## Foreword

### Masters of Fine Arts—Year 2

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Selected Activities

The World Turned Upside Down: Art and Ethics in the Rise of the ‘Stone Age South’

Dit Vindarna Bär / Whither the Winds, Lunds Konsthall, on the Occasion of Lund University’s 350th Anniversary

Mary Kelly, New Honorary Doctor at Lund University

Museet/The Museum/المتحف

Critical & Pedagogical Studies Exam Projects 2017

Moulding Course: Bronze/Aluminium/Silicone

Plastic Course

Welding Course

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There was an emergency message at the back of our Yearbook for 2015–16:

Save Malmö Art Academy—Open House

The school year ended with uncertainty about the future location of the Academy. In June, the Malmö City Council announced that it wanted to use the current building, Mellersta Förstadsskolan, as an elementary school. The Academy’s students organised an online petition and open house so people could see the importance of the facilities and how they have been used by art students over the years. The petition quickly gathered 6,000 signatures and an outpouring of support for the Academy. Though Lund University intends to build a new campus for the schools within the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts in the future, it remained uncertain where the Academy will be housed in the coming years.

This meant that the academic year of 2016–17 began with a certain amount of drama. Thanks to the extraordinary efforts and unity displayed by everybody at Malmö Art Academy—including students, teachers, and other staff—we managed to collaborate effectively and intensely with Malmö City and Lund University to find a good temporary solution to our lack of facilities while we wait for our new campus. The resolution was made public in March 2017. On June 30, 2018, the Art Academy will be moving to new facilities in the old tram sheds on Industrigatan, Mazetti Culture House on Friisgatan, and another property on Bergsgatan in Malmö. Being spread out over several buildings is less than ideal, but this arrangement means we will remain able to offer first-rate art education. After being fully renovated, the old tram sheds will house almost all studios; a student kitchen; workshops for metalwork, casting, ceramics, plastic, and wood; a photography studio and a darkroom; and a projects room. The Mazetti building will house our gallery, as well as rooms for Critical & Pedagogical Studies, offices for our administrative staff, the library, a lecture room, and a teaching room. We will be one floor below the Inter Arts Center, a connection of which we hope to make fruitful use. Across the street, we’ll have another floor with a few studios, teachers’ offices, a video-editing room, and a computer room.

Despite these challenges involving our facilities, they have in no way affected the school’s internal operations, and all classes, meetings, studio visits, work sessions, and parties were carried out as planned. You can find course descriptions for the year’s activities at the back of this Yearbook.

The spring of 2017 was dominated by one of the largest projects ever at the school: Professor Sarat Maharaj’s course “The World Turned Upside Down: Art and Ethics in the Rise of the ‘Stone Age South,’” which we organised in collaboration with Maumaus in Lisbon. The centrepiece of the course was a reconstruction of the room where Professor Maharaj studied art history at University of South Africa, University College in Durban for Blacks of Indian Origin in apartheid-era South Africa. Working from a blurry archival copy of a black-and-white photograph, students Sebastião Borges, Ellinor Lager, Max Ockborn, Joana Pereira, and Joakim Sandqvist reconstructed the room with its blend of an evolutionary perspective on art under white European dominance and a more global perspective, as evidenced by the various artefacts we see in the room: beside the compulsory copy of an ancient bust, there was also a Buddha’s head, Islamic tiling, a quote from the Indian theosophist Rukmini Devi, a rug made by the Zulu people, and sculptures hailing from a large number of different African traditions. This reconstructed room, with all of its desks and used couches, radiated an almost homely intimacy and served as the stage for lectures and seminars on the seven nodes touched upon by the project: migration, from 40,000 years into the past until today; pre-historic art; the colonisation of knowledge;
the actual situation in South Africa during apartheid and its consequences; local efforts against the apartheid regime in Malmö and Lund; how black women in South Africa are “forgotten” as the history of the struggle against apartheid is being written; and how we can work to decolonialise knowledge. To quote Professor Maharaj: “Alongside, a point to mull: how to deal with the ‘decolonialisation of knowledge’ in an all-encompassing knowledge society—a pansophic world? What mileage for the idea of art practice not as hard-nosed ‘knowledge production’ but its opposite—as ‘knowledgeable ignorance,’ as the mode of ‘Ignorantitis sapiens’?”

Also in the spring, Professor Franco Farinelli gave a lecture titled “The Nature of Mapping,” Associate Professor Jan Apel spoke on “The Scandinavian Pioneer Settlements,” and Professor Tom Higham presented on prehuman species like the Neanderthal and the Denisovan based on his own DNA research. We were also enlightened by the lectures “A Proper Name for Fascism: Torture, Humanism and the Challenge of Inimba” by Professor Paul Gilroy; “Unsettling White Temporalities” by Julia Willén; “The World Upside Down: A View from the South” by Dr. Betty Govinden, which touched on how black women are written into—and out of—history; and “Decolonising Minds? The Global Politics of Knowledge” by Professor Arathi Sriprakash. Activists from Afrikagrupperna and SAFRAN told us about their involvement in the struggle against apartheid back in the ’60s and ’70s, Jürgen Bock from Maumaus presented African film by artists like Manthia Diawara, and artist Angela Ferreira told us about her background as a Portuguese artist from Mozambique who studied at a white South African art school in the ’70s, and how this shaped her need for a politically meaningful artistic practice. In Manuela Ribiero Sanches’s seminar, the students read about Aimé Cesaire and Frantz Fanon and their struggles against French colonial politics in Africa.

Lund University celebrates its 350th anniversary in 2017. The Art Academy acknowledged this in an exhibition shown at Lunds Konsthall called Dit Vindarna Bär/Whither the Winds, May 19–September 17, 2017. This exhibition featured works by some of the many international and Scandinavian artists who have worked or still work at the Art Academy as teachers, mentors, guest lecturers, and doctoral candidates. We are grateful for the generous contributions of the Lund University Anniversary Fund and the Birgit och Sven Håkan Ohlssons Fund, which made this exhibition possible, and for the use of Lunds Konsthall’s space.

The Art Academy is also delighted to note that feminist pioneer, artist, and Professor Mary Kelly has been awarded an honorary doctorate by Lund University. Kelly has taught at the Art Academy several times and continues to play a highly significant role as a source of inspiration for the Academy’s programme. In a seminar held by Malmö Konsthall, Malmö Konstmuseum, and Malmö Art Academy, the people of Malmö and Lund were given the opportunity to experience her artistic production. We thank the Barbro Osher Pro Suecia Foundation for their generous contributions.

I would also like to thank all the external examiners of the various programmes at the school during 2016–17: senior research curator Marianne Torp from the National Gallery of Denmark, author Oscar van den Boogaard, director Jürgen Bock from Maumaus in Lisbon, and curator Barbara Mahlknecht from Vienna.

—Gertrud Sandqvist
Rector
Master of Fine Arts

Year 2

John Alberts
Julie Falk
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Simen Godtfredsen
Lavinia Jannesson
Mads Juel
Tina Kryhlmann
Viktor Landström
Marcus Matt
Nicklas Randau
Samaneh Reyhani
Selma Sjöstedt
Georgina Sleap
John Alberts

Untitled, 2017. Detail. Oil on linen. 195 x 155 cm. John Alberts
**Diomede**

A few years ago I was working on a painting of the Zinkensdamm sports field, which is close to where I grew up in Stockholm. In the lower middle of the painting, I tried to depict three people who were taking an evening walk across the ice in the skating rink. However, most of the surface of the painting was taken up by the city skyline. I soon discovered that it was very difficult to convey my experience of the sky in the painting: dirty and heavy, but simultaneously an uplifting and beautiful presence. Perhaps it was the glare of the floodlights and the light of the city, and the way they contrasted with the dark park to the west, that made me feel that way in that place more than anywhere else in the city. A cryptic reminder took hold of me, as a vague buzz travelling across my head, in warm circles. Dense, unpleasantly tangible, yet pleasurable all the same.

The light seemed to be as substantial and tangible in this sky as it was evasive. The colour of the light-polluted sky gave off a calming glare, revealing that it had been caused by human activity. The dense mass up there was a mixture of the needs, thoughts, and desires of all people. The barely definable hint of hidden participation. The hint that gives rise to the thought that there is something there behind it, under it. A living monochrome. The sky in the countryside, however rewarding its depth may be, is incomprehensible and distant, while the city sky can be frightening in its closeness.

Light and tone are the subjects that I explore, through a process of reduction. Just as a drawing or outline creates an image to be detected by the eye, the tactile experience of paint and colour can sometimes work on the same level of reality, although it is experienced in a separate part of consciousness. It seems as though the colours or the light are already present in the inner space; they have invisible counterparts. They make themselves known, and grow within the inner space through the viewing of the painting, which takes place in external space. Imagine if you could retain that experience, preserve it, and share it in such a way that the experience would be accessible to all. A knowledge within vision. I’m not sure “knowledge” is the right word. After all, it’s usually the case with knowledge that you learn something and are then able to produce it at will. That’s not how it works in this case. I’m speaking of a state that appears to be identical to the experience of understanding. However, states are evasive and fleeting, beyond the control of most people. We ought, then, to create new tools with the potential to open up our ability to understand. The state of understanding has to be re-experienced in order for it to find its way into reality, where it can be used as a tool for seeing beyond yourself. In my paintings, I seem to perceive interesting connections between the colour and the rhythm of the gestures—almost inexplicable ties between the colour I am seeing and the way it affects the tempo of the movements when the paint is applied to the surface. I experience this partnership between physical and perceived motion within a colour in a state that reminds me of daydreaming. Cohesive attention in a free state of wandering, in which the result has been made less important. Because I work on my paintings for long periods of time, and they go through various stages along the way, I want this aspect of painting to be present in the end result. However, I have to do the actual work in order to have this experience in the first place. The insight that the paint is, experiencing it as true.

An emotional state that I return to and that attracts me, both in my own art and in others’, is the simultaneous experience of familiarity and alienation. It’s impossible for me to put in words what it is that produces this effect, in the purely visual sense, because its appearance varies so. In my painting, I get it from minute perceptions of the material, from the light, and from the paint. As this emotion is contradictory in nature; I’ve learned that it can be precarious to lean too far in any single direction, as you risk positioning yourself within some concept that you’ve constructed, rather than experiencing the inherent ambivalence of the piece. I’ve found an interesting written description of this ambivalence in Sigmund Freud’s ideas about the uncanny. He suggests that aspects of our internal lives, such as fantasies, memories, fears, and wishes, have been suppressed and occasionally return to us as the uncanny sense that we have experienced them before, at some point in the past, although we don’t know where this feeling comes from.\(^1\) Freud states that his own rational opinion is that psychoanalysis can be regarded as a mystical act, as it is intended to reveal hidden aspects of the patient. One example of this sense of the uncanny, which Freud seeks to trace back to the early stages in the life of an individual, is the doppelgänger: the idea that we might encounter somebody who looks exactly like us, and who looks us...
right in the eyes. This experience would certainly produce an uncanny effect. The encounter of the doppelgänger is something that also works well in films. According to Freud, the unease caused by this fantasy originates in part in our uncertainties regarding our own subjectivity. We've been going around thinking that we're individual people, with private inner lives that only we can access. This is something that would no doubt be called into question after an encounter with a person who appeared to be identical to yourself. Underneath this fear of the dissolved ego lies just this kind of infantile, hidden fantasy, a thought or desire born of an uncontrolled self-love that has convinced us that we will live forever. The immortal soul. In this sense, the doppelgänger takes on a more positive role, in which it represents a way of addressing our own mortality. As we grow up, we're more than likely to have this conviction or idea of death tested. In this way, the doppelgänger as a symbol ends up representing nothing more than our own fears and insecurities about death.²

This is just one example of something starting out as a familiar part of our conception of the world and of ourselves, and subsequently being suppressed and transformed into something else. After spending a few years thinking about why certain expressions or modes within a painting can produce such a strong sense of unplaceable recognition, I have decided that these ideas have some validity. I'm looking for something new to see, something that will affect me, in my dual role as painter and viewer. It might seem obvious that a work needs to contain something new, a novel approach that makes the particular painting you're viewing interesting. This novelty doesn't have to be unlike anything anybody else has ever done before. But I have to think of the painting as new at the time. As a viewer of my own painting, my own expression, I can see that there is something very familiar there, in whatever aspect it is that seems completely new. Its familiarity probably stems from the fact that it's actually not new at all. It might seem new to me simply because I've forgotten about it. Whenever I encounter an artwork that penetrates my senses and resounds deeply within me, I experience it as new. This might be because I'm so fully in the present, in a state of great concentration, and what makes the impression so strong, what causes me to react at all, is my recognition of some element within the piece. Old-hidden-new-seen.

Without recognition, no strong reactions would ever occur, as something completely alien, whatever this might be, would lack all resonance, all internal correlates in the viewer, and would thus seem less viable as a work of art.

I am sceptical of the division Freud makes between children and “primitive man” on the one hand and the adult, modern, and rational individual on the other when it comes to religion and spirituality. The opinion I interpret in his essay is this: when we are children, we are narcissists who believe the world to be a magical place, and as we grow into adulthood, we realise that this is not the case, while still retaining traces of the earlier attitude, which occasionally returns to haunt us. Freud writes, more or less, that primitive man spent his whole life believing that the world possessed a soul, because he never grew up and became civilised. Personally, I think it is unnecessary to close any doors when seeking an answer to the question of what is true of the world in terms of religion and spirituality.

In his essay “The Uncanny,” Freud seems to be expressing a worldview and investigating a number of examples that support his way of seeing, none of which seem particularly interesting to me. Nonetheless, I find myself wanting to apply the idea that we all share hidden mental processes with one another to my painting, because I suspect, as a viewer of my own work, that certain hidden aspects of that inner world can be revealed. The sense of lightness I experience after encountering the alien-at-home suggests that these ideas are valid. It could be that it is somehow liberating to be confronted with this hidden side of yourself, as it proves to you that it might not be as dangerous as you had imagined. After all, there should be a reason why it was forgotten in the first place, right? After having immersed myself in this ambivalence in a landscape by Willem de Kooning, a scene by Édouard Vuillard, or the light in a room by Johannes Vermeer, my body seems lighter, and it feels as though a new pathway through my mental space has been opened up, one that was closed until that moment. Could it be that, as a viewer, you've been confronted with the things you had hidden inside you and that were getting in the way of your progress? You've caught sight of this through the work, and it has helped you feel forgiven, given you its blessing to walk on.

The act of seeking plays an important role in my work. When you seek something, it's important to leave as many doors open as possible, because you never know where you'll find something of value. Also, you need to be completely present in the moment, to make sure you don't miss something. Indulging in the kind of seeking where the thing you're looking for hasn't been formulated from the beginning—that is, where you don't determine anything in advance—is made meaningful by the belief that you can actually find connections inside yourself that you lack the words to express. I want to believe that art can act as an example in certain, good cases, where the artist works in a non-verbal domain rather than translating ideas from philosophy, psychology, or politics into painting. It's become clearer to me that it's important to maintain a certain attitude towards the work of painting. That this silent contemplation in the painting can reach deep into a viewer's mind. It's unreasonable to expect
this kind of painting to work on all of us. However, it can give the few people who are receptive to it a powerful experience.

I strive to maintain openness in my painting by seeking the silence in everything I see. Removing everything that expresses something, and keeping whatever is absolutely silent, and then working from there. Silence is the starting point for my exploration of the painting. If the painting becomes too clearly defined, all I need to do is enlarge it until it has nothing to say again. It’s easy to lose your way in this balancing act. That’s the greatest challenge for me. Gaining knowledge of what is actually valuable and can be shared with others despite this ambivalence, the impossibility of coming to an agreement.

I want to believe that it is possible to share one’s understanding of consciousness directly through the experience of investigating these ungraspable states. And further, that connections within our psyches, which are hidden until spotted, can be pointed out. An artwork can help us navigate our inner space, and I think that this inner orientation resides with what we often call our emotional life, where reason isn’t always such a useful tool. An emotion can exist as a part of a person, and control their thoughts and rationality, in the worst case without giving them any chance to reflect on what it is. Martin Lamm, in his book on Emanuel Swedenborg, describes Swedenborg’s assertion that language fails us when it comes to gaining understanding of such states: “Anima, then, is unknowable to us at its core. It is beyond reason, and thus also beyond our conceptual knowledge, and beyond the sphere of words. When we speak of it, we have to resort to words and similes that barely make sense.”

When you’re given an opportunity to view the connections between shades that run through the external to the internal in a painting, this opens up a significant clarity that finds its way in directly, as a reality rather than as an explanation. I want to believe that it is this aspect of an artwork that makes it meaningful to the right viewer. The fact that the viewer can use this internal and external dialogue with a painting to produce a deeper sense of understanding within their core being. In the words of Lamm:

> Through these series and degrees, the universe attains a kind of general uniformity. The same varietas harmonica that rules over the macrocosm also rules the microcosm. And thus, this doctrine also serves as an opportunity for us to use our experience to gain intimate knowledge of nature. We can, you see, from the study of later degrees within a series, which are more cohesive, or aggregated, conclude the existence of simpler, earlier degrees within the same series.

Just as we can make our way back to the big picture by observing points of contact in the external universe, we ought then be able to delve back into our inner space. However, this presupposes that we can detect recognisable signs in these series, so that we can form the circle in which this intimate gaze manifests. Lamm continues:

> When such natural-born thinkers arrive at a truth after a long train of thought, they experience a life-giving light, a kind of joyous, affirmative flash, which moulds itself around the sphere of their reason; a certain secretive radiation (occulta radiate), which passes through some sacred temple within the brain. In this way, a rational instinct of sorts reveals itself, to signal, in a way, that the soul has been summoned to an inner connection of some kind, and that it has in this moment somehow fallen back to the golden age of its integrity.

