemmas? There's this an almost utopian idea that those dilemmas could be the key to reconciliation.

It's interesting to note that you haven't tried to define freedom itself; after all, freedom is always part of a wider context.

As we see it, there are two main directions in which you can proceed. The first one has to do with the question of whether freedom is quantifiable. If it is, doesn't achieving the greatest possible degree of freedom become simply a matter of optimisation? Many thinkers before you have considered this problem... Because, undoubtedly, this approach also entails certain dangers. Where is the moral aspect of your algorithm? How do you choose one from the other, and how do you define boundaries? Take a case where my freedoms are many and someone else's are few: from an optimisation standpoint, this might be defensible. But not from a moral one. Perhaps you could explore this, using a case study?

The second direction relates to your idea of freedom as a learning space. As you say: freedom has a language, and freedom can be learned... The idea of a common language of freedom in diversity is very tempting in a world that is complex, and in which the differences between communities can often barely be bridged by words anymore.

## **UBUNTU\***

**Serendipity. Research by wondering.** We want to gift each group with the poetic reflections of Group 4, a uniquely spiritual and multi-layered group, as an additional inspiration in their quest. Group 4 made connections using a different approach which caused us to reflect on the concept of serendipity: the way many discoveries in art and science are born, by a combination of giving yourself over to chance and luck on the one hand, and of having a lot of insight and/or wisdom on the other hand. Is freedom an intuition, an experience that you get only if you are able to reconcile innocence with intelligence? Group 4 also put forward an intriguing question: whether we need to hide part of our identity in order to achieve freedom. Koen Vanmechelen links these questions to his work, Ubuntu.

\*Ubuntu is an African philosophy that translates as 'I am because we are'

*Additionally, we as the TT feel that a few themes have barely found their way into July's reflection exercise. Some of these themes may be worth considering in the broader context of what you'll be coming up with over the next few days. What about love and freedom, for example? Emotion and humour? Or, an even broader and perhaps more urgent theme: How could climate change affect our freedom? There's also an undeniably political dimension to our freedom, and not just in the sense of the opposition between democracy and non-democracy. There's also a deeper dimension, contained in the specific structure of our governments, international choices and organisations – think of NATO, the European Union or the United Nations.*

*We hope that in the coming days, you'll experience the same joy and freedom as we did on our journey across the richness of your ideas. Please know that your reflections are not, and never are, meaningless.*