

herman de vries

being

this

joy

experience

unity

personal structures art projects #08

herman de vries
being this joy experience unity

this book is the documentation of personal structures art projects #08. it has been published as a limited edition. the edition comprises 200 copies of which 50 deluxe, numbered from 1 to 50, and 50 deluxe hors commerce, numbered from I to L. the 100 standard copies are numbered from 51 to 150. in addition, there have been created 10 artist proofs, numbered from 1 to 10. each item of this limited edition consists of a book and a dvd with an impression of the Steigerwald in a case, housed together in a cassette. the deluxe edition is signed by the artist and additionally contains an item from the Steigerwald.

this limited edition has been divided as follows:

1-50: deluxe edition: luiscius books, netherlands

51-150: standard edition: luiscius books, netherlands

hc H: not for trade

ap # 1-10: herman de vries

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herman de vries

being

this

joy

karlyn de jongh

experience

sarah gold

unity

herman de vries

do it

like it

be it

see it

feel it

hear it

smell it

taste it

like it

do it

live it

love it

yes

karlyn de jongh

three human beings
all different
all together
in this moment

human beings in nature
being naked
this is me
feeling natural
being open

time to speak
time to think
time to enjoy
time for each other
being together
here
now

sarah gold

steigerwald
somewhere in germany
3 days
into the forest
naked
with herman de vries

endless shades of green
every sight different
differs sight in sight
sound of the forest
sound of silence
a full-bodied sound
airplane flies over

winding between the trees
walking down a forest path
climbing up the hill
to find Wu Wei
non-doing

returning to my basket
the beautiful snail with its big house
had moved on
by the water
sitting in the stream
fresh
intense
life
experiencing
being
together
being

grasses on my body
itching
scratched all over
ticks
itching
horse flies

biting
we are not alone
entering a magical world
moss covered stones
surrounded by trees
some where
some time
sator
arepo
tenet
opera
rotas

by the pond
full-bodied raindrops hit the water
erratically
softly
leaving only ripples
peace

28 - 30 july 2014
steigerwald, germany

karlyn de jongh: herman, we are sitting here together in the middle of the steigerwald, germany, and are looking at your text piece "all in one one in all", carved into a stone. when we first approached you to do this personal structures art project with us and make our special edition book, one of the first things you said was that you would like the book to be printed in the typeface "futura". also "all in one one in all" is in this typeface. i have the feeling that you like this font not only for its visual appearance, but also for its reference to time, future. what does the future mean to you?

herman de vries: in first instance, i think it means expectation. expectation and hope.

kdj: yesterday, you told me about a conversation you once had with roman opalka and that you said to him that in your opinion time does not exist. if you believe that, can you still believe in a future? can you make a 'division' of time in past, present and future?

hdv: well, you notice that you exist from one moment to the next. you have a view on the past. and you have an expectation regarding the future, that everything will continue to exist from moment to moment. the distance between then and now shifts together inside of me. it is present in you and me. time is no longer present in what has been given. it all comes back in the now.

kdj: in your art you deal with change, with processes. this change can be seen by comparing different moments in time. for me, seeing this change is actually one of the arguments for thinking that time does exist. it seems that with the same argumentation, both of us come to a totally different conclusion.

hdv: time is an idea. it is a construction that is visible through these processes, but it exists only now. our existence is only now. we only expect that the process of our existence is also there after this moment. but that is really only an expectation. maybe what i try to indicate with these processes, is what other people call 'time'. but time does not exist in the way that a tree exists.

kdj: this expectation seems to have a lot to do with relying on the future: trusting that i will still be alive tomorrow.

hdv: yes, but until now it was always the case. 'until now' is also a notion of time. we always work with terms related to time. the only thing that exists is this instant. i always like how huxley put it: "this timeless moment."

kdj: when we are looking at, for example, this stone here, it has a past. in your opinion, is this past also present within this moment?

hdv: the stone exists and we know that it comes from the past. we can expect that it will also exist later on. but this part of the process is coming to an end. but we can also expect that if we would return here tomorrow, the stone will look approximately the same. maybe it will look a little different, if it rains tonight, or if there will be wind and a tree falls on top of it, the stone will look different tomorrow. it will always be slightly different. it is not the case, that everything will be the same.

we humans like to keep everything the same, in order to function and be able to count with things we actually have no real influence on. present is the process. that is the only thing that exists. you could say this process runs in time. that is a method to gain control over this process. however, essentially we are always only here. we are only within this instance. we can only hope that we will also be there in the next instance.

maybe, one day or another, i will get a heart attack and suddenly i will be gone. once i was in a botanical garden in the netherlands. the weather was quiet, but all of a sudden i heard an enormous noise: a tree trunk was hit and fell down only 50 meters away from where i was standing. if i would have been sitting there, i would probably not have survived. it was unexpected. or something can happen here in this forest. maybe a hunter mistakenly confuses me with a deer. these things are unlikely, but for sure they can happen. then the process (in this case my life) will end.

our future is predictable on our expectations. i live in the security of my expectation. but they are only chances, no security. it is only an image which i use in order to exist. the security does not exist. actually, i live in insecurity.

kdj: you have chosen a tranquil place to live and you spend a lot of your time in nature. the village in which you live, there does not seem to happen much. was it a conscious choice to live here? does that bring you a certain security?

hdv: that only incidentally has something to do with it. actually, i need a quiet place to ponder and to peacefully make my work. i need to think about my work and quietly reduce it to what i consider to be essential, nothing superfluous. it is nice when you can do that on your own, in all quietness. of course, you can also work within a team, but a situation where you are constantly in contact with all sorts of people

through telephone and internet, that is a situation in which i do not really like to live. i like to live on a relative distance, and to concentrate on the things that are essential for me. this attitude can also have negative consequences, financial consequences. once, i had shut down my telephone, because i wanted to have more peace and quietness. after two years, i had to reconnect my telephone, because i noticed that my earnings had dropped to a level where i would no longer be able to survive. in that period, i received telegrams saying "please, call me".

kdj: that seems to show also a wish to freedom. free from everything...

hdv: yes, freedom! the freedom to do and not do what you think is necessary. not the freedom to do nothing—although that would of course also be allowed, every human has his own importances.