When I paint, I work in layers. This means that I paint on painted surfaces, which in turn means that I have to make decisions about how much of the layer underneath to leave exposed or cover up. I think I see this same interest in French painters from the turn of last century, such as Vuillard and Claude Monet. There is no way to calculate exactly how the brushstrokes will affect the painting, as they are at once creative and destructive acts. The ever-present risk of ruining the value of the painted surface gives rise to a sense of presence in the work, a denseness of concentration, where every gesture is made right at the melting point of creation.

The first, that which is added; the second, that which shines through. I try to exploit the irregularity of this relation to the material, to remain in the state of alertness that is necessary for me to see. When I have two things that presuppose one another, where one is nothing without the other, and where they influence one another in some seemingly irregular fashion, I have to trust in another tool that we might call intuition. Basing a painting on that ability can produce refreshing results in the context of our modern lifestyles. The way I see it, this is discovered in the relationship between the light and the dark, at the surface. A new space appears in this painting, a space that leaves behind a reminder of having been observed. At times, part of this activity feels like an exercise in intelligently directing my own will through a prohibitive and complex environment. Finding something resembling freedom within something restricted and strained. Cursive handwriting reminds me of this, a pedantic discipline in which any uncentered impulses must be restrained, as the activity is based on all too strict rules that must not be broken. A consequence of these regulated gestures is that there is no way to disregard the personal aspects of the style—they shine through whether you want them to or not. In an exploration of painting between the light and the dark, of what
covers up versus what shines through, things that
tell me something is beginning to happen with the
surface, in the obscure.

In reality, “a great clearness helps but little towards
affecting the passions, as it is in some sort an enemy
to all enthusiasms whatsoever.”

In this intuitive engagement with the obscure surface,
I discern choices regarding what ought to be made
more visible and what ought to be obfuscated to get
the aesthetics right. Choices of what we call taste. The
thing I find interesting about taste has to do with find-
ing your way to a judgment within the painting. Being
sensitive and judging at the same time, the “province
of judgment.” This is something I use, along with in-
tuition, in my painting practice of removing and add-
ing. In this strange state of concentration, in which I
see two sides being created at once, I find an approach
that expresses something significant about the diffi-
culties involved in navigating reality. The difficulty of
constructing meaning through judgment, which un-
less constantly monitored tends to alternate between
the overly critical and the excessively sensitive. One
side commits sabotage while the other side can para-
lyse you. Applying the paint in layers, a situation that
forces me to employ these two capacities, taste and
intuition, is thus essential to me. In my experience,
these two abilities have similarities in that they are
not tied to reason. The difference is that intuition is
activated in inner knowledge, and taste in external
knowledge. When I paint the whole surface with wet
paint, elegantly, in an ecstatic state of painting where
I become more autonomous before it can offer any insight into
the aesthetics right. Choices of what we call taste. The
closest thing to a judgment within the painting. Being
sensitive and judging at the same time, the “province
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intuition, is thus essential to me. In my experience,
these two abilities have similarities in that they are
not tied to reason. The difference is that intuition is
activated in inner knowledge, and taste in external
knowledge. When I paint the whole surface with wet
paint, elegantly, in an ecstatic state of painting where
the whole surface is connected, it is difficult for me
to call it ready and step away. These paintings seldom
work out in my view, because they don’t possess
the same inherent understanding and knowledge that
the more multifaceted paintings do. Temporary, quick
paintings, in which one layer is clearly visible, both-
ner me in the long run. They are too dependent on the
image within the painting. Whenever I see this in a
painting, I realise that it is far too closely tied to my
own conceptions. The surface should be worked and
made autonomous before it can offer any insight into
the painted picture. An elegant painting, which has
not undergone this transformation, may have a beau-
tiful surface, but it doesn’t display enough consistency.
I don’t see my own relationship to the external world
in the piece, and I see no reason to share a painting
like that.

I am currently in East Gotland, in a village right by
the sea, where I spent all of my childhood summers. In
the summer, this area is full of tourists and visitors,
but in the winter, like now, it’s almost empty, apart
from the smokehouse down by the harbour. This place
has a positive effect on me. The familiar landscape
is probably inside me somehow, in the way I think
Olav Christopher Jenssen claimed that we all carry
a landscape around with us to draw strength from.

Regardless of whether it is an internal or an exter-
nal one. Yesterday, I took a break from writing, and
decided to go out for a run. I needed a break from my
parents’ house, to clear my mind for a bit. I got out-
side, and began to run in a direction where there are
even fewer people than in the area where our house
is. Over to the fields, where you can sometimes see
the silhouette of a farmer on a tractor against the
horizon. Two solitary dirt roads run straight across
these fields, parallel to each other, one kilometre from
each side, like straight lines drawn through a desert
of ploughed land and crops. The country life, living in
a house in this place, which is so special to me, and
where my dad, my grandmother, and myself all spent
time as children, the impression of the majestic beau-
ty of the landscape that I pass through as I run inflicts
upon me a total presence, which is more carnal, more
lascivious, than anything I’m used to experiencing.
This feeling accompanies me all the way up to the end
of the first country road, to the main road, where I turn
right, and then down along the other dirt road, which
I follow as I descend back into this landscape. When
I’ve gone one-third of the way, the elated, euphoric
emotion shifts into the uneasy feeling that I am being
watched. The openness and beauty of the landscape,
which had such a beneficial effect on me just moments
ago, has changed. The thought that there is some-
body running behind me plagues me the whole way.
And when I turn around to look, I get the sense that
somebody is standing in front of me instead. Nothing
of what I’m seeing, which is almost exactly the same
landscape as before, brings me any happiness. I see
the same things, but instead of bliss, they provoke a
gnawing concern and an intense disquiet in me. I keep
my cool, and ruminate upon the fact that these two
extreme states can both be experienced in such a short
period of time, in a single situation.

The most common way for questionnaires to ask us to
rake our well-being is linearly: bad—good—very good.
Measuring positives and negatives is useful when it
comes to more moderate states, but if you want to
chart the extremes, like those in my little story here,
I think that attempting to depict our states in that
linear fashion is a most misleading and confusing
approach. You could say that I felt good when I was
running along the first country road, and that I felt
less good when I was running on the second one. That
would be true, as it happens, but it would still leave
out a very important aspect of the story: the fact that
these extremes seem to be strongly connected, and are
perhaps not so distant from one another after all. The
grandness and beauty of the landscape, my solitude,
the sense of belonging and being in the present. Any-
body who truly indulges in their sensuous nature in
the moment risks getting lost in such a way that the
concepts of feeling good and feeling bad won’t
carry much meaning. Instead of imagining pleasure
and pain as being at opposite ends of a line, I’d like to
suggest envisioning pain as being the north pole and

pleasure as being the south. They are thus maximally distant from one another, but resemble one another in terms of appearance, and in both having similar attractive forces. If we look at how a magnetic field surrounds a sphere like the earth, I think this gives a clearer picture of these two extremes than any linear depiction. The magnetic field moves around the sphere and descends through the poles, in what resembles the shape of an apple, through to the centre of the earth, and then out again on the other side. In my case, when I was out running, I’d like to think that I was just at the edge of one of the poles when I was feeling happy, and then slipped through the sphere, past its core, and emerged on the other side. To the opposite pole where everything is very similar, and just as extreme, just as present. Only on the opposite side of the centre.

In 1927, the Musée de l’Orangerie in Paris opened its permanent exhibit of paintings by Claude Monet. It consists of monumental murals that extend through two oval rooms. These pieces were created in the painter’s famous garden in Normandy, France. The subject of these works is the garden pond that Monet spent the last thirty years of his life painting. These efforts produced a large number of works, some of which were donated to the French state by Monet and subsequently given a home at the Musée de l’Orangerie, where they were installed shortly after the artist’s death.8

If you look closer, beyond the subject, at the panoramic paintings in these two rooms, you are struck by a mystical sense of the painting being whole, of everything fitting together. The paradox of the absolute wholeness of dissolved surfaces gives me a sense of fear-tinted delight, like a punch to the stomach. It’s impossible to just walk past them. To me, this experience has something to say about our gaze in contexts other than that of art. We walk around in the world, rarely experiencing, on the smaller scale, how deeply whole, meaningful, and vibrant it apparently is. Despite this, we see objects around us as separate from ourselves, objects that have no impact on our inner lives. What Monet does is remove all objects from his paintings and retain the meaning and wholeness. The relation is inverted. What is suggested is another gaze, which seeks to make itself available to us. We are allowed to use it as we see fit. Another response I have had to the contents of these paintings is the suspicion that the deeply meaningful, romantic gaze that Monet serves up to us in the spirit of impressionism is actually something dangerous. If we were to use our eyes to see as we do in Monet’s painting all the time, that would probably constitute psychotic behaviour. Where do you draw the line between a positive and pleasurable way of perceiving the world and a state of absolute terror and paranoia? Does a state, if sufficiently amplified, become its own opposite? In these rooms, I see the beautiful, the romantic, and the good as well as the opposite of these, which seems closed, angular, and exposed. As I mentioned, these paintings were donated to the French state, on the day after Armistice Day (the end of the Great War) in 1918, which has caused people to interpret them as symbolic of peace. In these paintings, I see a human experience that simultaneously encompasses both peacefulness and chaos.

If you disregard the motif of water lilies on the surface of the pond, and a tree here and there, I sense a particular way of thinking in how it has been painted. Thick brushstrokes over a surface that has been painted over so many times that there is no way of telling if it is a canvas or a panel. The surface seems to suggest something if you stand still and view it for a while; it’s obvious to me as a viewer that the creator of the work was driven by a powerful sense of will and conviction. I find the light in the darkness, and the darkness in the light. Perhaps the motif does have something to say after all? A place where dusk is falling. We’re given the opportunity to enter a state where we exist between light and darkness. The dim, grey light. The compactness of the surface of the water, made up as it is of a mass of paint, still leaves the impression of other layers hidden in the unknown depths of the water. The surfaces of paint are what is depicted, a fleeting surface of water lying on top of a compact, unknown depth. Monet has managed to convey a knowledge to me that seems to bring itself to life in the invisible. This knowledge suggests another way of moving through the world, opening up new potentials within my own abilities. The experience this gives me would never have been this accessible to me if he hadn’t trusted in his ability when he painted it. This ability is related to intuition, to trusting in your own taste and judgment. The result of the repeated use of this ability, which is what I feel I see here, becomes a gaze. Fully sharing a gaze takes consistency and discipline in every stage of the work. The surface begins to make its own demands, which we are unable to ignore. It fascinates me that this person managed to keep his discipline and consistency intact through so many endless metres of painting, so many years of painting this single artwork. Certain steps in the process of creating a painting can be incredibly dull. But they seem necessary for making the painting work as a whole. I recognise this from my own role as a painter, as I find myself in that same situation over and over again.

“All the natural powers in man, which I know, that are conversant about external objects, are the senses; the imagination; and the judgement. And first with regards to the senses. We do and we must suppose, that as the conformation of their organs are nearly, or altogether the same in all men, so the manner of perceiving external objects is in all men the same, or with little difference.”9

Why does a painting become more accessible to us as viewers when the painter has consistently followed their sensuality, their judgment, and their intuition? I think Edmund Burke is on to something when he says
that these abilities are common to all people. They look the same in all people, and this means that they can be shared. If you start from the premise that there is something to Burke’s claim, it seems to me that the task of the painter is to get as close to these abilities as they can, and to trust in them fully, in order to make a work of art maximally accessible to the viewer. This means, then, that we have to share the things we have in common. Make them available for others to see. My own art isn’t just an exploration of this, but I think it is important for all art that it resound with something that is already present within us. For us to discover and rely on abilities that we share with others.

Unlike the chronological readings of poetry and music—two art forms that can be used to express states and emotions that are otherwise non-verbal and contourless—paintings are read outside of time. They have no beginning and no end. Of course, certain elements in a painting can be constructed to be noticed first by a viewer, before other parts of it are discovered. But despite this, there is no predetermined chronological path for the viewer to follow through the work. The two-dimensional image is entirely mute and timeless and remains in its own physicality. It also cannot be studied in the same way that a sculpture can. It is not an object with different sides, each demanding to be explored separately.

I think that these distinguishing characteristics offer both problems and advantages in the work and in the viewing. If you compare music, say, to painting, it is possible to be affected by a painting in the same physical sense as by music, despite the fact that no physical touch occurs. Vibrating sound waves touch the organs of the ear, so that even though the experience of music can be deemed a “spiritual” one, it is based on touch, unlike that of painting, where the viewer hopefully doesn’t physically feel the work. However, in order for a painting to have this effect, I think the content has to have a cohesive duality, which causes the viewer to look inwards at the same time as they look outwards. The words of a novel aren’t intended to give the illusion of organic life, “they are intended to pulse through the blood vessels of associations that are given to you in your role as reader.”

Music is physically perceptible, consisting as it does of vibrations, and it is a thing that affects all people to some degree or other. Non-figurative images, on the other hand, don’t have the same immediate influence, for better and for worse, as, once again, they lack the
corresponding physical contact. The idea that it could be possible to produce physical pain with monochrome painting, in the same way and with the same force as with sound, is hard for me to imagine. For the same reason, I have a hard time believing that people generally respond to colour in the same positive way as they do to music. The complexity of painting grabs me with a greater sense of joy, and an even greater fascination, whenever I am fully absorbed by colours as opposed to musical notes. The experience of painting, then, leaves me with a powerful sense that I am more closely related to the outside world, the kind of insight that cannot be explained or taught, as its full potential can only be reached through experience.

This understanding of the conditions of painting, as I see it, gives me three directions to explore and express in my images. The first is to create the illusion of depth and light, so that the viewer can be drawn into the piece. The second is to use thematic worlds or storytelling and do things like express what I want to show through similes. The third is to present a non-figurative synthesis of cognitive realisations brought about by the material used in the work. Perhaps it is the case that these all bleed into one another at different stages of the work, but I have to say that I usually end up in the last of the three in my own work. For me, this approach gives rise to an exciting relationship between the two-dimensional object, the timeless reading, and our own fleeting inner states. In my paintings, I strive to make this non-chronological reading, as I see it, as accessible as possible. The place where I look for a subject is within the various layers of the painting. The surface appears flat in these works. What lies beneath extracts what is in front. They make each other visible, and work together to produce conditions for a reading in which the colours see each other. It’s when I’m choosing colours that I need to do the most thinking. I sometimes have to arrive at the right colour by experimenting with the material, and mixing paints, to find out what I need to do to progress. Sometimes the answer comes to me as a stray thought when I’m busy doing something else. Which paint to mix with which, and how light or dark a shade to use in relation to the underlying surface. In specific, good relations between two layers of paint, in their “speech,” I seem to see a third layer that gives rise to their correspondence. A result.

I imagine sitting in a park, watching all four seasons cycle past in a simultaneous jumble in which there isn’t much point in trying to discern and define...

summer or winter. They are like membranes covering my eyes, blending into one another as they form a whole for me to rest my vision on. The expressions of each season converge, despite their conflicting wills, accessible and visible, to be followed by my gaze, shifting from one to another at my own pace. Using my eyes to see everything and nothing at once in this timelessness makes me more aware of what it is I am seeing beyond the visible.

Eugène Leroy is a painter whose works I have come to be inspired by these last few years. I feel he has discovered an exciting space in his paintings, in his long experience as a painter, in which thought, emotions, and matter are brought together to produce a thrilling effect. He paints over his painting, and does whatever looks necessary, to the point where it seems almost absurd, and yet manages to keep from ever becoming destructive. It is paradoxical and mysterious to me how the process of his painting can seem so cold, raw, and ruthless, mechanical almost, while still possessing such a tangible sense of care, which comes across as incredibly sensual. I seem to see it somewhere on the surface. A connecting membrane, offering us an overview of what is below and what is above.

His painting interests me as he seems to have been able to become comfortable with and trust in older modes of painting while still making them uniquely his own. As the viewer of his painting, I see, among other things, an ability or a quality of motion that you can find in certain rococo paintings. I find it interesting that a maverick like him, using a distinctly unique mode of expression in his thickly layered canvases, still seems to be sharing his own impressions of painting from a long distant past. In his paintings, I see an experience appear before me. I see the same experience in eighteenth-century rococo paintings. Perhaps it is a longing for freedom that resides in the material, longing to explode into the room, in combination with a powerful sense of mournfulness. Invisible anxiety, which threatens to take over as the power and freedom to consume the world bring with them a potential meaninglessness. A spiritual longing, watered down by greed, turning its gaze towards a lifeless and superficial existence, where paint is just material void of all meaning.

I find the thought that there is something alive in painting—a remnant from a time gone by—an absolutely fascinating. Trying to identify these little characteristics that make the paintings of others significant for me is a necessary process for me. When I visit a large museum, with whole walls full of eighteenth-century paintings, the first thing that strikes me is the urge to just walk through the rooms as fast as possible. The imagery represented in these paintings is far too niche and gaudy for me to take it in. When I decide to walk past, I often catch sight of something that grabs my attention from the corner of my eye. One of all those old, inaccessible paintings that are hanging there draws me to it. This unconscious arbitrariness gives me a sense of how inexplicable the recognition that an image expresses can be. In these situations, I’ll sometimes remain standing in front of a painting like this for quite a while, trying to figure out why this particular work connects with me. It must be something, because I experienced with my whole being that this particular one somehow mattered more than all the other works with similar subjects. I understand that it has nothing to do with the imagery, the figurative content; it’s about the content of the paint and the composition. Perhaps it’s a presence I experience in the way that the paint has been applied. I stand there for a long time, looking for important points. That particular little brushstroke, or some small difference in the shade of a colour. Although I can’t always put this thing that seems so significant into words, I can tell that the riddles I’ve found in these old paintings recur in my own painting, to be re-experienced, observed, and explored in a new light. It could be a particular contemplative activity that I recognise in the paintings.

They seem to exist in all ages, united by nothing so much as by their lack of answers.

4. Lamm, Swedenborg, 72.
5. Lamm, Swedenborg, 66.
You can lose your language and be presented with nothing. You will have to start all over, even if, in that situation, it can be tempting to remain silent. Emanating from feelings like: We don’t know anything, so why say something? We don’t know where anything ends, so why even try.

