Adrift in a Borderland.

*Developing participatory and embodied methodologies as a collective of asylum seekers, activists and academic scholars.*

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**Drifting – what and how?**

Drifting is a collective intervention into everyday reality.

In plain language, it means moving in a space with a group of people, visiting places that are significant to the research, observing, collecting experiences, making notes and debating the research topic.
Our ongoing research on racism and vulnerability has left us with many questions:

Precarias a la Deriva explored precarity. It was the topic of which all members of the collective had personal experience of.

Do we have experience of racism and vulnerability?
Research question either excludes knowing subjects or enables knowing

• Research object: Everyday experiences of racialized minority.

• Research object: Hierarchical whiteness as a system and structures, which inscribe and uphold white domination and bring minorities face to face with racism.

Is drifting activist research?

• To answer this question, it is useful to differentiate between discursively engaged research and practically engaged research:

  • the former is predominantly intellectual endeavor, resulting from a commitment to certain social and political aims and concerned with producing knowledge that reveals and challenges power inequalities and (in some cases) with stimulating public debate—a “kind of social advocacy delivered mostly from the steps of the academy.”

  • the latter term relates to practical, hands-on involvement and direct reciprocity, to “pragmatic engagement with the contemporary problems of our social and physical worlds”.

• Activist research combines social critique with practical involvement to bring about ‘change’.

(Huschke 2015)
Critical domain of knowledge

• “... a critique is not a matter of saying that things are not right as they are. It is a matter of pointing out on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices that we accept rest” (Foucault, 1988: 155).

• “The role of an intellectual is not to tell others what they have to do. By what right would he do so? The work of the intellectual is not to shape others’ political will: it is, through the analyses that he carried out in his own field, to question over and over again what is postulated as self-evident, to disturb people’s mental habits, the way they do and think things” (Foucault, 1997: 131).

Focus once again on the research question and the questions posed to drifters.

• Simple example:
  
  • What places are important for us in Joensuu?

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  • What places are important for us in Joensuu? Is our access to these places limited in any way? If so, how? What can we do together to change that?
Conclusions

For an activist researcher, the vacillation between political, emotional and analytical states is not simply moving between various identities (activist, human being, researcher), but ‘it is a state of being in itself’ (Hage 2009).

This is not an easy state of being to occupy, but it is important if activist researchers are to maintain the critical focus that makes our work worthwhile. Without a deep analysis, we are ‘just’ another supporter of the social or political cause. And yet, without a cause we are ‘just’ researchers. (see Petray 2012.)

References:

Thank you!

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