kdj: one of the words out of the title of this book is 'joy'. are you happy or satisfied with your life?

hdv: yes, most of the time. most of the time the choices that i made were the right ones for me.

sarah gold: when i hear your stories, it seems that you have always gone through life in a very delightful way, enjoying every moment, sometimes with the use of drugs.

hdv: originally mainly with medicines, later in a delightful way. cannabis for example, helps me to set my thoughts free from all these everyday things. it helped me to set my mind free to develop new ideas for my art. its downside comes the next day, when you still remember your ideas—which is not always the case—you also have to think

about whether they are really what you wanted. you can think many things that are useless, or not realizable. but cannabis helped me a lot in bringing myself to new ideas and thoughts and to develop a philosophy.

back then, i sat behind my small desk and read all sorts of texts that interested me, especially upanishads, this indian philosophical literature, the books about forest. i never studied in a systematic way. i am not a person who works systematically. i always go back and forth and orientate myself on everything. i always have to find my way through this chaos of information. this way of working also opens possibilities.

ludwig wittgenstein describes this in his "philosophische bemerkungen": when he focusses his thoughts on a particular subject, he comes to a standstill. he always has to go back and forth. that is random research, i would say. one has to come across a certain thought. when you look for it, you cannot find it. that is also what i liked so much about the story lee ufan told you, which i read in your book "lee ufan: encounters": when he was searching for a stone for an exhibition many years ago, he could not find any stones; you have to come across a stone.

kdj: you have described your work as an act of presenting. this reminded me also of wittgenstein, when he speaks about ostensive definitions: defining what a tree is, by showing or presenting a tree.

hdv: yes, he is asking the question "what is a tree?" and if it is at all possible to define something. our language is a dualistic system. it is always this and that, yes and no. that is our language. and through our words we divide our experience into unities, so that we can speak about it. at the same time, that is a separation.

sg: you mean that because you describe your experience, you leave parts out?

hdv: yes, i always have this problem when i want to give something a title. i give a title, but then i think of another title which could also very well be possible. it happened that i had eight different titles for one and the same work. then you can better leave it. then you realize how limited you are. you give a possibility to understand something, but at the same time you exclude something else. that is why it is much better to just say: "look, here."

of course, i do use language.

kdj: in a way, with your work you also seem to make a selection: this leaf i show and that one i keep lying in the forest. or, for example, with your grass works "part", you make a selection: you take this particular cut and not another piece of grass.

hdv: yes, that is where i saw it. that is where i perceived it. now i give others the possibility to also perceive it. i say only very little about it.

i make a selection. that is my perception. that is my choice. that is private, personal. it is something that i cannot go around, something that i cannot escape. you cannot select a part out of reality, without it being a personal choice. or it has to be a random choice. i have also made works like that. the grey book "a random sample of the seeings of my beings" [2010] is an example of the random sampling of our being, and of that what we perceive. my perception and therewith the world in which we are operating, is part of my being. it belongs to my 'i'. when i look at this here, this is part of my 'i-moment' [ich augenblick]. this biotope i like more than a city biotope. why do i go there? that is where the museums and galleries are. they provide me with communication!

kdj: and at the same time, they give you the possibility to be here, in the forest.

hdv: yes, to return to this place here. this is a place where i return to almost every day, also when i have a lot of work to do. every day i go out, to be in this world. and when i am in a city, then at least have to walk. i have to move.

kdj: many artists who we meet for our project "personal structures" speak about life-time. it seems that you speak more about life-space, as you did for example in your book "to be" where you make a connection between your identity and your "life-space". i thought this was interesting, as you seem to identify yourself more with space than with time.

hdv: life-space is the space in which i operate. life-space. life-time is something else. i used to be a heavy asthma patient. i lost this asthma in an lsd-trip. i used to have a life expectancy of 50 years. thanks to lsd, i will now be able to represent the netherlands at the 2015 venice biennale.

with a life expectation of 50 years, i never believed in a long future for myself. i always thought of a short term future, always looking ahead for a maximum of a few years. i never thought: "i will do that when i retire." that is a thought that never occurred to me, because i never looked ahead that far. because i never looked so far ahead, my feeling for time intervals is probably different than for other people.

this stone "all in one one in all" is almost totally covered by algae now. it is very beautiful. i like it that it disappears like that. "one in all" almost totally blends into the world of mosses.

kdj: in thirty years from now this text will probably be totally covered. your text may no longer be visible and the work may be forgotten. how do you see the future of your artworks?

hdv: yes, most likely. you have to make a decision: do i want to keep it free? or do i let it develop the way it is doing now, that nature takes over? when i see the work like this, i cannot free it from these mosses. i have to let it be. i know that soon the text will be gone. maybe in two or three hundred years there will be some archeologists here in the steigerwald, and they discover my work. and they will be surprised: a text in english in the steigerwald! if there would be any archeologists then...

kdj: do you hope that one day somebody will discover your work? and that this person will then take care for it?

hdv: that would be nice. but i myself do not want to change it. i think it is so meaningful that it blends into nature. the act of freeing the text from the little plants that grow over it now, would be against the meaning of the text itself. maybe in the case of my other texts it will be fine to free them, but not this one.

kdj: with your stones being so accessible, lying in nature, in their natural habitat, it is a possible risk for violence. other people could damage it, like what happened with your work "sator arepo tenet opera rotas".

hdv: one stone got stolen. "sator arepo tenet opera rotas" was scratched out. it is a pity that it is scratched out, but fortunately it is still readable. it was three days of work to carve the text into the stone and a few months later a person had damaged it.

in france i have similar stone carvings. there, nothing happened. but here, yes. the pieces of gold from the destroyed letters were lying on the ground. it was glimmering. someone collected these pieces for me and i made a new work out of these fragments. i made the work as an archeological finding. a philosophy professor

then told me: "as a text it was perfect and it will stay perfect." he later bought the work. i always like telling this story, because i hope that the person who destroyed my work will hear that i sold it.

kdj: arnulf rainer's work was also once destroyed. thirty-odd years later he told me the story, when i visited him in tenerife, spain. it still hurt him. it seems that the fact that somebody destroyed your work is for you not a reason to be sad. you picked up the pieces and made something new out of it. life moves on.