Needing to restart. Stack essential elements on top of each other, which may serve as fertile soil for several capacities that can offer access and give rise to orientation. A kind of structured programming. Simple combinations that can tune our perception to a degree that is more sharply focused than merely combined. Starting from the outside, because it feels easier to talk around something than about something. But also because this opens up movement: a kind of zoom.

To zoom makes it possible to jump in and out of entities and makes us able to examine different levels of reality. Just like this text. Zooming can most aptly be described as moving at high speed. It is a movement that affects your surroundings, so that something appears to be much closer or farther away. So close that what is being observed no longer makes sense. Dissolved. But still reveals that emptiness is full.

zoom ++++: Material (pre-, post-air)

Air was a collective of substances: gasses, particles, vapours. It gave up its home to things: motion, electricity, dreams, pollution, sound, the internet. Together, they live between things larger than themselves, without fixed domains or permanent permissions. Hierarchies are being neutralised. It is a place where things are located and events happen. A medium with its own consistency and, most of all, with its own active agenda.

You create objects in a world where there are already too many. Sculptural production should never be about adding, but about articulating, widening, and embracing that which is already there. About awakening forces. Through sculpture. While we respect it.

Sculpture can release potential and ought not to be subjected to reduction. It will never simply be a reactive gesture, but rather an autonomous body.

“It doesn’t represent reality. It is a fragment of the real world. It is a thing just like any other—a thing like you and me.”1
“A Thing Like You and Me” is the title of an essay that Hito Steyerl wrote in 2010. She touches upon Walter Benjamin’s works that focus on the surrealists, in which he underscores the liberating force in things. In commodity fetishism, material, as such, generates cross-breeding between influence and craving. Benjamin fantasizes about igniting these compressed forces, about awakening the slumbering collective from its dream-filled sleep of capitalist production. In order to tap into these forces. Benjamin’s idea of participation asserts that it is possible to participate in this symphony of matter. To him, modest and abject objects are hieroglyphs, whose dark prisms of social relations lie concealed and fragmented. Things have to be understood as nodes, where the tensions of historical moments can be materialized in a glimpse of consciousness or they will turn and twist grotesquely into commodity fetishism.

From this perspective, a thing is never just an object, but a fossil, where a constellation of forces is petrified. Things “are never just inert objects, passive items, or lifeless shucks, but consist of tensions, forces, hidden powers, all being constantly exchanged.” While this statement runs tangentially to magical powers, all being constantly exchanged. It feels safe to say that scaffold netting is a classical materialistic grip. Because the commodity is being apprehended not merely as a simple object, but rather as “a condensation of social forces.”

**zoom —–: Volume**

*Surfacer* (2017) is a sculptural spacious negotiation. A frame that has been created for the elemental forces we share the world with.

*Surfacer* offers support. A kind of station for what can be overlooked. Created by scaffold netting whose properties lie in embracing and framing. In general, scaffold netting is used to form temporary walls, insulating sound and protecting those bodies that stay underneath or move around it. Examining this from a flat ontological perspective, “bodies” will never be only human figures, but rather it is as if there is a heartbeat in everything.

It feels safe to say that scaffold netting is a material that can sculpt air. Even so, selecting an uncommon colour for the net may be necessary, because the material is hacked with your own agenda. Its role is extended.

Sculptures are created outside the exhibition space and will therefore always be something that have forced their way in. It seems logical that they are dressed for being outside: easy and essential. *Surfacer* is a light structure, where scaffold netting is attached to thin metal frames. They work as independent side parts, a support structure where many parts are used to close a circuit. (Imagine a discarded grapefruit peel in pieces; it still tells us that it once was able to contain something.)

An establishment of a place concentrated around air: light things.

The sculpture manifests things’ presence, since, by virtue of its role as support, it will always be against something else. In physical contact, so close that they touch. To be against is an indication of a relationship in contrast. It is a position of active antagonism, which only disappears when there is no longer any touching. Support is defined in negation and will never be a confirmation in itself. It can never become the primary: it is neither the innermost nor the outermost, neither closed nor ever finished.

*Surfacer* has legs so that it can rise up from supporting, leaving it behind as a verb, and accept the role as sculpture. With positions created on the basis of your body’s experiences related to the act of standing: hanging, leaning, balancing, and whatever the material dictates. On several legs, since they have been created in order to walk (free). Not like a tripod with three legs that has been created in order to stand.

In 1997, *Torqued Ellipses* arrived at Dia:Beacon in Upstate New York. This Richard Serra work was created at steelworks in Baltimore and thereafter travelled to its new home. At Dia:Beacon, all the rooms are created specifically for the works that are going to live there. It is a former factory, where original details have been preserved—among other things, gigantic doors, so even large sculptures like *Torqued Ellipses* can sail their way in. The doors are still there, which entails that another future for the works is as part of the architecture. Consecrated to the moment when sculpture walks out.

With the supplemental in their DNA, your sculptures evade location so as to find a fixed place on the map. They have free movement and will never take ownership of a place. In their capacity of being sculpture, they will always be taking a risk, by virtue of taking place without having a genuine home. However, this should not stop them from having a jurisdiction or a base: that which does not have a fixed domain should still have a territory and a base to stand upon.

Together you create a unit. It is not a relationship of subject to object, but a relationship of thing to thing, driven by that which you can be together. As a travelling circus, where everything needed exists within, unbelonging to anything as specific as a cube or a home. It makes you a productive force, a station. We station.
Julie Falk
zoom +: Support Structures

Support Structures (2009) is an inquiry concerning what support constitutes and documents a collaboration between the artists Céline Condorelli and Gavin Wade. By registering and collecting referential projects into a new archive that amalgamates around frameworks and texts, they have managed to fashion a theoretical distinction. At the same time, the archive offers various opportunities for taking part in Support Structures as theory form.

Condorelli and Wade’s work is, in itself, also a support structure: a manual for that which bears and upholds, for props, for those things that actuate, take care of, and assist, for that which it identifies with, for that which articulates, for that which stands behind, frames, and sustains. It is a manual for the things that offer support, where the supportive work traditionally occurs subsequently, non-essentially, and with a lack of value in itself.

They manage to address important questions for art and architecture practices related to forms of display, autonomy, and temporality and the blindness towards them. Together, Condorelli and Wade have created an archive that attempts to restore attention to one of the neglected albeit decisive states, through which we apprehend and shape the world.4

zoom −−−: Modes

We share the world with sculpture. If we touch the sculpture, we allow it to touch us, too. It has free will, autonomous systems, and is not bound to the subject.

Surfacer (2017), Yagi (2017), Antenna (’, ¯), (¬), (O), (o), (J) (2017), Compress(air) I–III (2016) are names of your sculptures. Names that suggest they have a functional agenda, since you know they are capable of something that you cannot and about which you do not know completely. They extend your reach.

These are open ruminations, of a kind, about tools and systems of production, about their unspoken rules and ideologies. An investigation into the potential of sculpture as a tool-being. Because the hammer always is and always does more than we experience and understand.

Nairy Baghramian wants her works to develop their own subjective, incomplete, partially eclectic historical questions and assumptions. An attempt to propose alternative methods for understanding the sculptures’ evolving strategies. Her sculptural installations amalgamate interior design, literature, and art historical debates around minimalism in order to comment on current topics related to materiality and representational modes of production, form, and display. Through her artistic practice she examines political and social systems, comprehensive questions about context, the institutional frame, and the production and reception of art.5

Baghramian’s sculptures are created with an immediacy, which can illuminate bodilyness and a physical presence. They have corporeal identity. She’s conscious of sculpture’s dependence on its own context, so mise-en-scène may serve as a password for the installation, a sort of choreography that stages the absence of a body in order to give away bodily presence to the sculpture. It is a strategy the two of you are sharing.

zoom +++++: Metallurgy

Within bronze, motion and many potential bodies dwell. Antennas (2017) is a series of bronze sculptures, casted so thin that you can bend them yourself. It is a way to work with bronze whereby you don’t need to predict everything. The sculptures rest underneath a patina or completely without this. Via patination, one can add and hold on to a certain state, a created pause. Without, it will still be static.

You were told that in 2005, a two-tonne Henry Moore bronze sculpture was stolen, Reclining Figure (1969–70), in order to be melted down and subsequently sold to China. A result of the demand for electrical components.

Reclining Figure is now your computer’s microchip, or the copper cable that carries music into your ear, and also lives on as fossils in other bronzes. By melting your earlier sculptures, you can sustain this ecology while simultaneously presenting the sculptures with the opportunity for movement, and granting them the possibility to look however they feel like.

Antennas are curious beings. They can lead and collect activities and elemental forces living in the air around them, due to their nature as an alloy of copper and tin. A support structure that sympathises with what is almost invisible. They actually belong on roofs, out-side, under the sky. So it seems logical to let them live as close by as possible: in the ceiling. If they are able to sense that the sun goes and comes, the opportunity is given, because the light in the exhibition room is switched off.

Beneath the surface of more common antennas there is a coded language, an “assembly language” that is a second-level programming language—that is to say, a low-level language that does not directly support abstract syntax constructions: loops and variables, such as the Ada programming language of the computer.
The origin story of coding is almost so perfect a narrative that one could suspect it of being programmed itself. Its main characters are Ada Lovelace, the first-born daughter of Lord Byron, and the inventor Charles Babbage. In 1843, Babbage persuaded Lovelace to translate Luigi Menabrea’s dissertation on Babbage’s analytical engine from French into English, to which Lovelace added her own notes—which would eventually prove to be far more crucial than the actual dissertation. The notes include, among other things, the world’s first computer program, as well as the first theoretical reflections on artificial intelligence, which she believed possible.

Lovelace also articulated the poetic meanings of the machine. She believed that this science constituted the only language through which we can adequately express the great facts of the physical world. As well, she also explained the incessant changing of mutual relationships, whether visible or invisible, whether conscious or unconscious, within our immediate physical perceptions, which happen interminably in the creative agendas within which we live. In her own words:

A new, a vast, and a powerful language is developed for the future use of analysis, in which to wield its truths so that these may become of more speedy and accurate practical application for the purposes of mankind than the means hitherto in our possession have rendered possible. Thus not only the mental and the material, but the theoretical and the practical in the mathematical world, are brought into more intimate and effective connection with each other.  

We need air. It is being redistributed and concentrated by us, along with other elements from the earth’s crust. We are composed of vital materials. Our powers are thing-powers. This is not to say that there are no differences between humans and bones. But just that it is not necessary to describe these differences in such a way that mankind is placed in an ontological centre, at a hierarchical apex.

“We are walking, talking minerals.”

In gravity live motion, weight, resistance, force, and the most typical experience of being corporeal through all the touches on our skin. Your body is dressed with blue marks, traces from sculptural production, which makes you unsure if you are hacking material or material is hacking you. Sculpting can be somewhere in between. Physicality, materiality and reality as an entity: it is likewise a level of sculptural production, because they are forced together, which again makes you unsure whether you are hacking reality or reality is hacking you.
Untitled 3 (from the series *En rygg bakom armen*), 2016. Oil on canvas. 122 x 143 cm. Andreas Franzén
Andreas Franzén
Untitled 4 (from the series En rygg bakom armen), 2017. Oil on canvas. 208 x 178 cm. Andreas Franzén
The Back behind the Arm

“There’s a phrase of Sickert’s where he speaks somewhere about something succeeding in that it is like a page torn from the book of life. I’d like what I do not to be Art with a capital A, although it may or may not be incorporated into that concept. What I’d like it to be is a page torn from that book of life, even though it’s an abstracted image.” —Frank Auerbach

A page torn from the book of life: that’s how Frank Auerbach sums up his painting.

His studio is located in Camden, in East London. To get there, he walks from his flat to the underground and takes the tube to Mornington Crescent in Camden. From there, it’s a brief, five-minute walk.

Streets, people, parks, building sites, the studio. These have been Auerbach’s subject matter for the greater part of his artistic career.

Always the same streets, people, parks, and studio.

It’s his attitude to painting I appreciate, every bit as much as his actual paintings.

Routine.
Attempt.
After attempt. After attempt.
His intimate relationship to his subjects.

Even though his paintings are raw, they give the impression of fragility and lightness, as though on the verge of falling apart. Produced in the moment, from an instant that passes by as quickly as it came. His mode of painting is an act of covering up that also heralds an opening.

In Reclining Head of Julia (1997), we see a woman’s face and a hinted-at upper body. The fact that she is lying down produces a particular sense of motion, that she is protruding into the image space, calmly, in stillness. There is something peaceful about her.

In the background, at the lower edge of the painting, there are two hovering patches of dirty dark blue, which, despite their imprecise application, mark out something solid, a stability upon which the figure rests. Resting isn’t an entirely accurate description—it feels more like the figure is floating on top of the heaps of paint.

The upper section of the background echoes this temperament. The right part is done in earthy shades, with lively brushstrokes. A black line suggesting something solid—a structure—is embedded, almost buried, underneath. This right section fades over into the more extensively worked middle section, where the reddish ochre has been scraped off in a failed attempt to apply a new layer. The upper-left corner has the lightness of a cloud. A dirty yellow over a patch of pinkish paint, with a greenish-blue line running through it. Another implied structure. But it is never more than a suggestion, a vibration between the colour and what it symbolises.

There are never any defined surfaces. It all feels like one single, uniform motion.

The neck is indicated by quick brushstrokes in yellow. The face is made up of thick heaps of paint, with hollow spaces behind them. The jaw is a whitish-yellow coloration applied in quick, careless brushstrokes. This colour is also used for the nose and mouth, which are accentuated with black outlines. The hair and forehead are like a beginning, or continuation, of the background.

“He said, ‘I want the poem to be like ice on a stove—riding on its own melting.’ Well, a great painting is like ice on a stove. It is a shape riding on its own melting into matter and space; it never stops moving backwards and forwards.” —Frank Auerbach

—An Andreas Franzén
This painting breathes time. It carries the weight of past attempts.

On top of all this are black lines that express a fundamentally different temperament, which suggests they were painted in the final stages of the work. This produces a curious dynamic, a charged relationship between the figure and the space, embodying the time and attempts, and the black brushstrokes with their conviction and directness—as if to say, “This is what it should be.”

They draw up and reinforce the figure’s presence by suggesting and enhancing the contours of her body in an almost skeletal fashion, while simultaneously producing and suggesting a psychological, conceptually sensuous figure that hovers above the dense mass below. A sense of humanity, as light as a feather, floats up from the compactness of the paint.

“The marks and colours should reconstitute themselves if they’re any good into a sort of experience that has very little to do with the paint.”

Like a phoenix rising from the ashes.

*All of the paintings in my series En rygg bakom armen (The back behind the arm, 2017) depict humans/figures. I write “humans/figures,” because that is how they are experienced. They have all the attributes a regular person would have, but as symbols, as masks. As a representation of a human character.

They aren’t based on any particular individuals—they’re not portraits, or some story I want to tell.

Thinly painted, almost translucent. Just like the space around them.

Two colours recur in all the paintings. In one painting, the figure’s clothes are ochre, and the background is a pale blue. In another, the inverse relation holds.

In a third, a heap of paint represents a crease in the trousers, while a similar smear of paint hovers in mid-air, next to the figure.

A play with paint as representation and paint as paint.

Skinned Movements

“The Eel

“I remember the first time I performed the cruel act of skinning an eel. I attach it to a nail on the wall by the gills, like I’ve seen others do. Make an incision just below the head, all the way around, and then use a pair of pliers to peel the skin off the eel, while it coils around my arm convulsively, intensely alive.

The skin leaves the body unwillingly. I hold the pliers tight, and separate the skin from the tissue underneath. The eel continues writhing even after death, as though its instinct were to live on in some other form and become untouchable. An undressing of the very act of undressing.

“I have subsequently connected this scene to Titian’s painting of the satyr Marsyas being flayed alive as punishment for the hubristic act of challenging Apollo to a fluting contest. A painting is not a picture. It allows the motion of the gesture to be exposed, in a constant state of emergency.”

—Håkan Rehnberg

I visited the National Gallery in London two years ago. What made the strongest impression on me, apart from The Virgin of the Rocks (1491–99 and 1506–08) by Leonardo da Vinci, which left me speechless, were the works of Titian, particularly The Death of Actaeon (1559–75). Actaeon, who has just seen the goddess Diana bathing nude in a river, is turned into a deer and killed by his own hounds. It’s one of Titian’s later paintings, from the phase when his painting was open and flowing and had bottomless emotional depth.

When Lucian Freud passed away on July 20, 2011, he was still working on the painting Portrait of the Hound. In it, his assistant, David Dawson, is naked on the floor, in a reclining position. Beneath him are white sheets, and the wooden floor of the studio is visible in the upper section of the painting. Next to him on the sheet is his dog, Eli, whose hind legs are unpainted, as is the area of the sheet to the side of him. Freud passed before he had time to paint them. Also missing is a section of the piece of fabric that enters the painting from the top edge.

In terms of subject, it is not significantly different from the majority of Freud’s later production, as both Dawson and Eli had served as models for a number of earlier works.

What makes it so striking, however, is how stripped down and raw it is. Like a late painting by Titian.

Freud called himself a biologist. In his studio, he worked like a scientist, attempting to capture the essence of each person. He once said: “My work is purely autobiographical. It is about myself and my surroundings. It is an attempt at a record. I work from people that interest me, and that I care about and think about, in rooms that I live in and know.”

Here, Where You Are and Are Not

Something that has always interested me is the use of space in images, or rather, the use of its possibilities. There are innumerable works, throughout the history of painting, in which the artist has used mirrors as objects in paintings, to produce an intricate interplay
between the viewer and the painting—parallel dimensions where something occurs inside or outside of the mirror’s frames, something you can only perceive, or attempt to understand.

