

# Jenna Sutela

## Voices (Towards Other Institutions) #19



Jenna Sutela: *Many-Headed Reading*, 2016 (photo: Mikko Gaestel)

The audio above is a short recording from a live performance realized by artist Jenna Sutela in the context of her work with *Physarum polycephalum*, a single-celled yet “many-headed” species of slime mold.

Speaking about her piece, Jenna told us: “The exercise I originally learned from somatics teacher Danguole Venšlavičė-Mykolaitienė intends to produce an experience of embodied cognition. It’s also meant as training in socially derivative practice, including an element of risk taken together with another person, letting movement happen. Like the slime mold, people engaging in this exercise do not rely on a hierarchical structure of parts. Instead, they react to the environment in real time, adaptively, applying new degrees of freedom.”

In the audio, the exercise is recited with Elvia Wilk as part of the performance *Many-Headed Reading* at Haus der Kulturen der Welt

in Berlin, 2017.

An exercise to lose the head

Let's start by assuming a quadruped, four-legged position. To experience the middle-brain, the "not-knowing mind", you need to collaborate with another person who holds your head. First they move it from side to side, gently. Then they suddenly decide a direction for it. You should not be able to predict the direction of your head. The cortex should not have the time to analyze it. Like this, we get a sense of the body following the head without the brain knowing how or where the limbs are supposed to move.

*Jenna Sutela works with words, sounds, and other living media, such as *Bacillus subtilis natto* bacteria and the "many-headed" slime mold *Physarum polycephalum*. Her audiovisual pieces, sculptures, and performances seek to identify and react to precarious social and material moments, often in relation to technology. Sutela's work has been presented at museums and art contexts internationally, including Guggenheim Bilbao, Moderna Museet, and Serpentine Galleries. She is a Visiting Artist at The MIT Center for Art, Science & Technology (CAST) in 2019-20.*

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An Exercise to Lose the Head, 2017