hdv: it was annoying. the work was very beautiful: the sandstone had become red, here and there green algae had grown over it and then there was this golden text.

kdj: does that mean that for you there is a difference? when plants or algae grow over your golden text, and makes it less visible, then it is part of the work. but when another human being 'works over' it and the text becomes less visible, then you experience this effect as a destruction of your artwork?

hdv: yes, it is like that. and when i then tell the story that i was able to sell the work i had made from this destroyed material, then that is my revenge. hoping that one day it will be known to the offender. sator arepo tenet opera rotas. the creator (sator). arepo. keeps the work continuing [tenet opera rotas]. the situation reminds me of an old paintings that shows a setting in the old pastoral time. on a stone was written "et in arcadia ego" [even in arcadia, there am i—whereby 'i' can refer to death and 'arcadia' to utopian land]. i once used that sentence in france.

it's raining! it is wonderful to feel the rain drops on my naked skin. normally, people are not so happy when it is raining, but actually: it feels marvelous.

kdj: yes. the experience in nature is for you an experience with all the senses, isn't it? to feel, smell, hear...

hdv: my relation to nature is first of all through my senses. it is a sensual experience. first comes the sensual experience, then after that comes thinking. the act of thinking comes out of the possibility to experience. and our experiences are always sensual.

kdj: you once published a text in which you stated that you went to the forest in order to think. then when you were walking through the forest, you noticed that you had forgotten to think. i really like that statement.

hdv: i think that is one of the best texts i have ever written. it is true.

kdj: where lies for you the border between experiencing and thinking?

hdv: i think the experience is always primary. it is only later that thinking starts. without experiencing, we would not even be able to formulate our thoughts. you can also have thoughts that have never been verbally expressed before. you often think in text, but you can also have emotional thoughts. there is a transition between experiencing and a conscious perceiving or noticing without immediately formulating what it is that you are perceiving. that is of course a transition to thinking.

kdj: the last few days we have seen several bushes of the plant "bella donna". it seems that you immediately denote them as being "bella donna".

hdv: yes, that is because i know them and i want to tell you: "look, there is a bella donna." when i see them myself when i am alone, i must not necessarily have the word "bella donna" in my mind.

my best moments, my best existential moments are when i am without thoughts. they are only short moments, and it happens only now and then. they are very important moments of awareness. without that i am thinking, i experience that "i am here", i am present. this presence you have because of your presence, because of your being. potentially this is through the eyes or through the ears, but one does not think about this and is simply present. those are the most beautiful moments. they are also fruitful moments.

kdj: you have always been open about your interest in marijuana and the hallucinating effect of other plants. i have never really taken any drugs, only a few times i smoked weed, so, i do not really know anything about it. for me, it is remarkable that you on the one hand make works about a conscious "being here and now" and on the other hand smoke grass. it must be different, this experience of being here-and-now, while being under the influence of drugs. how do these acts go together?

hdv: when i am under the influence of cannabis, it can be that i do not even need the outside world in order to experience the present. but when it hit me, then it goes very fast, then i must think, think, think... there is no escape. that is circumstantially nasty, but it can also be fruitful.

sator arepo tenet opera rotas. it is a model for the world. it fits very well. i always say "chance and change." the change of the chance is the chance of the change. you are in a field of chances. one can leave it and do something else: you can go to paris, start a different profession or move to another town. then you have a new field of chances. you have a different relation to reality. a field of chances is never closed. it always has relations to other fields. also: there are always exits. it is always possible to leave a field of chances and visit a new one, but then of course, you do not know what you will get. also these

changes bring new chances with them. this idea of chance and change is something that occupied my thoughts and work for a long time.

kdj: how do you experience these chances? is it again something that you look towards with a positive attitude? or does it sometimes also frighten you not to know what consequences your choices can have?

hdv: under circumstances, it can frighten me. you do not know what will happen. but most often, almost always, there is an escape route. when you are not able to find a way to escape a chance field, you either have a big practical problem, or you are psychologically blocked. in both cases, you are very unlucky.

kdj: several of your stone inscriptions are located in the forest on places that are difficult to reach. "wu wei" [do nothing] for example is halfway on a hill. you are now 83 years old and although you are in great physical shape, i saw that it is not easy anymore for you to visit this stone. it will become more and more difficult for you to see your artworks like this. you never know if you will ever have the possibility to return. your chance to see it, will become less. in a way, i have the feeling it could be a "farewell" for you. how is the experience for you to climb up the hill, to see "wu wei"?

hdv: no, it is not a farewell. well, possibly. there was a time that it was more difficult to walk up. now it goes a bit easier. it is wonderful that i am doing so well and that i can walk up this hill to visit my stone.

who knows. maybe i will return one day. but you are right, it is becoming more and more difficult for me.

kdj: from the way you speak, it seems that you actually have a very open and serene attitude towards your death.

hdv: well, if i would become ill, i would look for help, just like anybody else. but even a possible illness, i would accept with a certain serenity. once i was ill in india. i was at the airport in madras and had 39°c fever. i was sitting there and i remember thinking: "well, let's see how it continues."

but what i am actually concerned about is that when something would happen to me, that my wife susanne would be alone. when i think about the fact that i will die, i am actually in first instance worried about this: that susanne will suddenly be standing alone, because this will not be easy for her.

kdj: besides susanne, are you really not concerned with the fact that one day you will no longer be alive? is that because you have had so many serious illnesses, that you are already happy to have reached this age?