In Édouard Manet’s *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881–82), we see a woman in the centre of the painting, dressed in a black bodice with lace trimmings. Her skirt has a grey coloration. She is leaning against a marble bar, which extends along the length of the lower edge of the painting. On it are wine and spirit bottles, a bowl of oranges, and a glass with two flowers in it, one of them a creamy yellow and the other a pale pink. Behind the woman, a large mirror makes up the entire background. To the right, we see the reflection of the back of the same woman as she leans across the bar to speak to a man in a hat, who is located in the top-right corner of the painting.

Behind them, a scene from what could be a theatre plays out. Two large chandeliers hang from the top edge of the painting, just above a large crowd in what looks like gallery seating, with a pale ochre border hanging down from the upper floor. Two pillars, each with a light fitted to it, rise from the crowd.

Parts of the painting have smudges of paint that seem to be hovering in mid-air, like little gusts of wind.

Everything we see in the mirror, then, is a reflection of what is happening in front of the woman, which means it is then also partially happening behind the position of the viewer/painter. This opens the work up to a multitude of potential interpretations.

If we assume that the viewer is seeing the work from the painter’s point of view, we’re standing right in front of the mirror and the woman. In this case, it would seem reasonable for the reflection of the painter/viewer to be right behind her, but it isn’t. Instead, her reflection is a little to the right of her, and shows her in a slightly different pose. French philosopher Michel Foucault has this to say about it: “The painter therefore occupies—and the viewer is therefore invited to occupy after him—successively or rather simultaneously two incompatible places: one here and the other one there.”

The man in the reflection, who is speaking to the woman at the bar, is positioned very close to the counter, much closer than the viewer/painter is. It seems reasonable to assume that a shadow would fall over the woman and the marble counter, but there is no such shadow.

The gazes between the figures (and the viewer) form very special relationships to one another within the painting. Judging by the perspective in which we see the woman before us, the painter should be about the same height as the woman, or even a little shorter. However, in the reflection, the man (the painter?) is significantly taller, looking down on the woman. The woman, in turn, is holding her head as if looking down, at the chest of the man.

All of these contradictions within the perspective and the lighting, then, arise from the reading of the angle of the mirror in relation to the viewer’s point of view. This means that there is no clear position for the viewer to take to get a true reading of the painting; it is in a constant state of movement.

“*It happened in Zürich in June, a few years ago, on a hot, sweltering day when the weather kept alternating between thunderstorms and bright sunshine. I was on my way to Hotel Franziskaner. I walked to Niederdorfstrasse, and my path was blocked by a crowd that was captivated by something I couldn’t see. I stopped, and suddenly saw what was going on: a huge swarm of bees was buzzing around at the bottom of a large, dull, almost empty shop window. A natural phenomenon in the midst of this urban environment. The crowd maintained a respectful distance, forming a perfect semi-circle around the swarm. My eyes were drawn to the bees, which were swarming intensely in a formless and sluggish vibrating mass, almost liquid, and I felt a sense of elation and disgust. After a long time, I don’t know how long, when the fascination’s hold on me began to weaken, I saw the whole crowd doubled in the shop window, forming a full circle, and suddenly, I glimpsed my own reflection as well, almost swallowed up by the crowd. But the bees seemed to me to be able to move freely through the glass, as though it were a passageway, simply non-existent. It was as though the reflective surface was porous, completely without substance. My gaze accepted the reflection, but the swarm of bees undid the surface. The border between reality and illusion was still there, but at the same time, it was dissolved by the cloud-like swarm.*”

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In my paintings, the humans/figures seem to be in vague spaces—implied spaces. A monochrome surface divided by a line down the middle. A cohesive surface giving the impression of solidity. It is the figures that create them, they are part of them.

The humans/figures are in two different modes—standing or lying down. Sometimes both in the same painting.

Those cases depict events. A movement. Transportations. Progressions.

**Two Black Pupils with Some Pink in Them**

The carnival was originally a heathen springtime celebration. It was an opportunity for people to disregard social norms for a brief moment and become somebody else. Ever since the Middle Ages, the
"Untitled 1 (from the series En rygg bakom armen), 2016. Oil on canvas. 156 x 175 cm. Andreas Franzén"
tradition of the carnival, involving the use of costumes and masks, has existed in Belgium and Holland. This is well documented by painters within the traditions of both countries—from the absurdity of Hieronymus Bosch, through Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and on to Hans Holbein the Younger’s “dance of death” wood carvings.

A more recent example is the Belgian painter James Ensor (1860–1949), in whose work the use of masks and a play on identity are recurring themes. When he was active, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the classic carnival with its absurd elements was already a thing of the past, replaced by a somewhat friendlier variant not entirely unlike the American Mardi Gras, in which people wearing costumes and masks visit various bars and challenge people to guess their true identities.

In Ensor’s painting *Christ’s Entry into Brussels in 1889* (1888), we see a carnival train, in which ordinary people are crowded together with soldiers, clowns, members of Ensor’s own family, and people wearing skull masks. The street they are walking on seems to go on forever. The mood is tense, and menacing. In the centre of the painting, where a gap has appeared in the long parade of people, a Jesus-like figure appears, surrounded by people who are bowing down before him.

What Ensor is telling us is that if wearing a mask can conceal a person’s identity and appearance, it also gives rise to an anonymity that allows for a person’s true nature to be revealed. It brings the normalcy out.

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Each painting in my series *En rygg bakom armen* is a repetition of the preceding one. An attempt to find whatever the preceding one couldn’t.

The series consists of five paintings. There are at least four more between each pair of them.

It takes time to get to the crux of the issue, where you begin to feel like you’re on to something. It’s fleeting, dispersed.

It’s a strange feeling. When conviction finally kicks in, and you think you know what you’re doing—and then realise that it’s all over. What you were about to say has already been said.

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In Cecilia Edefalk’s graduation exhibition in 1987, at the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, she showed *Baby* (1986–87). In the centre of the painting—in the middle of the icy-blue mass of paint that sweeps across the whole painting—we see a woman in a reclining position. Not sitting, but not lying down either. She’s floating around freely, with nothing solid to lean on. And even so, it feels like she’s firmly anchored to the background. Although, perhaps it’s wrong to call it a background. The surrounding surface moves both into and out of the painting, from side to side, in front of and behind the woman. It has just as much substance as her clothing, which seems like an extension of it. She could just as well be emerging from, as sinking into, the painting. The only thing that stands out are the visible parts of her body: her head, hands, and feet, and a small part of her calves.

Just like in *En annan rörelse* (Another movement, 1990) by Edefalk, the woman comes from a photograph, an advertisement in this case. I’m not saying that the figure looks like it’s been edited in, but the contrast between her and the background makes her seem unreal—even though she has a realistic skin tone and human facial features, she seems empty, almost like a shell. It brings to mind an old Greek sculpture rather than a living person.

Three years later, in 1990, Edefalk showed the exhibition *En annan rörelse* (Another movement). In it, she repeated the same subject—a photograph from a fashion magazine, in which a man applies suntan lotion to a woman’s back—in a number of paintings of different sizes. In the painting, the tube of suntan lotion has been left out, which gives the work a strange, mysterious mood. The series doesn’t differ thematically, or even in terms of painting, from *Baby*, even though the actual execution is very different. Both of them have fairly uniform backgrounds behind the figures, which provide a sense of space. The figures are human, but they seem more like symbols. They are independent of the message they articulate. The subjects are based on photography, in which the figures pose in front of the camera.

Since the first half of the 2000s, Edefalk has been in an ongoing dialogue with the late writer August Strindberg. He advises her on how to proceed with specific paintings. This has also resulted in a series of paintings of him.

At her exhibition at Waldemarsudde in Stockholm, which opened in October 2016, she showed her most recent paintings—very small ones, depicting dandelions. In the same room, there were dried dandelion clocks in jars. All of these shared the space with the photographs and sculptures.

Regardless of what Edefalk creates (casts of trees, paintings of angels, ancient sculpted faces, self-portraits), and regardless of the medium (sculptures, photographs, paintings), she manages to infuse her works with both life and death. The dandelions serve as powerful symbols of this: in their final state as clocks, they make new life possible.
Installation view from *En rygg bakom armen*, MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Andreas Franzén
Installation view from *En rygg bakom armen*, MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Andreas Franzén
For lack of a better word, there is an objectivity and seriousness that runs through her entire body of work (although she has made some rather humorous paintings). So precise. And it is in her paintings that this is at its most apparent. Not a single brushstroke is superfluous.

Everything transformed into paint, nothing ever represented by paint.

She puts the world into the paint.

I’ve wanted to bring more of the line into my painting, to emphasise it. Just as with your own handwriting, it’s something you can’t escape. It’s there, whether you want it there or not.

Eugène Delacroix and Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres were both born in France, and were both active during the nineteenth century. Towards the end of his life, Delacroix worked with subjects like lions, tigers, horses, and war scenes. In his painting Collision of Moorish Horsemen (1843–44), a warrior rides into battle on his white horse. In the background, there is a throng of people, locked in combat.

This painting is full of movement—the fact that what we’re seeing is a war scene feels secondary. What matters is the motion within the painting. How the paint leads and the painting follows.

Ingres was more of a classical portrait painter. Women and men from the upper class. His painting is precise, his lines drawn sharp.

The paint, and the line.

As the German troops were approaching Paris in the fall of 1914, in the early days of the Great War, Henri Matisse fled to Collioure, a small village in the south-west of France. While he was there, he befriended two Parisians: Juan and Josette Gris. Apart from becoming close friends, Juan Gris and Matisse engaged in an intense dialogue about painting. Gris was into cubism and its clearly delineated fields. These ideas increasingly found their way into Matisse’s own work as he moved away from free painting, with its powerful colours, to a stricter division of the painting, until it became almost architectural.

One painting from this time is a portrait of Matisse’s daughter Marguerite. X-rays have shown that this painting was originally naturalistic, with soft cheekbones and billowing clothing. According to Marguerite, during one of their sessions Matisse said: “This painting wants to take me somewhere else. Do you feel up for it?”

Head, White and Rose (1914–15), as the painting is called, is completely unlike anything else Matisse made, either before or after.

Her blouse is flat, with blue and pink stripes. The only thing suggesting any depth or solidity, and creating a physical dimension, are the distinct, black lines that run down from the collar, across the blouse, to the lower section of the painting. Around her neck, which is painted dark grey, she’s wearing a black collar with a piece of jewellery that contrasts starkly with the rest of the painting, as though it were a remnant from the earlier attempt. The face reminds me of ancient Egyptian art. This is partially because of the shape of the head, but also due to the fact that it possesses a very distinctive clarity and freshness. All of the facial features are accentuated by clear, black lines—the chin is completely straight, as are the cheeks and hair. The nose consists of a small, rectangular shape that runs all the way to the top of the painting. The mouth expresses a different temperament; the lips are the same colour as that used for the blouse and hair, only accentuated by thin black lines.

And then, there is her gaze. Her eyes.

They are really just as muted as the rest of the painting: two small black pupils with some pink in them. But they sparkle; there is life in them. Her gaze has a soul. She’s there, every bit as present as Philip IV ever was in Diego Velázquez’s portraits of him, or Andy Warhol when he posed for Alice Neel.

I don’t strive for realism. Wooden boards, a mirror, a table, or people. The paintings take great liberties. But I want them to feel like I’ve measured them out with a ruler and folding rule. That precise.

I’m after something very specific.

A perception of reality.

Outside and within the physical
State, event
a sequence?
Imagining your way into another form
An arm that’s behind the back, the back is displayed
Are they inhabiting the same space
is it a reflection, is it the same person is it
a reflection of yourself

2 Auerbach, quoted in Lampert, *Frank Auerbach*, 6.

3 Auerbach, quoted in Lampert, *Frank Auerbach*, 60.

4 Titian, *The Punishment of Marsyas*, 1570–1576, oil on canvas.


8 Rehnberg et al., *Dubbel scen*, 68.

9 Henri Matisse, quoted in Lampert, *Frank Auerbach*, 208.
Simen Godtfredsen

A Safe Place, 2017. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Simen Godtfredsen
A Safe Place, 2017. Detail. Annual Exhibition, Malmö Art Academy, 2017. Simen Godtfredsen
When I was sixteen years old, my mother inherited an old house in the countryside from a long-lost uncle. Upon arriving there for the first time, I saw that there was a shed standing by the house. Automatically drawn to the shed rather than the house, I entered the dusty mess of a space. Old things hung from the ceiling and were stacked on shelves, a working bench was covered in tools and the smell of sawdust, oil and rust lingered in the air. I had the strange sensation that there was a lack of oxygen in the cramped space just as some rays of sunlight penetrated a small broken window, revealing the cause: the air was thick with dust. I started looking at the objects in the shed, tried to make sense of them. A piece of a railroad track was welded together with a large bolt to form the handle and the head of a hammer. A long and straight branch was attached vertically to a shorter plank piece; the plank had a row of holes with smaller branches of similar lengths sticking through and out the other side to form a rake. I realised that many of the objects in the room were purposefully made from the materials available at the time by the same hands that would later use the objects to perform specific tasks, each object revealing a patina of time and use. Later that same day my father took me for a ride in his car; he needed some tools to start the renovation of the house the next day, and he did not bother with the junk in the shed. When I walked into the hardware store to buy a hammer, I suddenly could no longer remember what a hammer was called, so instead I asked the clerk for a rake, but the clerk did not seem to know what a rake was, maybe because all the things in his store had somehow lost their inherent definitions. Who was to say what these objects, arriving by truck from a factory somewhere in the world, were really called and which purposes they were meant to fulfil?
A Wall is a Line that Can Be Broken

On my way to the large Willy’s grocery store located at Katrinelund, while going down the bike lane on Östra Farnvägen just where it meets Industrigatan, I finally spotted what I had been looking for. And when I say “finally,” I mean that I finally saw it; I had passed by it dozens of times before, it was just that it finally managed to catch my attention. It’s strange how you don’t really see the architecture you pass by every day. It was just there, lurking in the background, like an old pair of curtains; blocking out the sunlight and collecting dust. What I had been looking for were corrugated metal sheets. But I had been looking for a pile of them, a stack of unused material; it had not occurred to me that they did not need to be lying down to be useful to me. I realised the reason I managed to notice the large wall in that moment was because a part of it had fallen and was lying flat. I later returned with a trolley to stack the corrugated metal sheets on and some tools to disassemble them with. I loosened the fallen sheets from the wooden frame that held them together, placed them on the trolley, and took them with me. Removing this part of the wall meant that the wall would no longer be connected to anything; it would be a free-standing structure placed on the border between two empty plots that were used as parking lots. The wall seemed to have lost its purpose, and it looked like a cheap Richard Serra monument reminiscent of some lost industrial era. Not satisfied with the number of sheets I had acquired from the fallen part of the wall, I thought that no one had really paid any attention to one part of the wall falling and vanishing, so why would anyone notice another piece missing? It just needed a bit of help to hurry along towards its unavoidable future of falling apart; there was no use in fighting the force of entropy here. Tilted Arc (1981), after all, was only allowed to stand for so long before being removed.

To simplify the task of removing the wall, I took my bike to the Jula shop at Jägersro and bought a pair of worker’s trousers, the kind you see road workers stand around in with very bright yellow and reflective materials. These trousers change your role in the public sphere, they communicate that you are working there, that you are paid to perform some task. They ultimately act as a sort of urban camouflage; somehow the high-visibility outfit makes you less visible, makes you stand out less. I started removing pieces of the wall during working hours when the greatest number of people use or pass the two lots. I would have my lunches at Kafé Kryddan a few blocks away together with other workers in high-visibility clothing. That place seemed to legitimise my actions as real work with the same importance as the laying of new tarmac on the road just outside the café’s window. At some point, the process of removal was no longer about the material or my need for it, but rather the removal of the wall itself became the focus. While I ate my brown and beige meals of traditional Swedish food, the black tarmac outside the window slowly turned grey. Over a period of three months I disassembled and took four sheets at a time, slowly removing the entire wall, eighteen sheets in all, in the end only leaving a rotten wooden frame.

During the process of removal I came to realise that the seemingly functionless wall had its uses. The wall was obviously used by graffiti writers, just another surface to practise their tags. Two other uses for the wall I only came to realise after spending more time there. It was a rather unpleasant discovery that the wall was often used as a sort of public toilet, made evident by the smell, bits of toilet paper, and other remnants, which proved to make the disassembling job a bit less attractive than anticipated. Along the wall I also discovered six cut bicycle locks. Six destroyed locks and no sign of any bicycles. The site and its immediate surroundings are not places where anyone would commonly park a bike either. This led me to speculate that stolen bicycles had been brought there as a place to remove the locks before disassembling the bikes and selling the parts separately or sending them to some other city or country to be sold. These two last discoveries start to tell a story of people having a relationship to the wall that is not obvious when just passing by. It hit me that by removing the wall, I would probably rid a public site of these two illegal activities and likewise deprive the people conducting these activities further use of a designated toilet or a secret space to scramble together some money for, I am guessing, food.

In a sense, the removal of the wall can be read as a rather psychotic form of urban acupuncture. The practice of acupuncture is “aimed at relieving stress in the human body, [and] the goal of urban acupuncture is to relieve stress in the built environment.”1 Of course, the stress-relieving effect might be overpowered by the stress inflicted when the practitioner of acupuncture, in this case a complete amateur, just starts poking away with needles at a random person on the street, without asking for the person’s consent or without any knowledge of the person’s need or desire for such a treatment in the first place. It becomes a strange sort of experiment where there is a great risk of the outcome being worse than the starting point. If the wish is to follow a more urban-acupuncture-friendly path, it might be useful to construct something like an answer to Nils Norman’s Public Workplace Playground Sculpture for Graz (2009) to replace the wall. It could be called something like Public Private Toilet Chop Shop Sculpture—a DIY-style structure based on research done on site and engagements with the people who park their cars there and the odd passer-by, but also, and most importantly, keeping in mind the people you don’t see, the people in need of a toilet and a place to conduct their bicycle business.
Norman’s structure is a multifunctional structure placed in public space for the creative architect on the way home from work who suddenly has a burst of creativity. Then, when they are in desperate need of an alternative, Google-type workspace in a park, the architect is able to lies down, fish out their iPad, and start sketching and mind mapping. This can be done while simultaneously sharing ideas with all the other creative designers and artists hanging around doing the same thing, connecting with other like-minded creative people. In the midst of all this, the architect’s spouse has brought the children to play in the same structure for some quality family time while teaching a random immigrant about food recycling. The utopian vision here is apparently a total collapse of leisure and labour activities, where the public place becomes a facilitator for work/relaxation, socialising/networking, art/architecture, family time/after-school care, ecology/integration, etc. In this case, Norman’s multiple functionalities purposefully backfire. The structure seems to collapse under its own critique.

The Public Private Toilet Chop Shop Sculpture could be built from the materials of the disassembled wall. It could serve as a multipurpose public structure where the faeces from the toilet system could be used as plant fertiliser in a hydroponic growing system for rapeseed. It also could include a system for pressing the plant oil into the oil into biofuel for the cars at the lots. It could house a chop shop/bicycle-repair workshop where the people stealing bicycles could cut locks while socialising with people who just need to tighten the chains on their bicycles, creating the possibility of a direct marketplace for bikes and bike parts. Meanwhile, graffiti artists could constantly re-decorate the whole thing while teaching the local kids their trade. It would be a hub that connects the sort of underground and unwanted parts of society with everyday people who have everyday problems. A creative space where problems like ecology and social injustice can be openly played around with to find alternate solutions. In the end, the Public Private Toilet Chop Shop Sculpture could also help speed up the process of gentrification so sorely desired by the city of Malmö without actually dealing with the problem of soil contamination, but rather working on moving the focus away from such a grim matter and over to an image of something creative and positive.

Consider Vele di Scampia (Sails of Scampia), a large utopian urban housing project north of Naples heavily influenced by the ideas of Le Corbusier that instead ended up embodying Robert Smithson’s entropic writing: “That zero panorama seemed to contain ruins in reverse, that is—all the new constructions that would eventually be built. This is the opposite of the ‘romantic ruin’ because the buildings don’t fall into ruin after they are built but rather rise into ruin before they are built.”2 Constructed between 1962 and 1975, Vele di Scampia soon became known as a ghetto. In 1980, a large earthquake rendered large numbers of people homeless in the south of Italy, and the housing project became a refuge for illegal squatters. After its completion, its buildings were deprived of any sort of maintenance and regulation, and the government largely ignored it. There was also a lack of police presence in the area. In a sort of response to the architect’s inadequate design, alterations to the buildings continued to be made—not authorised in any way, but illegally conducted by the Camorra crime syndicate.

The alterations done to the building by the syndicate (which included the construction of barred metal gates, the creation of alternate locking systems in existing gates and doors, the building of brick walls while tearing down and making holes in existing walls, the construction of road blocks around the buildings, and the installation of their own CCTV systems) were largely made to limit police access and therefore ensure the unhindered sale of drugs. Using the open courtyards of the buildings, the syndicate employed an early warning system of strategically placed people who used a system of shouts, whistles, and code words. It wasn’t until 1987, fifteen years after the first people moved into the apartments, that the first police station for the area was established.3 The police, for their part, would also continue to make alterations to the buildings by tearing down and removing the illegal walls, roadblocks, metal bars, and the gang’s extra locks on doors and gates. They also removed a large number of walls originally designed by the architect in parts of the building that had been taken over by drug users, creating large open halls within the building complex.

Men Have Become the Tools of Their Tools4
Instead of floating freely within the relative boundaries of the city, the interdisciplinary artist Klara Lidén employs a range of specifically chosen tools that open up, like keys,5 a whole set of new geographies. Boundaries and limitations are actively attacked. It’s a forced freedom, an aggressive stand against the oppressing forces of our built environments. Like urban explorers who employ “keys,” people who specialise in lock picking and breaking and entering and who enter the desired building first, clearing the way for the explorer, following suitable payment. These people stay anonymous while the daredevil urban explorers, within the movement now commonly referred to as “urbex,” seek fame and glory through their spectacular photos and YouTube videos. Exposing herself in her self-portrait,6 Lidén looks to be equipped with a sort of EDC, short for “everyday carry,” which is an expression commonly used in the survivalist and prepper movements. Apart from being involved in a very commercialised way of selling goods, I would connect the EDC community to an underlying feeling of paranoia and anxiety. Feeling the need to carry an array of survival gear, tools, and weapons at all times, just in case society suddenly collapses, reveals a state of

Right: A Safe Place, 2017. Detail. MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Simen Godtfredsen
A Safe Place, 2017. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Simen Godtfredsen
uncertainty—a lack of trust in the government and a lack of trust in the relative safeness and stability of society itself. Survivalists and preppers stock goods, plot, and plan, as they prepare for society to collapse so that they can finally live up to their “true potential.” They might not know it, but they seem to represent a strange branch of anarcho-primitivism—living their life not in fear of the collapse, but rather in a sort of longing for it. Imagining a world where one cannot rely on having water in the tap or electricity in the plug, and where the survivors, of whatever causes the system to collapse, are driven by the goal to return to a more primitive way of living. Government will be a thing of the past, and a return to nature will be necessary for survival. Unlike the Unabomber, the prepper community does not want to take action into its own hands, but rather waits on the system to consume itself, on nature to destroy it, or on a zombie epidemic to rip everything apart. Watching endless amounts of DIY and how-to videos on YouTube, desperately trying to suck up all the information before the internet ceases to exist.

Along the wall I had found six broken bike locks of different types, which all came to lie on the floor of my studio among the rest of the mess (by mess I mean all the debris that I choose to call materials). Somewhere in this mess the locks were lying alongside other objects like tools, tools that potentially could have been used to break the locks. When a lock is broken, is it still a lock? That is to say: “What happens when a thing no longer performs its function? Is it still the thing, or has it become something else? When you rip the cloth off the umbrella, is the umbrella still an umbrella? You open the spokes, put them over your head, walk out into the rain, and you get drenched.” These are Paul Auster’s words channelled through a madman, a character in a story titled City of Glass (1985). The character seeks to mend a broken and fragmented society by fixing a broken language. Our current language is not sufficient, because we have no words for all the broken things we are surrounded by: we have no way of really describing the umbrella that is no longer an umbrella, and therefore we can no longer speak the truth. Spending his days collecting debris and broken objects from the streets of New York, Auster’s character seeks to make new words for these broken objects. A broken bicycle lock without a key is far from a functioning bicycle lock, but it unmistakably carries with it the idea of its former function. It can at the very least easily be identified as having once been a lock. It also carries with it the marks of its destruction. The broken locks lying on the studio floor with the tools that might have been used to break them could potentially merge. The attacker and the assailant could become partners in crime. A hacksaw or a bolt cutter can fuse quite neatly with the features of a U-lock. A wire sawblade of course fits with a wire lock.
A Safe Place, 2017. Detail. MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Simen Godtfredsen
Everything Can Always Be Something Else

When I next returned to the two parking lots, this time without a clear goal, about half the corrugated wall had been removed. A jacket had appeared; it had been lying around, not for very long, a couple of days maybe. A pinkish almost flesh-coloured tone in some sort of synthetic fabric with a fake-fur collar and gold-plated buttons. It might be taken for a fallen animal. A hunter coming upon fresh prey like this might take it as a lucky opportunity and immediately skin and dismember it. The meat could be smoked, the bones turned into tools and utensils, and the skin cured and made into leather. An industrial tannery had once been located in these parts. Tanning, a process of turning animal skins into leather, halts the natural decomposition process and also colours the material. At some point in history, the tanning process was done by soaking the skins in pools of urine and then stomping on the skins for hours with bare feet. By the time the tanning industry started in this area of Malmö, urine had been replaced by much more dangerous chemicals, which probably linger in the ground still today. Cutting away at the discarded jacket to separate its component parts and materials, not finding any meat or bones of course, removing the arms, inner lining, hood, collar, and pockets, the remaining piece of fabric gained the distinct shape of an animal skin.

The last building to stand on the now empty lots housed a gas station. A 1994 report about soil contamination in the Sorgenfri industrial area, a report that claims to be based to a certain degree on interviews and informal conversations with people, somehow relates to the many businesses that were present in the past or that are still around today. It is a report about pollution in the ground, based upon word of mouth. It sounds to me like a sort of myth, building evidence of an invisible monster hidden in the ground. Which the Malmö city officials at present would like to talk about as a carcass already rotted and vanished, for the sake of gentrification. The whole picture of the amount of heavy metals remaining in the ground of the Sorgenfri industrial area will never be completely clear. Some of the heavy metals and other pollutants have probably seeped into the groundwater over time, and with it been washed into the sea where they have been subsumed into the bottom of the food chain and eventually worked their way up. Catch a fish in the old industrial harbour area, eat it, and get the metals as an added supplement.

I decided that I would scavenge for materials available at the two parking lots in order to make the equipment necessary to fish and trap crayfish at the harbour. Using J.G. Ballard’s book *Concrete Island* (1974) as an example, I would, much like the main character of the book, Robert Maitland, have to make do with whatever was available within a very limited area.

As cultural theorist Craig Martin thoroughly covers in his text “Everything Can Always Be Something Else: Adhocism and J.G. Ballard’s Concrete Island,” Maitland, stranded as he is, looks to his immediate surroundings and uses his training as an architect to decipher and repurpose the detritus surrounding him to fulfill his immediate needs of survival. Martin points to the examples of Maitland fashioning a crutch from an old exhaust pipe, using a car’s windscreen-washer bottle to collect rainwater, and repurposing the cables sticking out of the dashboard of his burnt-out car into writing utensils. Maitland demonstrates “the transformative potential of material things: their openness to becoming something else.”

No car wrecks to pick apart in Sorgenfri though, only fragments of debris hidden among the gravel, a fallen chain-link fence, and a couple of trees. I started scanning the ground thoroughly, picking up pieces of things that I thought might be useful. Looking over a small portion of the ground at a time, picking up whatever seemed interesting before moving on to the next small area. In Auster’s dystopic vision of the future, *In the Country of Last Things* (1987), post-industrial society as we know it has collapsed. Almost no new things are produced, so whatever remains from life before becomes more and more valuable as time goes by. People survive by collecting scraps from the past. The shopping cart gains status as one of the most precious objects because of its functionality in collecting and moving detritus. Large groups of people spend day in and day out collecting whatever they can find in the streets:

> It is an odd thing, I believe, to be constantly looking down at the ground, always searching for broken and discarded things. After a while, it must surely affect the brain. For nothing is really itself anymore. There are pieces of this and pieces of that, but none of it fits together. And yet, very strangely, at the limit of all this chaos, everything begins to fuse again.

Back at the parking lots in Sorgenfri, the metal cap of a beer bottle can become a fishing lure, an old bendable sawblade attached to a piece of wood can fulfill the function of a fish-filleting knife. The flexible metal rod of a chain-link fence becomes a fishing rod, an empty plastic bottle turns into a crayfish trap.

In thinking further about the inherent possibilities of things, it seems relevant to mention the work of Korean artist Kim Beom. I’m thinking here about a specific work, which for a moment had me rather puzzled, as I could only look at it as a small photo in a book. The picture showed a kettle, an iron, and a radio neatly arranged on a table with a white tablecloth. What is to be discovered through the title, *An Iron in the Form of a Radio, a Kettle in the Form of an Iron, and a Radio in the Form of a Kettle* (2012), is that Kim swapped the
inherent functions of these common everyday objects, in the process completely altering the understanding of them. By doing so, he challenges the viewer to look at all other objects in this distorted manner, where you might suddenly start to wonder if the objects surrounding you really are what they give you the impression of being. An object can only begin to be something else after ceasing to be what it is. It is an issue of definitions; to see potential uses other than what was intended for an object, its original definitions must be temporarily forgotten. In a different work by Kim, a video titled *A Rock That Was Taught It Was a Bird* (2010), this change is initiated within the object itself, through an attempt to alter the object’s perception of itself. That is of course an impossible task to perform with an inanimate object. Our perception of a rock can change, as a rock can be sculpted into the shape of a bird. This does not mean that the rock will finally take off and land on the branch of a tree, but when we look at the rock we will think of a bird.

In Buster Keaton’s film *The Scarecrow* (1920), the viewer is met with the statement that “all the rooms in this house are in one room.” What follows is that the two men who live in the house, through their everyday practices, reveal their unconventional solutions for “micro living.” A modern take on the scene, which plays out inside the house, could easily be a commercial for the micro-living solutions of IKEA. After hooking up a gramophone player to the gas system, Keaton pays for gas with a coin connected to a thread, which is pulled back out again for reuse, and the gramophone itself then becomes the kitchen stove. When the two men are done eating their meal, which is a beautifully choreographed situation in itself, the tabletop is lifted from the table, all the plates and trays still attached to it, so that it can be hung on the wall over the sink and washed with water from a hose. When the washing is done, the tabletop is flipped over, revealing itself to be a sign with the text “What Is Home without a Mother.” Then the bathtub is flipped over, emptying...
A Safe Place, 2017. Installation view, Annual Exhibition, Malmö Art Academy, 2017. Simen Godtfredsen
the bathwater out into a small duck pond just outside the house and simultaneously revealing a couch. This sort of clever micro-living situation is shown in a more dystopic manner in New York–based artist Joshua Citarella’s work SWIM A Few Years from Now (2017). The art critic Scott Indrisek describes SWIM thusly:

In the year 2025 Joshua Citarella isn’t doing so well. Donald J. Trump has just rounded out his second term as President, and the world is a mess—half under water, with basic services nonexistent, and with only the 1% able to afford efficient transportation that avoids the floods (via Uber-esque helicopters, naturally). Meanwhile, Citarella sits in his unnaturally cramped micro-studio, surviving on potatoes and dried lentils while waiting for coveted freelance assignments to arrive via an ultra-high-speed internet connection.

Let’s be clear: This is only one possible future, the artist’s conjuring of what an “anarcho-capitalist” America might look like. ... The image—a canny blend of analog photography and digital trickery, with many images borrowed from the internet—has the slickness of a dystopian IKEA catalog spread.14

A Safe Place and the Missing Protagonist

“An industrial building can function as some kind of base, a hidden chamber of white walls in a sturdy construction of bricks and concrete. The building is not set in the city centre, but rather on the outskirts, making it easy to move in and out of the city. Enter the chosen premises through a window. The space is located on the second floor, high enough so that you’re not too exposed to the street and the people outside, low enough to jump if you need to make a hasty exit. A large open staircase can be controlled and even blocked from the second floor, and restricting access to the gallery rooms there are two heavy lockable doors. In buildings like this there is a goods elevator located at the back and as a last resort use the elevator shaft to get out when the electricity has shut down. There is an air-raid shelter on the first floor or in the basement. Block any windows in the space, except one, which can be used as a third exit. The spacious gallery rooms will leave you exposed and it will be difficult to keep the heat up. Instead make use of smaller spaces, for example a video room or a closed storage room, as they are easier to heat and stay hidden. Be sure that you have a second exit from this room, create a small hole in the wall if necessary. Always be ready to leave, to change location.”15

The viewer is already too late; they only get to witness the aftermath of what has happened; the main character(s) have already left. In Klara Lidén’s installation Teenage Room, shown at the Danish Pavilion at the 2009 Venice Biennale, the escape of the unknown teenager is made evident by a hatch in the wall that’s been left open. What remains are the outlines of a teenage room, simplified almost to the level of abstraction. In the corner stands a bunk bed built out of found materials, and hanging from the roof is what looks to be an IKEA lamp. The bunk bed has been painted on site with black spray paint, made evident by the spray of colour on the walls and floor surrounding the bed. The black colour and the strangeness of the structure hint at something one imagines could be found in a BDSM dungeon. The room holds a feeling of uneasiness; simple objects and materials are put together to create a familiar, everyday scene, but the result is anxiety inducing. The axe hanging by the entrance, part of a contraption that looks to be a booby trap, might trigger this feeling before even entering the room. During his guest lecture in an MFA graduate seminar at the University of Guelph, Ontario, the British artist Mike Nelson was asked about one of his installations, “Are there protagonists?” He answered: “I don’t think there is so much. I don’t think I imagine people so much as the absence through stuff. It is more to do with the objects and the ambiguity that’s given by the articulation of the absence of something.”16

There seems to be a correlation in the working process of these two artists, Lidén and Nelson, where the objects and materials they find and use take up a dominant role in building some sort of narrative. The narratives, however, seem to be rather suggestive and unclear; the artists want the audience to “digress at their own will within the loose limits of a narrative” and “to arrive at some sort of conclusion in the loosest possible sense, but one that is not didactic or prescriptive,” to use Nelson’s words.17 Lidén breaks and enters into a hidden world, while Nelson constructs a world in which you feel you have broken in to. In a sense, both artists reveal the backside of the coin, the shadowy side of the world that we are left with. The expression “finders keepers” gains a whole new meaning when the finders don’t actually want to keep what they have found, but have no choice but to accept it. We cannot refuse the detritus or failed urban planning projects in and around our cities. But in a time when the word “truth” seem to have lost its meaning and a shovel is no longer a shovel, a whole new set of possibilities emerges.


“Men have become the tools of their tools. The man who independently plucked the fruits when he was hungry is become a farmer; and he who stood under a tree for shelter, a housekeeper.” Henry David Thoreau, Walden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 35.

Klara Lidén, Self Portrait with Keys to the City, 2005, digital print, dimensions variable.

“Klara Lidén adopts the pose of a sex maniac or a hawker of hot goods: holding her raincoat wide open. Rather than stolen Rolexes or her naked body, she reveals an arsenal of pliers, wrenches, flashlights, and other burglary tools. It is the portrait of the artist as a young thief, armed with the keys to the city, as the title proclaims. Taken in Berlin, where Lidén lives part of the year, the photograph speaks of an underground network of tunnels, shelters, secret passageways, and broken fences—a clandestine world that seems to survive in the fringes of a civilization on the brink of collapse. It is a place where cities seem to be in a state of such near-total decay that hidden shelters and lairs must be constructed for vagrants, outcasts, and rat people—a world that frighteningly resembles our own.” Massimiliano Gioni, “Breaking and Entering,” in Klara Lidén: Bodies of Society, ed. Massimiliano Gioni and Jenny Moore (New York: New Museum, 2012), 20.