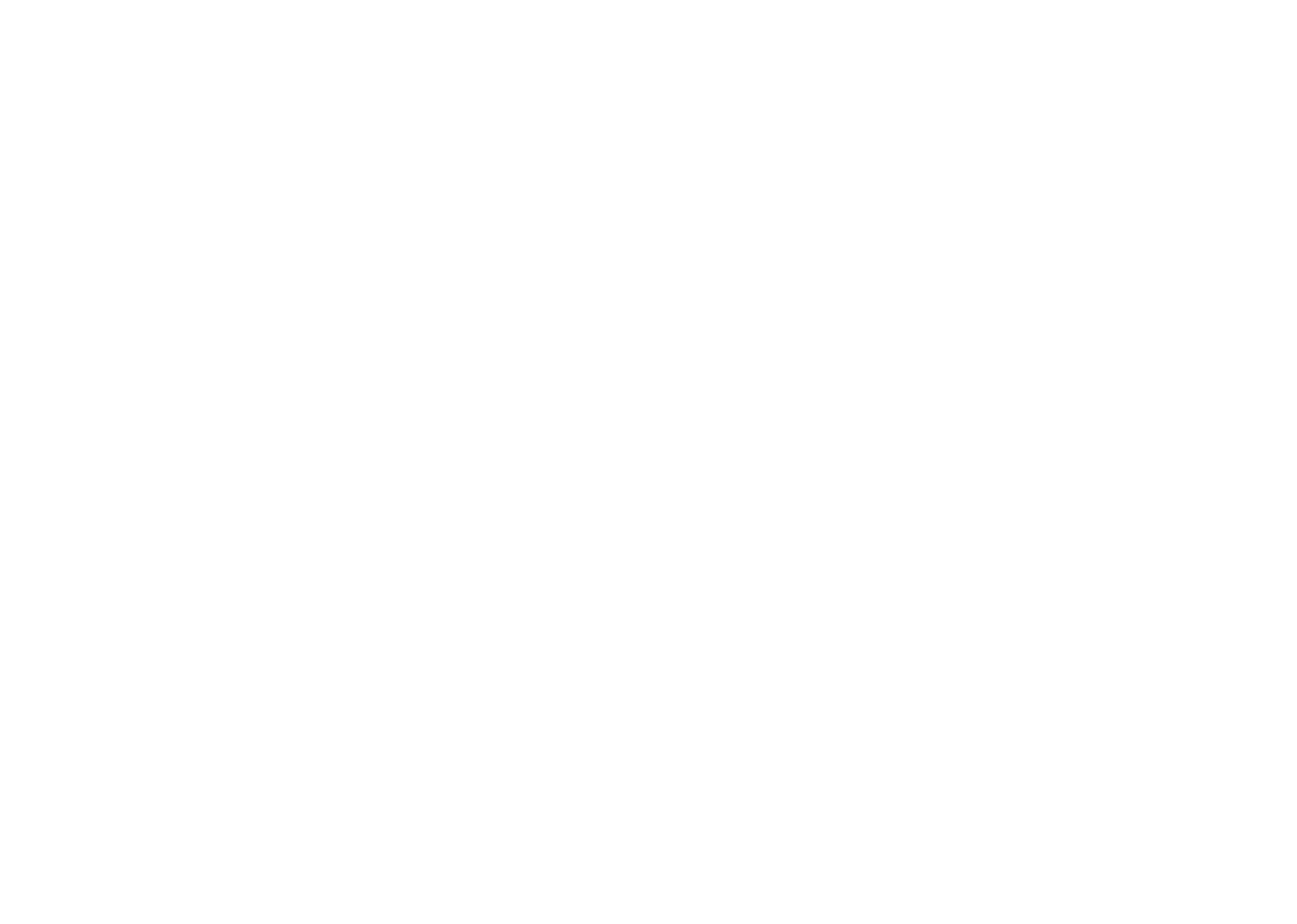
hdv: yes. without antibiotics i would not be alive anymore. but my serenity is also necessary. i am not a hero.

kdj: herman, despite the fact that you never had a long life expectancy, today we are sitting here in the steigerwald and you are 83 years old. how do you look at your own future nowadays?

hdv: it cannot take long anymore, but i do not know how long. more than ever, the ideas that i have in my head, i want to execute now. that is also why i am so happy to be able to represent the netherlands in the 2015 venice biennale, because it is a huge possibility to communicate my artwork. it is the best place i can have, to communicate with the world.