“Maitland fashions his crutch from the exhaust pipe protruded from one of the abandoned cars on the island. He casts a canny—perhaps architectural—eye over the material detritus, recognising the transformative potential inherent in the exhaust pipe. Seeing beyond the singularity of use, Maitland demonstrates a different sensibility that recognises plural instrumentalities: one of course driven by the need for survival, but equally one that is attuned to the material voice of things, a voice that speaks many tongues.” Craig Martin, “‘Everything Can Always Be Something Else’: Adhocism and J.G. Ballard’s Concrete Island,” Literary Geographies 2, no. 1 (2016): 10.


Paul Auster, In the Country of Last Things (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 35.


Nelson, “MFA Graduate Seminar.”

Further Reference
Installation view of *From Violet to Vermillion*, MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Lavinia Jannesson
Installation view of *From Violet to Vermilion*, MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Lavinia Jannesson
I
Browns turning into purples, shifting towards blacks. Mostly there are rusty reds and yellows appearing, the fleshy kind.

The studio reeks of rotting leaves, lichens, barks, and shells. *Quercus robur, Acer platanoides, Castanea...* Insects that were preparing for their seasonal sleep inside a thick layer of summer residue are forced into an awakened state, disoriented, swarming, finding new hiding places, or pushing themselves against the glass sheets of the windows. A tiny snail has climbed up the long vertical wall to the edge of the paper bag in which it was put, having been mistaken for an acorn.

II
Materiality, robe of the abstract. One must deal with you in making art. Sooner or later and to varying degrees. To investigate the interplay between form and content is for me what the artistic work very much is about. Playful only on the best of days. In the recent past I worked with veneer, thin sheets of hardwood that I used to cover cheaper kinds of board. These boards had symbols cut into them and were installed in such a way so that, during certain hours of the day, these symbols would appear on the seemingly solid wooden surface. Revealed by the sun. Light shone through the thin veneer covering the cavities but was blocked by the density of the rest of the board. The symbols spelled out locations given by coordinates pointing to the place of installation, collapsing in on itself, or else pointing to places far away. Gaboon, mahogany, oak, and ash. The sheer concept of the veneer reverberates with my ideas about art, playing on illusion and ennobling the materials it covers. Obscuring and refining at once. There is a transmutation that takes place, but it does so within. Counting on our inability to grasp the true state of things at first glance. Even so, I felt as if an essential part was missing in the interplay with the material I had chosen, something I have known all along is essential to my work, something I both consciously and unconsciously had been muting—the narrative. The stories, the leading stars of each and every one of my projects. And in not inviting the narrative into the process of externalising ideas, I made it an outsider and estranged it materially. Reduced to a bystander. And because all materials inhabit a story of their own, they could, if not properly introduced, be off to a bad start. As even friends risk being reduced to acquaintances, acquaintances reduced to strangers, or worse, enemies.

III
“Then shall I see, with vision clear,
How secret elements cohere.”
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Part One*

Is it too great a task for an artist to unveil secrets of the hidden unity between the seen and unseen, to present proof based on an inner conviction regarding a universal synchronicity of the states of things beyond the passage of time? An unannounced revelation. That which, for the most part, is concealed only to be revealed once in a while through a sudden fall into a mood, coloured by the melody of a resonating song that seemingly directs the flowing movement of feet across the floor. A dance performance. Choreographer absent. Possibly hiding at the far end of the stage behind the curtain. Yes, I believe it is too great a task. Instead, I borrow segments from documented history, from science and its wonders—stories, facts, theories, more or less recognised ones—and apply them into the present in order to close in on such vast quests. What I have come to believe is that in small entities one can recognise the greater movement of which they are a part. As a vast ocean is too great to master while a wave is possible to ride, the bigger the better. Paradoxically.

I am a teller of stories. Once apparent, as it is with many children, eventually forgotten in getting older, and rediscovered, at last. It is not about mediating what I already know, but arranging new means of relating experiences woven into the fabric of history, finding ways of exceeding borders of time and space in using what has been, a detaching and reattaching. Making room for micro-revelations about the grand unity and synchronicity of all things. Like Faust, I call: “Mysterious spirits, hovering near, answer me, if now ye hear!”

It is also a search for the eternal, hidden in the seemingly temporary and coincidental, cloaked in beauty. “Six or seven miles of surging waters around is enough to grant the most perfected beauty experience that could be offered to a human being in this, her temporary abode.” Or so says Charles Baudelaire.

IV
My artistic work is one long detour back to myself, to beliefs stripped of all credibility, to suppressed childhood potentials that once again wish to resound, reminding me that I have been untrue.
Tools, utensils, furniture, tarpaulin, linen, hemp, jute, rusty iron, bags of dried vegetation used in the dyeing process, glass jars containing dye solutions made from pigments extracted from bark and leaves from ash, beech, birch, chestnut, maple and oak gathered in the Forest of Fontainebleau, aluminium sulphate, iron sulphate, sodium carbonate and vinegar, 2017. Detail. Lavinia Jannesson
V

I enjoy the reading of an artwork, if possible, even more than seeing it in a physical space. The question I ask myself is: Wherein then lies the experience in art? In breaking down the elements of works that I am particularly prone to appreciating, I find they often exhibit a few common traits: that of the spectacular and the peculiarly coincidental. Often they reach completion in a full but skewed circle. A ghostly return to the point of departure.

Working in a post-conceptual tradition, British artist Simon Starling has played a key role in applying the use of research as a methodology in contemporary artistic practice. In getting even a little bit acquainted with his work, one soon realises the many interdependent conjunctions between various disciplines residing within and beyond an artistic context. Starling seems to establish and follow a web of connections across the globe and across history. Drawing on a variety of subjects and returning to a few. This circular movement is always present. There seems to be an interest in the passage from one dimension to another. Or as Starling puts it in a conversation with Francesco Manacorda: “In the work there are constant shifts from image to object, object to image. And from material to information, digital to analogue, etc.”

In regard to my own somewhat extreme indulgence in the spectacular of an artwork, it is ridiculous how fired up I get by works such as Starling’s comparatively modest work Silver Particle/Bronze (After Henry Moore), made in 2008. For this work he gathered information from a tiny fragment of a vintage silver gelatin photograph of one of Henry Moore’s sculptures, and then turned this fragment into its own sculpture. Using an electron microscope, Starling zoomed in on one of the single silver particles that make up the surface of the photograph. A 3D image was then obtained and transformed into a physical object. Fantastically enough, the produced shape exhibits resemblances to the motif of Henry Moore’s sculpture (!). No way. After learning this, I am reminded of the fact that I have not seen even a photographic reproduction of the presentation of this work, so I look it up. Seeing it did not make me appreciate the affinity of the two works any less, but neither did it make me appreciate it any more than before seeing Starling’s version of the enlarged microscopic particle.

When discussing this particular project and his work in general, Starling uses the word “interrogation” to explain his angle of approach. He is interrogating the silver particle; he is “working with the idea of interrogating the nuts and bolts of art making, the material
nature of those processes. This has included tracking things back to their source—going to Ecuador to find a balsa tree to build an airplane, for example. Whether his choice of word is highly conscious or not at all, it makes me think about matter, seen and unseen. Interrogation implies that a hitherto unknown, non-apparent piece of information could be transmitted in the act of questioning. And in the case of Silver Particle, an imperceptible unit—the silver particle—is by chance in aesthetic synchronisation with an exterior and visible unit: Moore’s sculpture. This was a fact that was true even before being recognised, but in being recognised, the medium—photography—all of the sudden is not merely a mediator but a significant co-actor in the spectacle.

A certain macrocosmic tendency is detected. It is likewise detected in the literary works of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In Theory of Colours, he, in one particular paragraph, claims that “the colours which we see on objects are not qualities entirely strange to the eye” and that the organ of sight is “not thus merely habituated to the impression; no, it is always predisposed to produce colours of itself, and experiences a sensation of delight if something analogous to its own nature is offered to it from without.”

Mirroring. Synchronisation. Of moon and man.

VI

During a trip to Barcelona, while wandering through the narrow alleys of its Gothic Quarter, I found myself becoming a bit overexcited with having so many different paths to choose from, all of which seemed to lead to some cozy plaza, marketplace, or café worth visiting. An attractive destination at the end of one alley, forgotten with a random turn of the head. My body slavishly following the latest alluring target caught fleetingly by my eye. A feeling of recognition occurred. I could not help but notice a most critical resemblance to the patterns I follow in my method of gathering material in the early stages of my research projects. The browsing of sources, on- or offline, getting caught up in one interesting anecdotal reference and, in venturing further towards its origin, finding another, and following that one instead. In the confusion and in the feeling of losing control, I need to rely on inner processes to discern what is of importance and to filter out what is not. In an attempt to get an overview of the various parallel narratives that emerge—the conjunctions, relations, connections—I began to use digital mind-mapping software. The mind map was introduced by the English author and educational consultant Tony Buzan in the 1970s as a thinking tool designed for generating ideas and strengthening cognitive functions. It mimics how the brain thinks, which is not linearly but multilaterally: radiantly. It is based on a hierarchical structure with subjects branching out from one main theme. The mind map is a tool that has proven helpful for me, not only through its obvious functions but also in how it revealed a fundamental misunderstanding I had regarding the hierarchical structure of my projects; that is, where I thought there was one, there was none.

Root to stem, stem to branch, branch to finer branch, finer branch to leaves. And we all know what happens to them.

VII

A while ago I was given an inner vision, a shape that I believe indicates the tracings of the movements of my working process. From immaterial state to material. Strongly contoured and vaguely detailed when it comes to the particulars. It came to me, not in an attempt to gain an overview of the movements of my creative process, but in a moment of personal frustration wherein verbal means of communication seemed exhausted. This frustration concerned the hardship one never escapes: the aspiration to convey an inner sense of the self to the equivalently complex reality of the outside world, and to do that in a manner that feels honest enough to avoid feeling like a fraud. The way I see it, it all culminates in the performance, the solo exit. Ideas presented, questions asked, answers given, decisions made. They more or less mirror an inner set of conditions. Another way to view it is as a struggle between individuality and collectivity, which may very well be the reason why there is art at all. The battle of the partial versus the whole.

In an attempt to understand the motives and struggles of the artist, Austrian psychoanalyst Otto Rank conducted an interesting (but quite crude) comparative study in the early twentieth century between the “partialist” and “totalist” types of personality, and further between the “artist” and the “neurotic.” The partialist can more easily experience being “part of a greater whole” and establish his identity with the world through various communions, whereas the totalist tries to maintain a sense of being whole while “absorbing the world as part of himself.” According to Rank, “the artist and the neurotic are alike,” sharing “a far wider, more ‘magic’ feeling of the world, which is gained, however, at the cost of an egocentric attitude towards it.” The neurotic “stops at the point where he includes the world within himself and uses this as a protection against the real claims of life,” an act resulting in a “feeling of Weltenschmerz,” or world sorrow. The artist also shares this feeling, “but here the paths diverge, since the artist can use this introverted world not only as protection but as a material.” The artist “is thus never wholly oppressed by it [world sorrow—though often enough profoundly depressed—but can penetrate it by and with his own personality and then again thrust it from him and re-create it from himself.” This extrusion, Rank means, is a process of liberation, a repulsion of part of the ego, felt as a relief rather than a loss.

My previously mentioned vision of a shape, which is really a concept, would best be described as taking the form of a funnel, an upside-down...
cone-shaped object with a large opening at the top end and a small one at the bottom. As a kitchen utensil, it is used to pour liquid from one container into a second container with a small opening. Minimising the risk of spillage.

Now, I was not concerned with ideas of tampering with physical materials when I conjured up this shape, but of working with mental ones. This shape was revealed, as previously stated, in a moment of psychic exhaustion. I have since tried to make sense of this in relation to matters of the mind, arriving at the following conclusion: naturally, only a small portion of one’s orientation, temperament, composition, disposition (floating unrestricted and non-hierarchically in that upper area of the funnel) can be passed down through the narrow opening at the bottom end, and even less in each and every separate individual moment in life, such as social encounters. Not actively recognising this fact—that is, the impossibility of presenting all aspects of one’s personality at each and

Three oak framed photo gravures derived from low-resolution digital photographs of Orion’s Belt, 2016–17. Detail. 21 x 31 cm. Lavinia Jannesson

Three oak framed photo gravures derived from high-resolution photographs of treetops shot from below while picking fallen leaves, 2016–17. Detail. 21 x 31 cm. Lavinia Jannesson
I am constantly looking to see how artists who work in a similar field to me are solving the issue of material, of execution, of finding a passage-way for a research project into the physical realm. The Canadian-born artist Janice Kerbel borrows segments from conventional narration models to build new and skewed alternative narrative forms, resulting in performances, printed works, and audio recordings, among other final forms. She has declared she doesn’t feel any loyalty towards any particular medium or material. Dealing with materiality in its absence, she almost exclusively works with digital methods during the preliminary stages. Here, sketches and drafts are recurring key elements, ones that ultimately receive the applause from behind the curtain. Kerbel herself expresses a feeling of the bisection of time: the time spent behind the desk at the computer and the time when the works actually become material. Perhaps this process is a safe point that enables her to be in control in a multimedia practice, and perhaps the distribution of control throughout a project is a far more complex enterprise than I have previously thought. Because control is necessary to set up frames, but, as we all know, at a certain point there needs to be a release in order for something unexpected to happen and to bring home that awaited reward. But the release is targeted, still.

IX
I have an interest in the investigation of the smallest entity, and through that, a hope to detect any signs that reveal what is to come. A hope that the full experience is present in all its constituent parts. I seek to be consecrated, to comprehend the grand experiences in life as well as the smallest gestures that invoke them.

X
On April 1, 1814, Napoleon Bonaparte makes his way to the town of Fontainebleau, just south of France’s capital city. More precisely, he makes his way to a château within the forest of Fontainebleau, which he left for immediately after the news reached him—Paris is lost. At Fontainebleau, he faces a wall of muscle and bone, its spirits defeated. It cannot meet his demands of a counterattack to recover the city. He cries in vain. The wall of men is surrounded by one even greater, one of foliage and tree trunks. You are done. Some of the oaks were by then already several centuries old.

Three days later, on April 4, the emperor tastes, for the first time, the bitterness of abdication. All the while, the trees of the surrounding forest whistle in the wind. Red, white, and blue within soft ochres, springy greens, and bright yellows. Blue jackets, stiff under blue skies. Bleakly anonymous were they until turning blue; anonymous still, but united. One hundred and fifty tons bearing down on their shoulders, the weight of the indigo imported by Napoleon’s Grande Armée to dye their uniforms, six hundred thousand, each year. Six months later, on October 4, the French painter Jean-François Millet
is born. He would, along with painters like Théodore Rousseau, paint in and around those woods, the same woods that stood witness to the last of the red, white, and blue.

XI
When I began thinking more deeply about nature, I picked up an interest in an art movement that arose in France in the mid-nineteenth century, the realist movement. Romanticism and historicism had previously permeated French culture, manifesting in both fine art and literature. The realists rose in opposition. One of the movement’s motivations was to depict the physical world as it really is, without any exotic or divine influences. A handful of realist artists were also associated with the so-called Barbizon School, an informal group of painters who left Paris in order to live and work in the small village of Barbizon, located at the edge of the Forest of Fontainebleau. While diverse in some aspects, they shared in common an opposition to the romantic and academic landscape genre of painting. They wanted to depict landscapes naturalistically by way of a physical encounter with nature. In pursuit of this ideal, they developed a new genre of landscape painting that displayed the objective experience of nature reached through observation (they did this without abstraction in the formal sense, but I suspect their approach inevitably led to the beginning of impressionism). The impressionists’ subsequent conceptualisation or abstraction of nature—also reached through observation, but of the shifting properties of nature—interestingly complicates the idea of naturalism. Even the most abstract form of art is concrete, just as, on the other hand, the most definite naturalistic artwork is abstract when compared to nature.

Around the same time the Barbizon School was working came the development of plein-air, or open-air, painting in France, which is the practice of working from within the landscape in order to “gain a truer understanding of nature and its fleeting effects.” The Forest of Fontainebleau was thus an attractive place for emerging artists at that time to observe and work, to the extent that the area assumed Italy’s position as the continent’s premier spot for landscape painting.

All of this seemed exciting to me, that artistic evolution always works in relation to or reaction against a prior set of objectives set up by individuals within that same profession. I was also fascinated by the fact that while these artists fled the cities, knocking on nature’s door, the nation underwent a massive revolution. Industrialisation was running on its highest gear. Nature was being scrubbed away and artificially painted over. Paradoxically, the interest in the Forest of Fontainebleau arose, not after romanticism, but in the midst of it, at its peak. The unorganised topography of the forest, its unruly and raw state, was not appreciated until a new romantic sensibility had taken hold of the populace. A force not to be undervalued.

XII
My position in time and space as well as my whole being is transformed with each and every project I undertake. Perhaps it is not a lasting transformation, but in the meanwhile and as of right now, I am moving through and with the changes of the seasons, summer turning into autumn, mid-autumn turning into late, taking mental pictures of every oak, maple, birch, beech in my surroundings, actively observing for the first time the leaves as they shift colour, hoping as I go by for them not to sail to the ground just yet, because I need them, and many of them, before winter comes. After my initial experiments of extracting pigments from local vegetation, I set out to more southern latitudes, hoping to find the Forest of Fontainebleau, with its trees bare and its ground full and generous enough to let me sweep it.