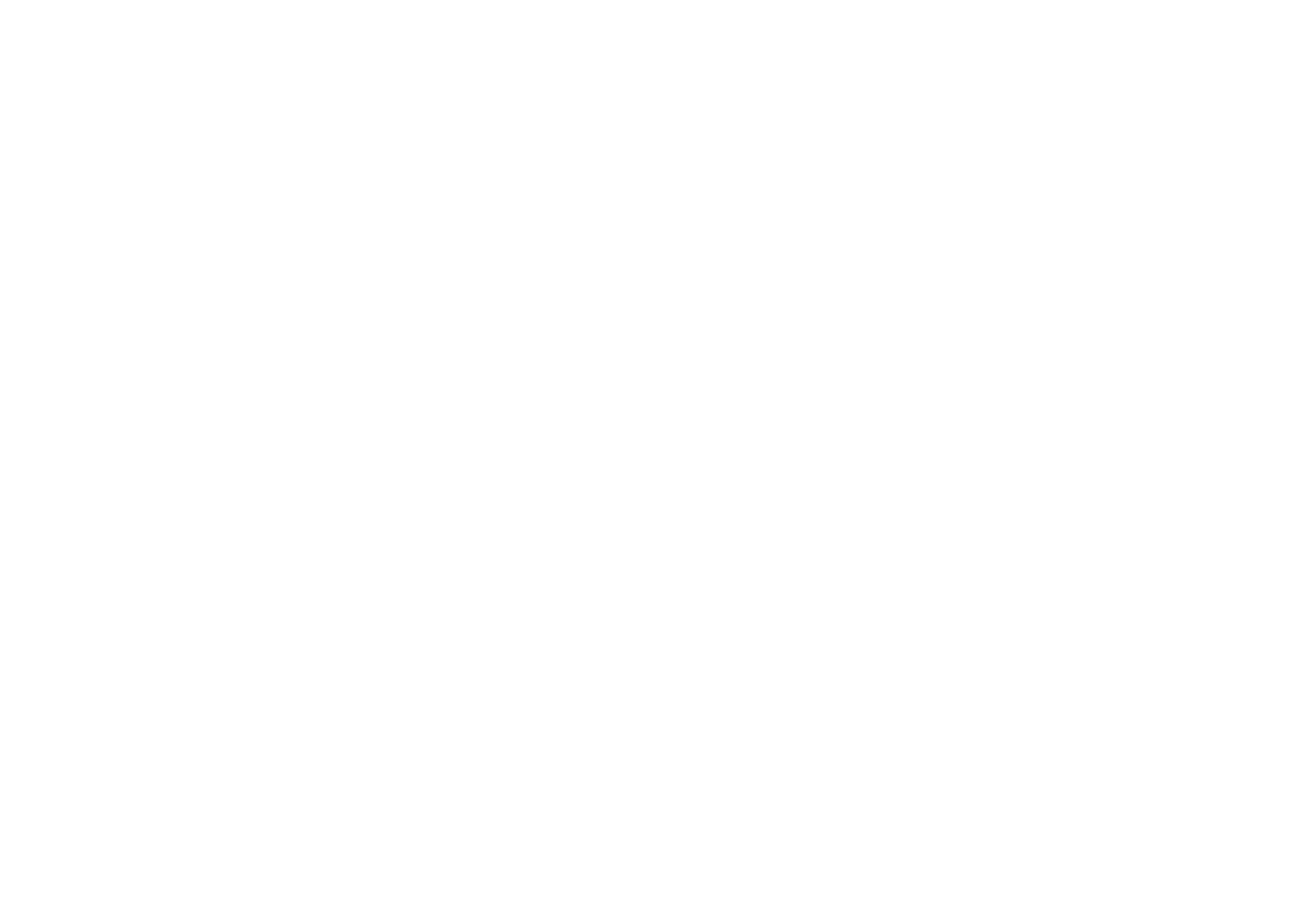










































































































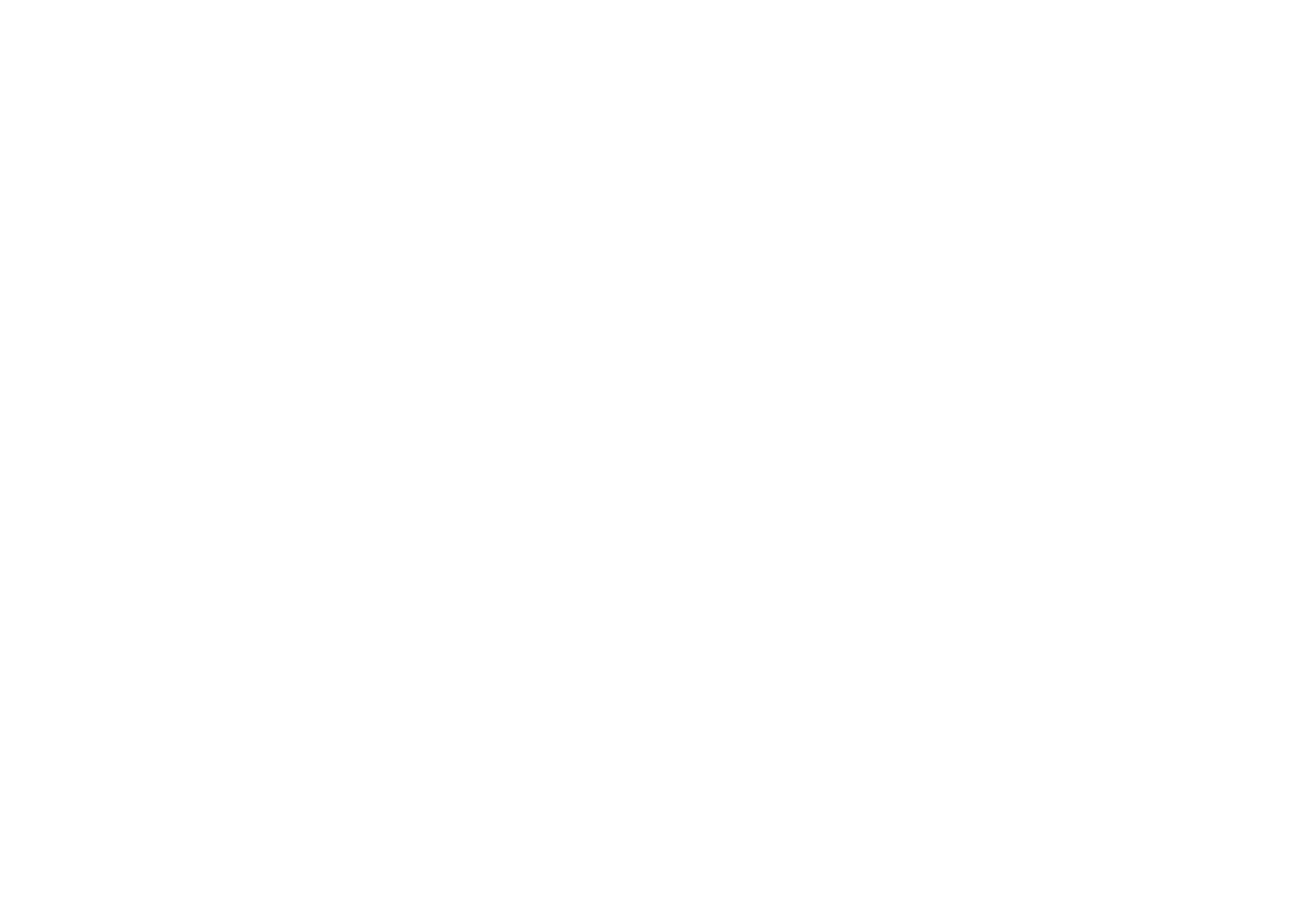


























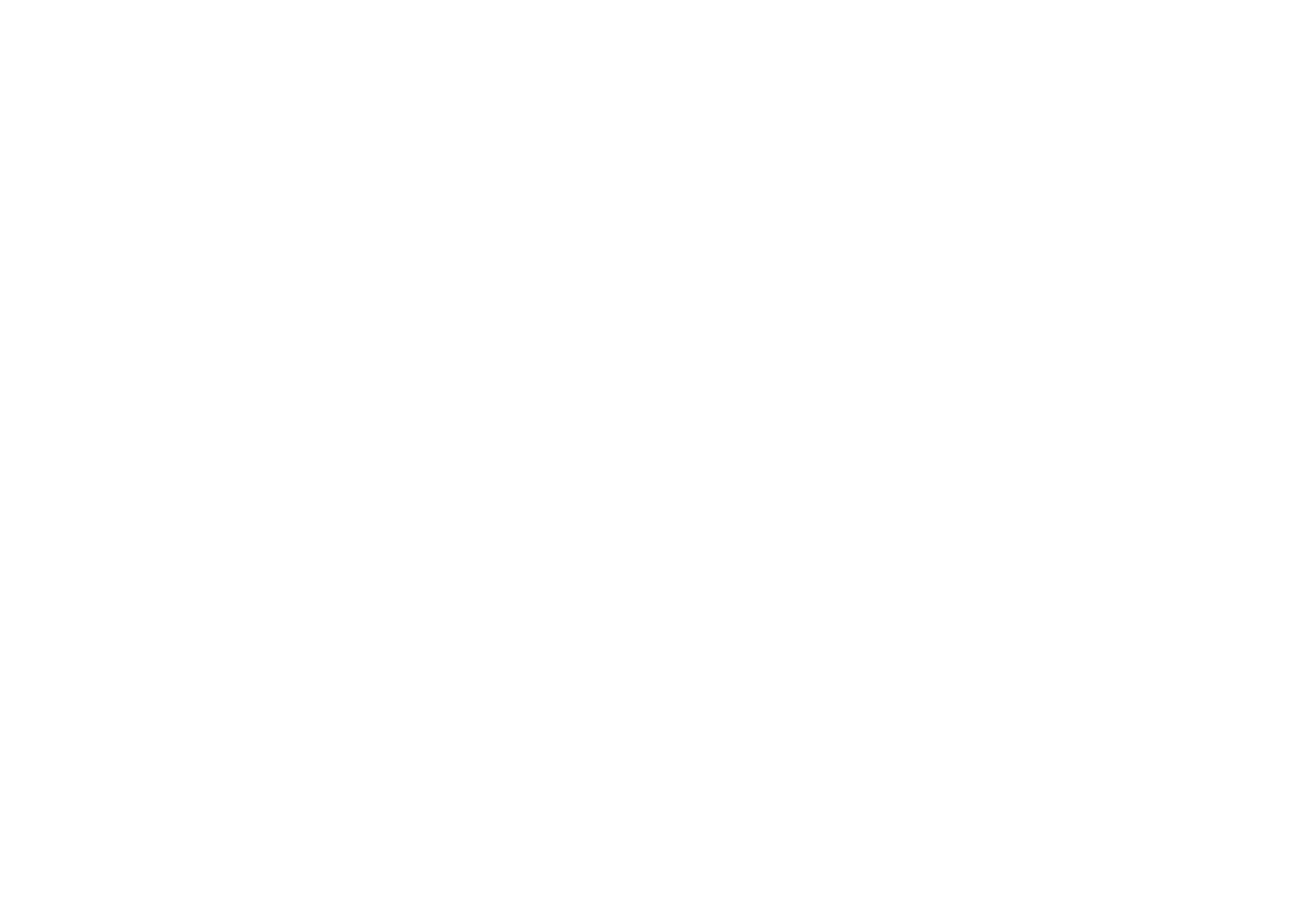






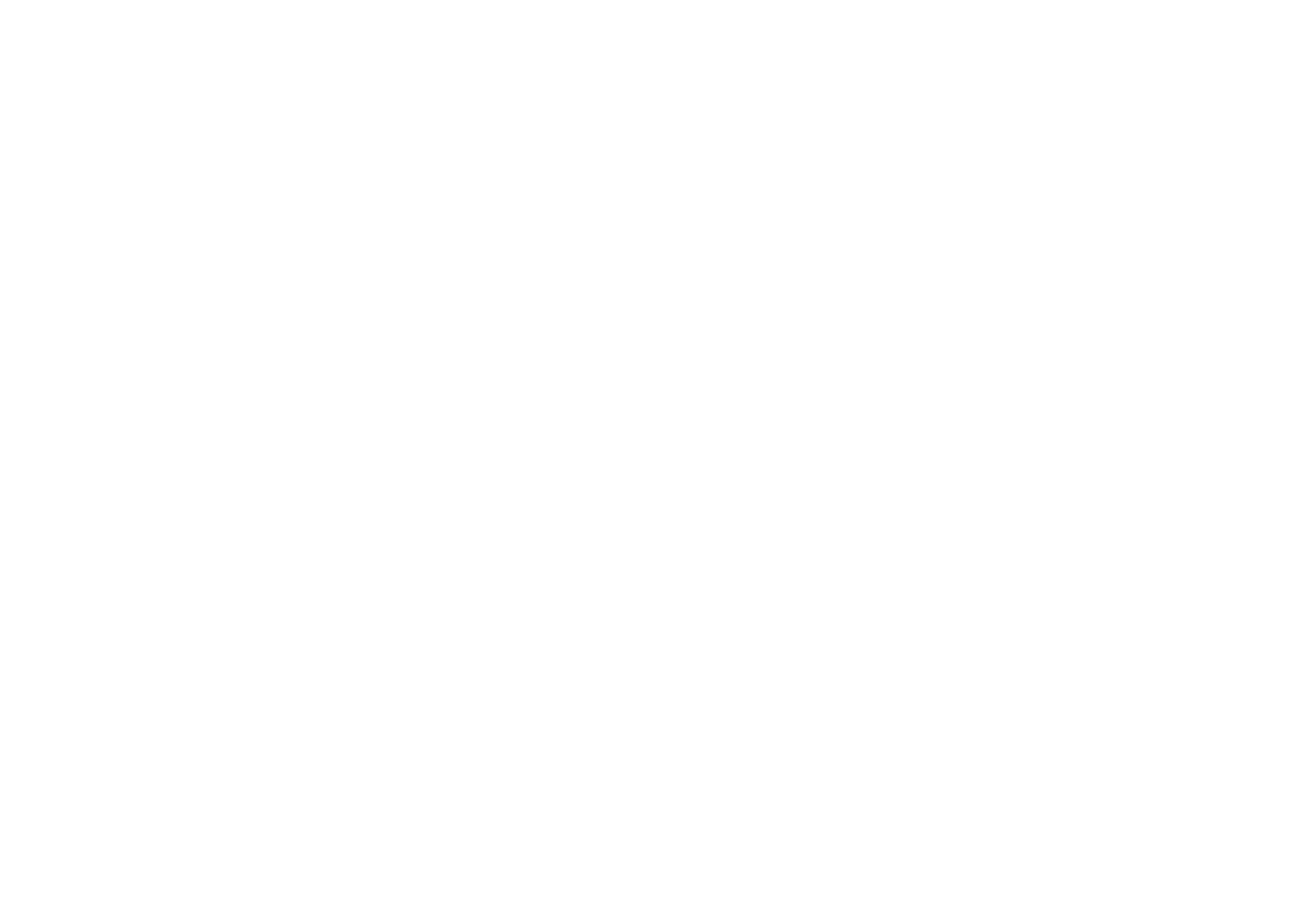


