The material conditions, the nature that inspired the painters of the forest, Jean-François Millet, Théodore Rousseau, Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Narcisse Virgilio Díaz, are now conditioning new works, my works, in a most physical sense. Raw pigments from the vegetation produce random patterns on lengths of fabric, of linen and hemp, aiming to break down something, the idea of a painting. It becomes an investigation into both material and the conceptual in nature. The historical use of natural pigments and the consequences of their industrialisation is, of course, a whole chapter in science in and of itself. As the anthropologist Michael Taussig explains: “Like fast food’s effect on food, nineteenth-century color technology killed off the body of color and, as regards the fine arts practiced by the likes of Jan Van Eyck and Vermeer, choked off centuries of craft, notably the tremendous work of preparing pigments.” For me, handling the actual material before any interpretation, manipulation, or concretisation feels vital. The hands-on approach is important in following the thread that leads to the externalities of things. What I am also looking to examine out here in the forest is the actual matter, that which inspired a generation of painters to break from the academic style and descend into nature, observing. And even more so, what it was that eventually made them ascend again with an awakened romantic spirit. The work might reflect on the underlying and fundamental human will to materialise and question whether it ever really is an external landscape that is reproduced in the concretisation of the observable.

XIII
Many of the artists who work in the same field of thought and concepts as I do are perceived as mainly working in a sculptural tradition. These artist include, among others, Alicja Kwade, Simon Starling, Michael Stevenson, Maxime Bondu, Saskia Noor van Imhoff, Katie Paterson, and Yto Barrada. When it comes to artworks that deal with the underlying universal laws of physics and the ways in which reality is limited by the outer rims of human perception, I enjoy looking...
at and reading about the work of Polish artist Alicja Kwade. In Nach Osten (2013), an installation wherein a single light source moves back and forth across a darkened room just inches above the floor, she offers a contemporary interpretation of Foucault’s pendulum. The work rotates around its axis once every twenty-four hours to demonstrate the rotation of the earth. However, unlike a regular Foucault’s pendulum, the work’s bulb does not swing westward but rather towards the east, “as if in a mirrored universe.” ¹⁷ The rich simplicity attracts me. One can present one’s research in single performances in this fashion, or one can present research in a setting constructed more like a landscape—a possibility I believe I need to explore in my own practice. A four-dimensional exploration. Both Saskia Noor van Imhoff and Yto Barrada are artists who mould the exhibition space into one reminiscent of a forensic scene or a skewed excavation. Found and made objects are equal, the lines between them blurred. The artist becomes both originator and explorer, as well as observer. Facts are interwoven with their visual interpretations as authenticity becomes an uncertainty.

XIV

For painters like Millet, who depicted the laborious life of peasants from the small village of Barbizon, rural life was a common subject. Such paintings portray the arduous existence of the local population. What really catches my interest about Millet’s work in particular is that, in light of the increasing objectivity in painting, with its scientific means of depicting the matters of nature, Millet still made a few paintings that, to me, seem most peculiar—even edging on the supernatural—unveiling a dormant force in nature through close observation. Romantic indeed. One of these outlier paintings is Starry Night, painted between 1850 and 1865. In comparison to Millet’s other paintings and to the works of his contemporaries, its deviation is clear. Not only does it not include people, which is an otherwise common feature of Millet’s paintings, it also depicts a nocturnal landscape with silhouetted vegetation that’s dark and gloomy, the sole light source being the starlit night sky. One of these star constellations is more recognisable than the others: Orion.

Starry Night is regarded as a unique nocturnal landscape painting of that period in time. Studies found on amateur astronomy websites (although admittedly lacking some professionalism) suggest that the night sky portrayed in this work was not just made up by the artist, as was previously presumed, but is rather a real sky, the parts of which were painted (or at least sketched) in tandem. Based on the alignment of the stars, this was done just before sunrise. Inscrutable, mysterious, and made by close observation of nature, as she really is. As one admirer of Millet’s work puts it: “Absolute truthfulness to life and nature ... was the guiding principle of Millet’s career from the first; and although at one time from sheer necessity he swerved from this maxim, it was only soon to return to it with redoubled earnestness and vigour.” ¹⁸ One could assert, and many have, that Millet painted Starry Night in a desperate attempt to reach a different audience and potential patrons, having felt his support weakening after suffering the accusation of being a socialist! So perhaps Starry Night, along with The Shooting Star (1847–48), The Sheepfold, Moonlight (1856–60), Bird’s-Nesters (1874), and Spring (1868–73), was Millet “swerving from this maxim,” but as for me, it is not my aim to present an assessment of Millet’s intentions and nor is it to find out what is true or not, for I am not a servant of art history. I have other concerns. I draw conclusions and use fragments that fit into my personal and artistic quests. It is the turn that intrigues me; an act of anti-romanticism turning romantic, once again, as naturalism paved the way for impressionism. The circular movement, arriving at a point similar to that of departure, but still moving endlessly in a forward direction.

XV

At the core of my current investigation are the materials that ignite a will to form. This striving to give form to an idea, how and why there is one at all, through the connecting of lines and geometrical shapes is something that German art historian Wilhelm Worringer calls “a will to abstraction,” which he posits is “one of the two fundamental aesthetic impulses known to human culture—the other, of course, being the urge to empathy which manifests itself in the naturalistic depiction of the observable world.” ¹⁹ Worringer, however, “denied that art began with the imitation of nature, or even had this object; but it was imitation all the same, though in a wider sense. The most definite representation possible of an idea is imitation, in the ideoplastic sense.” ²⁰

It seems that embedded in the concept of nature, which is all that is not second nature, is the capacity of surpassing its primary state and thus becoming the second kind. It seems post-industrial capitalist society is functioning on that level alone. The fuel that all human production requires to sustain the balance runs on the transformation of nature. Just as the concept of the artist presumes that the natural state of things are, at some level, unsatisfactory. Solely observing is insufficient, as some things need to be understood by being read in an altered state.

XVI

Artistic volition by the sensation of collapse, collision, conjunction.

The materials of nature are transformed and re-arranged, becoming this second nature that human production and society are so very dependent on. Made exceptional in the destruction of its preconditions. During a trek in the Forest of Fontainebleau, where Théodore Rousseau had sought and found inspiration
for his paintings for over four decades of his life, he encountered a woodsman hunched over a tree he had probably felled himself, whereupon Rousseau cried out in an outburst of anger: "But do you know what is the difference between an oak and a board? It is that an oak makes a million boards, while a million boards can never make an oak."21

This is true. There is no going back. But what seems certain, however, is between the two, human nature will choose the board. Imagination prevails.

**XVII**

Located 1,500 light years from Earth, just south of Alnitak, one of the stars that make up Orion’s Belt, approximately three to four light years high and two to three light years across is the Horsehead Nebula. It is dark, consisting of thick dusty clouds and gas, towering majestically against a backdrop of glowing bright pinks and mauves. Its shape resembles that of a horse’s head, hence the name. It was observed for the first time in 1888 by Scottish astronomer Williamina Fleming, who, during the second half of the century, along with many other women, rode into the field of astronomy on a rainbow-coloured tide. It was through the discovery of a new application for the spectroscope (an instrument that breaks down light into wavelengths) that a whole new division of astronomy opened up: the beginning of what later would become astrophysics. By analysing the data retrieved from images of stars’ colour spectrums, details about their size and composition could be more accurately determined; this work required “repetitive, painstaking attention to detail,”22 and thus was considered to be a suitable task for women. A similar demand for this type of labour can be found in many areas of science in the late nineteenth century.

As colour assisted the systematisation of the heavens, a second discovery enabled colour to spread down below on Earth and completely revolutionise, for example, the textiles industry, namely through the first aniline dye—purple mauveine. It was, interestingly enough, discovered by accident, by the English chemist William Henry Perkin, who, in 1856, failed to synthesise quinine, the substance used for treating malaria, but succeeded in making mauve.

Through the entry of that one colour, all remaining colours received an access pass. One might call purple mauveine the very last colour. This is how mauve became bornly fixed within the history of the European bourgeoisie. The word “traveller” is, according to the anthropologist James Clifford, very stubbornly fixed within the history of the European bourgeoisie, a topic he examines in his collection of essays *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. The book portrays a history full of exclusion and the obscuring of the conditions that enabled these dislocations. The picture of the traveller is that of a certain preconditions. Clifford claims that the definition of the traveller, the bourgeois voyager, as a person comes from circumstantial details. By following them, and especially as they sometimes reveal an actual relation, I feel as if I have uncovered something hidden, like an archaeologist dusting off the last layer of her latest discovery.

**XIX**

Millet was born in 1814, the same year as Napoleon’s abdication at Fontainebleau, which is where Millet relocated and lived out his last days. Millet painted his famous painting *The Gleaners* in 1857, which is the same year that the astronomer Fleming was born in Scotland. During those years, Millet worked on the painting *Starry Night*, a nocturnal landscape that includes the Orion constellation. Fleming is again connected by her discovery of the Horsehead Nebula, located within that same constellation. So on and so forth.

**XX**

The colourful messy state in producing the work is mine alone.

**XXI**

Travelling as an activity is part of the methodology of my practice. I find a compelling necessity in the physical displacement of my own body and in the elongation of the body of the co-travelling work. The material components of the work-to-be move many times through space, pass through borders, and see more than one shore. But I find I must try to determine and question the nature of this travel, and figure out which word is best suited to use in relation to artistic research.

Travel, journey, trip, ride, voyage, expedition, passage, or pilgrimage. The latter has been my choice of expression in the past when trying to characterise these spatial dislocations, but all the words store within themselves various cultural and historical associations. The term “travel” seems to me to be more about describing the movement of following a route. You leave one point (a) and arrive at another (b); the points of departure and arrival are arbitrary. It does not specify any expectations. But, not surprisingly, in reading about the word’s history I found it to be an intricate subject. The term “traveller” is, according to Clifford, very stubbornly fixed within the history of the European bourgeoisie, a topic he examines in his collection of essays *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. The book portrays a history full of exclusion and the obscuring of the conditions that enabled these dislocations. The picture of the traveller is that of a person who is cultivated, autonomous, “a citizen of the world.” One would not ascribe the word “traveller” to immigrants or people fleeing for their lives from one war-torn place to another of peace. Those dislocations are of another kind. The distinction seems to be about certain preconditions. Clifford claims that the definition of the traveller, the bourgeois voyager, as a person...
Five-leaf oak and linen screen, dyed with leaves from ash, beech, birch, chestnut, maple and acorns gathered in the Forest of Fontainebleau, aluminium sulphate, iron sulphate, sodium carbonate and vinegar, 2016–17. 625 x 215 cm. Lavinia Jannesson
who is independent enough to “move about in relatively unconstrained ways” is the travel myth. In fact, studies have shown that “most bourgeois, scientific, commercial, aesthetic travellers moved within highly determined circuits” and were privileged enough to be ensured a secure ride and a safe trip home.23

Scientific travellers and explorers became ethnographers, archaeologists, biologists, and anthropologists, all of which are associated with fieldwork, which is another term with a heavy legacy. “Fieldwork” has colonist historical associations, as it makes a claim on foreign territory, perceiving it as an extensive laboratory. Should the artist too be included in this list? To a certain extent I feel like a fieldworker, although I seldom travel to a location in the hopes of gaining experiences that will lead to future art projects. When I begin a new project, there is always a strict schedule, and I have an idea of what kind of material it is I need. An implementation in an almost robotic sense. I get in and out. It feels like a mission. So I would categorise this part of my practice as a type of fieldwork, only without the element of on-site discovery. I am never looking for any surprises; or, rather, my work is not dependent on them. This is not to say that I do not look for an experience, but rather that my interest lies in getting closer to profound experiences made by figures of the past, and in reviving experiences and events that are embedded in history, theorised, reduced to symbols on sheets of paper. One way of doing this is to track back to the original, to investigate the materials that precondition the experience.

XXII
The experience as a starting point for making art is not descriptive of my practice, and I would say it is debatable in regard to artistic production in general. The experience of living is experience as default, and it goes without saying that this experience sits at the beginning of all human production. However, I feel it is too simplistic to claim, as some do, that a piece of art is a result of an artist’s experience of living or that it is a direct product of impressions from the outside. For I feel that I make art in order to gain an experience, and I seem to get relief from this.

XXIII
As previously mentioned, my relation to materials is not one free of conflict. I want to offer an entry into my work that springs from any possible source and at the same time try to avoid illustration and reproduction without providing contemporary anchoring. I share many interests with the French artist Maxime Bondu. One of these concerns imagery of the past. Bondu reproduces or recreates objects from documented history, from video documentation, photographs, and so on. His selection of materials used to concretise these intangible objects is closely bound to a source. His consistency lies not in his choice of materials but in replicating them in order to force forth their inherent ideas and to further build new narratives through association and juxtaposition.

The detour is habitually present. Geographical. Metaphorical. Why take the long road, one might wonder. I believe I have a tendency to connect to the present by analysing moments after they have passed, rationally evaluating patterns of thoughts, intellectualising in order to retrieve the feeling that caused them. Confusing thought for sentiment. With a feeling of being in a constant state of emotional delay, I process impressions by reanimating them through externalisation, and, in that, invariably taking detours. This in order to reach a deeper understanding of myself. A method of gaining unidentifiable knowledge, but knowledge nonetheless.

XXIV
I sense there has been a displacement of the role of the artist’s personality in regard to visual expression in contemporary practice. The personality and emotional state of the artist seem to have been more obviously exploited and transformed into pictorial elements throughout modernism, and now it seems the emotional triggers are set off further down the chain, blooming in contact with a receiver, dependent on being perceived by a spectator. That is not to say I do not express myself through my work, but using the experience as an aesthetic effect has been deprioritised, or perhaps does not fit into the contemporary aesthetic ideal. A recurrent feeling is that I need to reduce all unnecessaries in order to reach deeper down. Simplification in order to touch on the essentials.

XXV
I am a potential anthropologist, archaeologist, architect, archivist, astrophysicist, botanist, cognitive scientist, communicator, conservator, curator, designer, detective, geologist, historian, museologist. All these potentials. That is just it. How can there be a way of choosing? Perhaps the difficulty in making a decision lies in the possibility it has already been made. Doing this, making art, was perhaps one decision I never had to make. And that is all the reassurance I need.


Starling, interview by Manacorda, 27.


Rank, *Art and Artist*, 11–12.


Jones et al., *In the Forest of Fontainebleau*, 30.

Taussig, *What Color Is the Sacred?*, 41.


Rank, *Art and Artist*, 14. “Ideoplastc” means “rendered symbolic or conventional through the mental remodeling of natural subjects.”

Jones et al., *In the Forest of Fontainebleau*, 20.


Mads Juel

Untitled (cartography I) andUntitled (cartography II), 2017. Colour photography, MDF, glass, metal clips. 100 x 100 cm x 4. Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Mads Juel
Atlas

Diary Entry

atom bombs exist¹ (not as the threat, but as the fission)
as a day, the twenty-seventh of January²

as the Milky Way: a ghastly scent that drizzles down into the underlying water³

*

I step in and out of this text as I step in and out of different memories. I am writing out a game between fictivity and factivity: the atomic bomb exists—fictively and factually. Sign systems like the personal (lyrical) and the factual (universal) are being activated. I've tried to widen the space of possibility in such a way that I allow the personal and the factual to cross over each other. It becomes a reabsorption of the past, which is reactualised in relation to the present time. I am weighing the gravity of the events and spreading them out as new forms on paper.

The first colour was black, like the earliest hours of the day.

I am working my way through a body of material, and proceeding on the assumption that there is a system to what is experienced. I philosophise about this, making use of different grips that can decode this system. I want to understand how the use of colour can create a link between the body and an experience of higher understanding. I examine the sorrow and the light, the colour and the body, within a world that is vulnerable.

When I first was cut off from language it was out of necessity, like when I'm playing “the floor is lava.” In order to get to the kitchen, I've got to step away from the bed, over the chest of drawers, and then try to grab hold of a jacket on the coat hook in the foyer. I step right down onto it. From there, I can coax one jacket after the other off its respective hook and finally reach the kitchen. What is experienced is a continuous series of small events that can be altered over time and through changing contexts. It consists of sentences that are constructed and built up every day. I use the same ones again and again. These bear my attitudes: I see as far as my sentences stretch. Beyond that, I am blind. But a sentence is not a dogma. If I strive and look far, there is surely a possibility in a change.

– So I start out by dividing the language up in places where it is consciously being staged: this is something that we play, and you get a chance to watch the game.

– And in places where I'm left alone in a clearing. Your gaze can shift between apprehending that this is something we are pretending and apprehending that this is the way reality actually looks.

It's right here that I could cheat in the game. That I could cheat language. As a movement between the act of wanting to believe and the act of actually seeing. I could compare the memories, set them up in rows, and pretend that there was a structure tying them together. I might be able to believe in this to such a sufficient degree that I would sometimes forget that this was no more than a speculation and an affectation. I could work with my memories in a different light than the spontaneously nostalgic light: the nostalgia, which turns attention towards the predetermined emotion, towards the time or the place before the journey began. A journey that now calls forth a form of pain, not necessarily linked with the journey itself, but spanning the starting point's utopia. However, this is far from my wanting to make any attempt to create a museological chasm in my melancholy, as it is built on the assumption that there are answers conjoined with the body and with poetics, like a small door in the wall that can lead you further into the labyrinth.

I've got a notebook, in which I am writing this now, which changes. It becomes enlarged. The present is given extra attention. I can, on the following day, where the present is woven from another fabric altogether, go back and bring my own words to mind. But there is also a danger in this increased attention. I allow it to glide out from reality and into the fiction. In a rewriting, in an exaggeration. So exaggerated that it can almost seem crazy. But follow me over the edge. And then you'll get something in return: my notebooks' memoranda and the beginning of it all. We could start off with a simple gift. I will give you a beginning. One of many, presumably. A beginning of a tale that can be yours. All right, this is yours to lean up against; now the whole thing can proceed! This is one of the current stories that is being told. A delimited narrative that started out with a text message that I received one night—I just woke up from a dream that you were here in Kenya with me⁴—and concluded with a conversation in January.

When something is put up on stage: that is to say, when it looks like, but it's not.
Words Are Beginning ...