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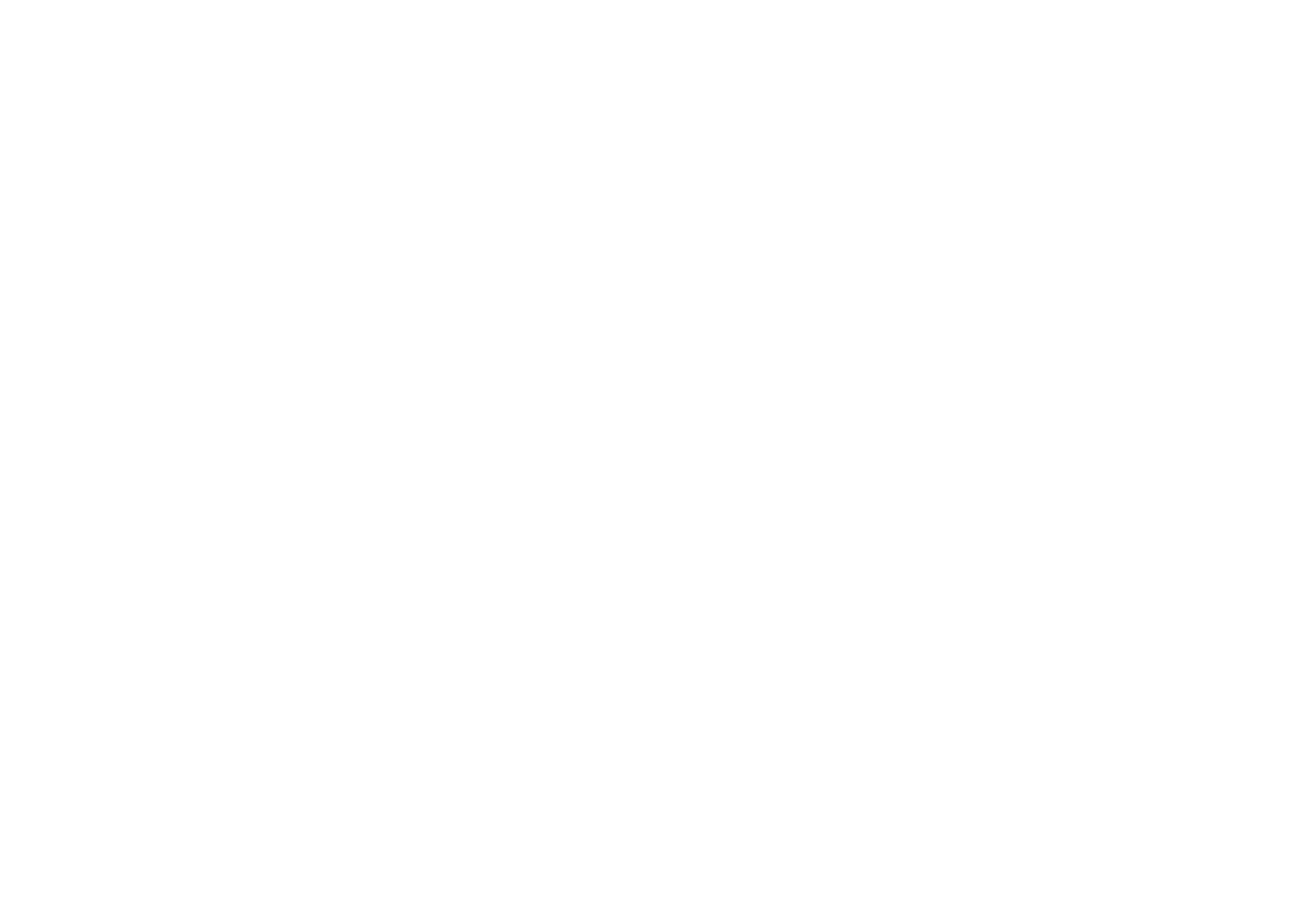








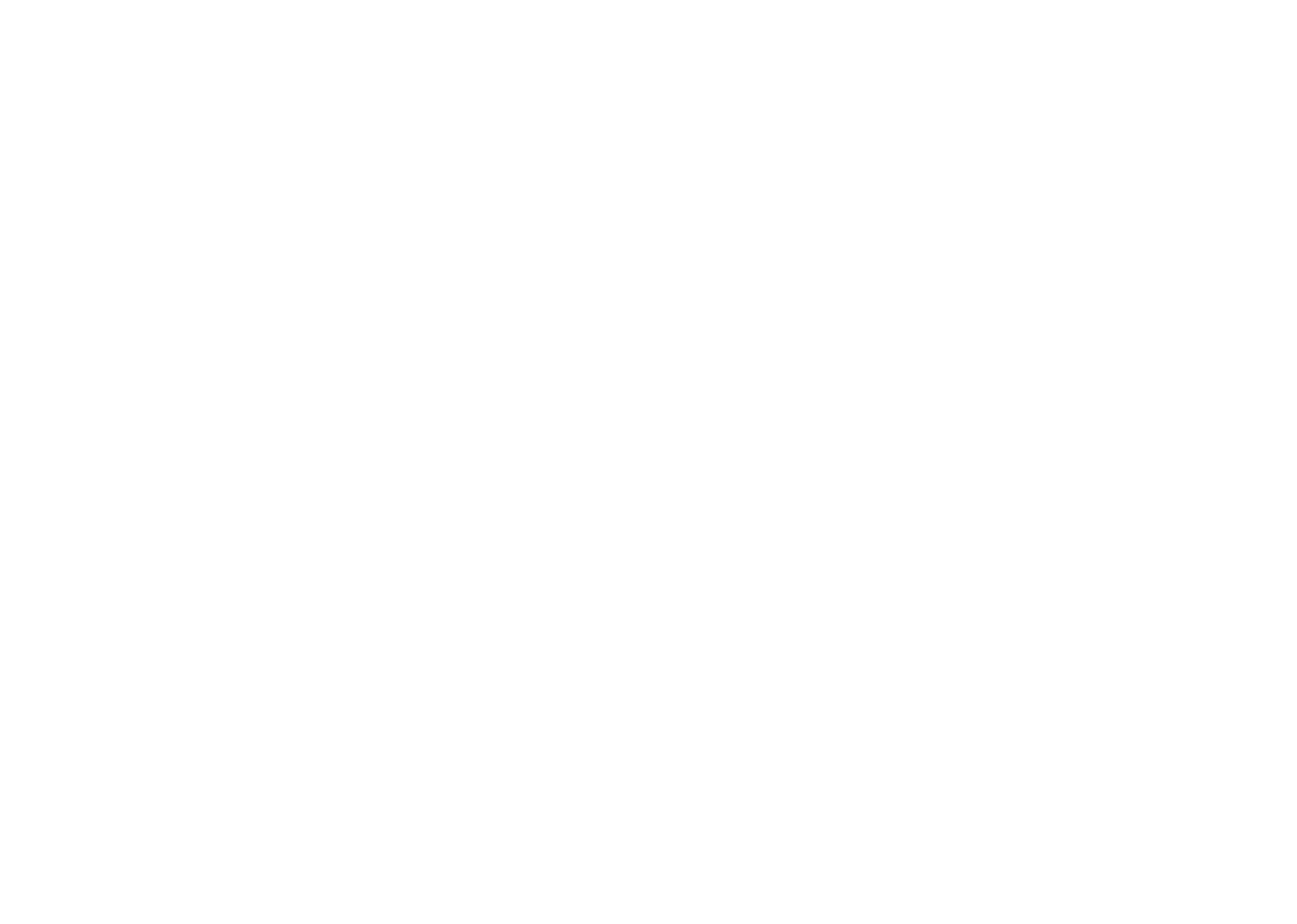










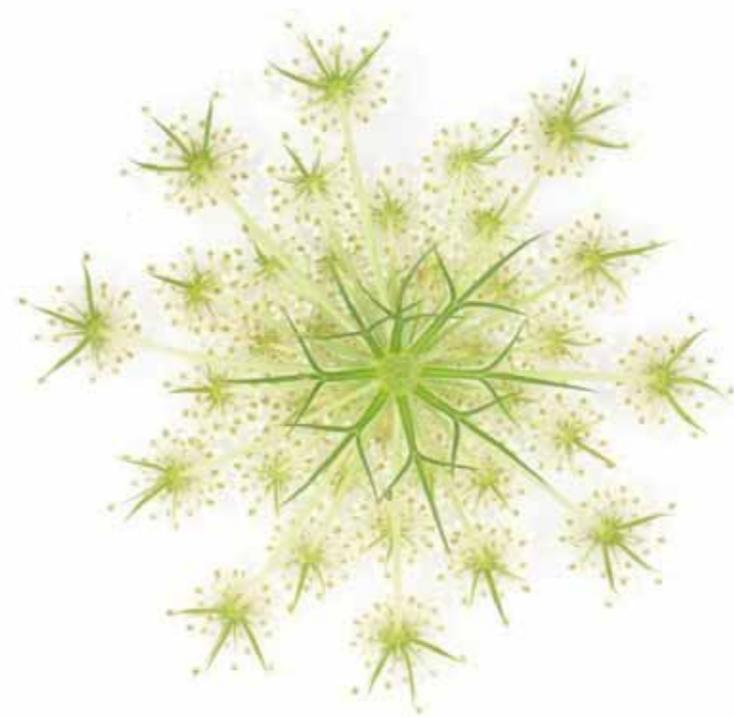














karlyn de jongh

karlyn de jongh (1980, netherlands), m.a. philosophy and m.phil. art history, artist, independent curator and author. since 2007 with the project personal structures, organizing symposia and exhibitions in a.o. amsterdam, new york and tokyo as well as at the 53rd, 54th and 55th venice biennale. with the global art affairs foundation, publishing books and documenting art projects, in coöperation with a.o. lawrence weiner, hermann nitsch and roman opalka.

[photo: eschenau, germany, 30 july 2014, 14:03]

sarah gold

sarah gold (1978, netherlands), m.a. art history, independent curator and author. since 2005 with the project personal structures, organizing symposia and exhibitions in a.o. amsterdam, new york and tokyo as well as at the 53rd, 54th and 55th venice biennale. with the global art affairs foundation, publishing books and documenting art projects, in coöperation with a.o. lawrence weiner, hermann nitsch and roman opalka.

[photo: eschenau, germany, 30 july 2014, 14:04]



Personal Structures Art Projects # 08

herman de vries

being this joy experience unity

Personal Structures Art Projects are projects which are documented as special edition artists' books. Each project centralizes one artist and emphasises his work. All books in this series are published by Global Art Affairs Foundation, the Netherlands. An excerpt of each project will additionally be published in the ongoing series "Personal Structures: Time Space Existence".

Previously published in this series:

LAWRENCE WEINER: SKIMMING THE WATER [MÉNAGE À QUATRE]

HERMANN NITSCH: UNDER MY SKIN

ROMAN OPALKA: TIME PASSING

ON KAWARA: UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

ARNULF RAINER: UNFINISHED INTO DEATH

LEE UFAN: ENCOUNTERS

BEN VAUTIER: INTROSPECTION TRUTH ART & SEX

In discussion to appear as part of Personal Structures Art Projects in 2014 is:

YOKO ONO