... if word is the beginning, an embedded time, a unit that can be broken and realised in non-time, the evidence within a parentheses' nature. A curve will break, and soon the contents of a reduction or an addition will flow and take its place in space.

An annex. A wing to the actual house. The underlying notations that lead up to the actual text. As an opening in the sign, or more correctly, as a fracture of an enclave in the ground, so compressed gasses gush out and become combined with oxygen. A fissure within an entity. The personal accounts could be regarded as belonging to the annex, as an unfolding of an archive, like the conceptual structure in Gerhard Richter’s photographic work Atlas (1962–2013). When I turn the pages of Atlas, the resemblance between a note system in a text and Richter’s work becomes clear to me. When one is let in on the personal archive (the annex), it’s a way to unfold a more complete understanding, or as an adumbration of the body. My body, in this case. The sitting-alone body, which I, in this situation, share with others in the sense that you, likewise, are sitting and possessing a body and making use of it. Taking advantage of the fact that the body is functioning, that is to say, is walking down the street, eating a piece of fruit, which it slices up, it is making love, and it is departing in anger. It feels. The street, eating a piece of fruit, which it slices up, it body is functioning, that is to say, is walking down.

A circuit could be seen as an action of feeling or loving. So we love each other. For each other’s sake. For your own sake. For society’s sake. For the love of your neighbour, and thereby, for the sake of taxation and the taxpayers and for society’s beneficiaries. Beneficiaries of social assistance and home help. And help after your arteries are blocked, which puts an end to the circulation of your blood and, again, makes you a part of the circulation and the lovers.

For some time now, I’ve been standing outside the circuit. I’ve left things to stand, let people overtake me on the street. I haven’t looked up nor reacted to being addressed, as if my knowledge of simple and public behaviour had been taken from me. A part of my body is my images. They operate as an extra arm, or as splittings of my personality. But also as their own individuals, which act and function entirely of their own accord: like my brothers or sisters. Their manner of addressing me also struck me as strange. I did not understand their gestures or their reciprocal language. However, the body has its own will and takes control: it cheats (that is to say, I am cheating), it wants to survive. It doesn’t want to die or to look dead. Others must not see that I am dead. So I copy others, trying to alter my deathlike appearance. I am trying to decode what life looks like. I’m reading books with their closed cycles. A thoroughly revised story, conceivably and concluded, one that has a reassuring effect: the hero comes into realisation, or fails to. I put my life in the book’s hands. I’m trying to start all over again. To [every morning] read a little in a book or in a photocopied handout. I’m making my own attempts: the words, they are supposed to be right there. The many varieties of words are a quick creation: they might seem inhumane, far from being a brother or a sister, but they can nevertheless approach a potential. The word can generate an infinite number of sentences, each sentence being a small space. Whatever language I have been using up until now has disappeared; I am trying to create a new one, a counterlanguage.

Space:

“Mathematically speaking, a space is nothing other than a quantity within which it is possible to speak about mutual positions and, when relevant, about the distance (prosody) between the elements. In addition to its dimensions, a space will be characterized by a number of other topological features, expressed in terms of categories like continuous/discrete, finite/infinite, etc.”

I’m reading about space: I’ve forgotten what simple relationships to my surroundings feel like. Moreover, I am trying to work with simple sentence constructions: Continuously, as the days keep passing by. Discrete as the day, which sometimes begins from your slumber. Finitely, as the night which takes hold. Infinite, like the day: thedaythedaytheday... The four words are imprinted and come to constitute a beginning of a sequence of thoughts that will generate more sentences. More counterlanguage. It starts out in the small things. I constantly carry around Inger Christensen’s collected poems. She opens up a world about what is. That which is. She writes about nature, as a collaboration between the golden section and series of numbers with poetic revelations, which can dart from point zero and nothing to whirling up into innumerable patterns. The vegetables are writing poetry, each one in its own peculiar way. I’m thinking that there are countless others in the world who are thinking alongside me. There is a discrete relation between the graffiti applied to a building’s wall and a body in passing. She starts out with the systems, in the things she can see: everyday life and biology. That which binds all of it together, such as the lawn that she shares with others. She leaps from the factual to the imaginative and back again. From touch (transitive) to the act of touching (reflexive). It’s transitory: I know that. For my own part, I take hold, to some extent, of east and west, and read on.
Fold:
"The fold articulates two different domains (or spaces), but without further separating or juxtaposing them. For aesthetics, the crucial importance of the fold is seated in articulation of the difference between the visible and the concealed.

"Ontologically considered, the category of visible/concealed is one of the most important preconditions for the concept of truth: accordingly, the fold can be considered a fundamental 'feature' of 'being'.

“It is upon this background that one has to apprehend the philosophical significance of categories like implicit/explicit (Latin = ‘unfolded/infolded’).”

Christensen places brackets around things, as though they occupy a reciprocal position and share a certain relation from which to proceed. I imagine the relation of tension between two individuals' positions inside a room in an infinite number of scenarios. Christensen makes use of language's way of generating relationships. The prepositions create one of the fundamental frames around the structure in her collection of poems Det (It). They are words that appear to conjoin a human hope to a grammatical element. It's human to ascribe human qualities to things; this is something I recognise from the nature of photography. Christensen widens the space (the text), as a fold, as a non-determined delimitation. She does not confine herself to the actual structure, to the poem's body, which holds the sky above the earth; instead, she makes use of what is implicit: the hidden word in a sentence, that is to say, the meaning that yearns to dwell beneath what is visible. It is conceivable to read this structure transversely, as a breach of the book's linearity, as though you were stepping into a thought that had been rendered three-dimensional. Such a reading, however, does not immediately give rise to meaning. It creates a form of meaning, which implies being or essence, but is rather an interpretation of the text or of a system hidden beneath. A being that lies, quite precisely, below the surface. Photographically, the being could be disguised as summer or winter. It could be disguised as nature. The notion of reality: a delimited identifiable something. It's right there, beyond the words, there it is! The visual language: something dwelling there, outside the words.

The Schematics of Weather Phenomena
A schematic of my own practice, the meaningful elements in my work.

Lightning. Of a momentary character, which gives rise to distance or differences. A temporal aspect.

Rain. Freedom.

Darkness. Emptiness. The emptiness is still missing emptiness, even though we are being told that this is precisely what is missing. The word “emptiness” becomes a substitute for emptiness, which winds up in the middle of darkness.

The sun. The sun is systematic.

The fog. Camouflaging the static. In the days when the fog does not lift, all actions have to be regarded as transitory, since the static is being concealed.

Later on. One speaks about the words in the manner in which one leads food up to the eyes. And about their delight and their freshness. A delight, as we find in crisp, exotic fruits, whose peels break open to reveal the voluptuous flesh. One ate and ate, for even the most fastidious palates could not get enough, as though they were the stolen apples from the Garden of the Hesperides.

And what about the flies?

The flies?

When you've got fruit, you've got flies.

They build their nests
underneath the delectable fruit peels
And hatch their eggs as
the dessert is being served

In my attempts to remain on the body's level, I cry out an anti-death wish: Stay and grow, my body, grow! The repetition (the circuit) jibes with this reading, inasmuch as it turns the poem into a magic list, which, by extending the word's lifetime, will prolong the body's lifetime. The preservation of material: the body remains, even though its condition is being altered. It is a part of the circuit.

I'm looking at pictures from Boris Mikhailov's Case History (1997–98) and from "his Russia" and at the aftershock of what he calls "the world experiment," where socialism and a socialist way of thinking are supposed to go the distance. I had seen these pictures earlier. His after-images of this new world, where people are put out on the street. The picture's bodies are covered by an excoriated rawness, by blemishes, by crusts, by loose teeth, excrement, and worn-out clothing. You see diseases that are growing inside the mouth. Or, at least, that's what you think you're seeing. You see the bodies that are living on without anybody believing this could be possible. Mikhailov was photographing the new boundaries of morality, which are fit to the new conditions that have been set up for these people's survival. He would photograph people and whatever they were willing to undergo, and there he would follow them. Whatever the person was willing to show, Mikhailov would accept. I'm fascinated by this tacit drama that is being lived out. It's about almost nothing, which seems to be almost human. They
Untitled (cartography I), 2017. Detail. Colour photography. 200 x 200 cm. Mads Juel
are not posing for him, and “it was like life itself.” Life was standing forth, in the middle of death.

I take some measure of delight in reading Georges Bataille; it’s something like the pleasure taken in looking through water. I’ve read my way into his inner experience in the same way I read poems: in a scattered way, and without any expectation of a complete baring. His reflections on the poetic, the strange, and his craving to look at the ugly seems to be speaking more about photography than most other texts that try to formulate themselves directly about the subject: “If poetry introduces the strange, it does so by means of the familiar. The poetic is the familiar dissolving into the poetry introduces the strange, it does so by means of the familiar. The poetic is the familiar dissolving into the strangeness.”

Familiarity dissolves into strangeness. And this is what I sense is happening: I am looking at the nameless. But it’s not that at all. The colour could now be green, maybe as hope (who knows?).

What is present in my works are the dual dialogues, or the concurrent monologues: I don’t quite know which is more precise. It is the notion of parallel lanes that are gliding along silently. Lanes where people do not have any chance to trade places. When it comes to translations, I’m thinking about that which gets lost—as we move from the original to the other. I’m translating all the time. In order to communicate, I’ve got to translate. It’s quite simple. This text moved from Danish to English: from one hand to another. I constructed a video sequence with this in mind. The material consisted of recordings of starlings hunting insects; these birds turned up in home videos that I got from my mother. The chattering of starlings moves rhythmically, as if the starlings were one collective body. Whenever the chattering took on what I understood to be a solid form, I would pause the video and take a picture. I did this slavishly until I had gotten all the way through the material, until I only had solid forms. Subsequently, I put the pictures in motion, animated them, and created a new rhythm. A ritualistic, repetitive chattering of starlings. A visual language, displayed on a screen, in a short loop. On another screen, I had another circuit, a chattering of words moving forward as a wave. In this manner, the two screens try to sustain a conversation about the circuit, albeit it becomes interrupted by the difference between languages, in the internal genesis of the misunderstandings. On a piece of paper I wrote: *I lost/between us.* I wanted to address the word flows’ loss. But where there is loss, there is also profit and a return, which serves to make it so that we keep going. Language runs out into holes and fillings. In my head, it has fashioned a form of persona, *the parasite.* Small stickers of a kind that steal their way around among my images, as a colourless scent in the room. It is the last layer that settles in, inside the established room. The parasites represent a form of knowledge. They present you and the images with certain words or with a bid on a context. At the same time, this knowledge is sometimes of an impoverished character: it is the hole and it is fragile and can only lean up against its immediate surroundings, like a hanger-on at a dinner party.

The visual language is immediately colonised and “the room inside me has disappeared.”

I am looking at the nameless. But it’s not that at all. We have conquered the forests, *hallelujah.* The nameless could be seen in connection with the blank space that is created during the interval that spans from when I take a photograph to when the photograph is eventually perceived. Allegory’s most important asset: “its capacity to rescue from historical oblivion that which threatens to disappear.”

Photography’s knack for borrowing motifs and adding new meanings on top: I appropriate landscape and allow it to toss...
itself in, taking on a new meaning. It stands forth as a primeval landscape, where the moment has already eroded. It throws us out into a line of temporal demarcation, where we face our own distance from history. With the photograph (the allegory), what is secured is the materiality’s time-related nature and perishableness, which is accordingly linked to the ruin. The motif (the story) is secured for posterity, is secured in the ruin. An emblematic fragment, which stands forth as transcendent, sealed-up meaning, and that which lies between meaning and physique, within the blank space, is the subjective interpretation.

The hardest thing is to get dressed in the morning. [trying again] underpants, then socks, etc. I’m sitting on the bed, thinking, while my faith in mankind is vanishing. From one time to another. More and more often. And they will inherit the earth: they will bark from each of their corners.

Transitory Landscapes

The landscape and its myths, in its untold number of shapes, must once again be called forth from its cave. A body is formed by the limbs’ immediate presence. The soul, for example, is only held down by a lightweight binding. And the breath sometimes leaks out, only to remain out there. What’s it all worth? On the verge of understanding, a bitter turn. There’s no room to stand inside of. The ground swallows itself up or gets stomped down. The grains are standing even closer. Erasing the next ones. Disappearing right in front of your eyes. The photographs disappeared. I let them be erased, more and more, until the motifs were exercised: a large monochrome. Until the colour was indistinct and tainted: a square of grain. The body congeals with its own blood. A field is formed solely by the grain’s immediate presence. This is a photograph of an epic nature in free fall, the eradication of what is most real. I have, in certain cases, introduced my photographs to the frame, consisting of a simple backing sheet, set out with glass. These two surfaces are assembled around the photograph with small metal brackets that I have folded and mounted. I want to create the layers, and I want to emphasise these while simultaneously retaining or enhancing the fluidity between the pictures. I do not want any delimitations. The glass lets the surroundings enter into the picture, through the reflection. I’m standing inside my studio. I have just framed four new photographs. This occurs to me: when the aperture opens, the negative gets exposed. It is activated by light. Inside my studio, a similar process is taking place. The photos are activated once again, but this time in a different way, by the light. The light enters into the photograph’s motif through the glass and you’ve got to find your focus, precisely like when I was out in the woods and the film was exposed. My photographs cannot stand alone. They cannot be isolated. They are interchangeable and they cannot enter into a stable or protected form.

If colour were a room in which I could lie, or my body was a room in which you moved.

I am always photographing myself, my own feelings. I’m not in any doubt whatsoever. It depends on the moment. [the morning after] it’s transpiring in a different way now. I’m saying: Yes, but that’s not how it is anymore. The landscapes are undergoing constant change. I think of them as being transitory, as levels of colour and as scales. In their lightlessness, they turn into a gravity. In their fictivity, a factivity. The landscape and the breath are one and the same. I never master the breath—or the hunger, which titillates, when I really ought to fast. My understanding of the landscape: I take a pocket camera out and flash. A flock of birds flies away from a tree in terror. The darkness hides their number.

Not only is the landscape transitory: it also provides me with some form of tranquility. I’m sitting in front of a picture: from the dark grains, it’s buzzing and breathing. When it functions, it’s as if everything is growing: the spatial perception, the intimacies, and the levels of colour. In addition to an aesthetic sensation, the colour scales possess a relation to time. As opposed to, for example, bla, tid (Blue, time) (1968) created by the artist Per Kirkeby, a publication with blue squares, which, in their expression, are indifferent to time; the colours in my photographs have been drawn from the day’s changing light. Those that seem colourless are those which have absorbed the least amount of light. The darkest hour. The colour has been driven out from them; what remains are only the grains and the vestige of a motive. What are also included here are the reddish and the sepia tones. The next level is the green. Deep tones, but where there may be faint impulses from other colours, such as purple and rose. The very last level is the blue, which lies closest to the light. A movement through the pictures would be a movement through time.

I’m harbouring a wish that I will, at some point in time, create a work that is entertaining. A work that is fun or sufficiently absurd and swathed in humour. I’m thinking about works like Me and My Mother by Ragnar Kjartansson. A body (Guðrún Ásmundsdóttir’s body) is reduced to saliva and noise inside the room. My body is reduced to laughter. The work actually consists of a series of videos that Kjartansson has been recording since the year 2000 in collaboration with his mother. Every five years, the drama plays itself out; every five years the abject is captured on video. I’m thinking about what it is that constitutes an individual and that can be dissolved and flow away, like the landscapes that flow into and out of each other. (And already there, my thoughts digressed and broke off what might be entertaining. For now, I will have to be content with appreciating works that are quite unlike my own.) My father seemed to me, at a certain point in
my life, to resemble a mirror, which reflected the similarity there was between my mother and me. I think he set elements into connection, like when I read two texts at the same time and the texts seem to dissolve into and out of each other: in Lars Norén’s Filosofiens Nat (Philosophy’s night), the bodies fall into ruins. The first-person-voiced narrator’s death (as well as that of the mother and the father) is portrayed in an epic poem, in a mad person’s ravings, in the twilight. This mirrors the rhythm of the subject-dissolving stream brought forth by Clarice Lispector in her Água Viva. As close as words in a sentence, people grow alongside each other. They are nevertheless separated. There seems to be incongruity between the body and its subject. Lispector’s dissolution, however, appears to be different from Norén’s. She is a bucket of water that has come to be submerged in the ocean, with the result that the bodies of water flow together: “I surpass myself by surrendering my name and therefore I am the world. I am following the world’s voice with a solitary voice.”

The average person in Norén’s world is under pressure, and the rebirth that Lispector writes about seems impossible. A dissolution of the subject, which moves into connection with everything. The dissolution of the individual can either be seen as an amalgamation or an expiration. One will continue to write if one is nourished by this. I’m going to keep photographing the landscape as long as it bears fruit.

**Underlying Structures**

My first conscious thought about underlying structures found its basis just outside my home, in a protracted dreamlike slowness: roads have to bend and have to intersect with others. You’re on the move. A tree had been placed there. A parking meter. The cars glide silently past and pull up on their steering wheels. Mankind’s trot has been tailored to fit the distance from the car. This can simply continue, in a calm way. The wheels pull towards the left. The lane for the ones who are walking is uninterrupted. The adjustments of our movements. You don’t see them. But they exist.

A tree had been placed there. All the distances had been measured out, and whatever I passed, whether it happened to be static or in motion, appeared to be moving around something else, as in a dance. Or in what appeared to be a scene. It was all at once calming and disturbing. It seemed predetermined, like the primordially latent. You would experience this in the last scene. Some years ago, I found some Polaroids that my mother had taken. The landscape in the Polaroids reminds me very much of the landscape to which I myself am drawn. My mother’s inner landscape seems to bear a striking resemblance to the landscape in which I dwell. My father has pointed this out. Last summer, he saw time tying knots around itself. Time was not advancing with a forward march, but was repeating everything it had done before. I wonder if you need any help? Instead, my work at the computer began.

The working process required for analogue colour film has generally come to be difficult in a digitised world. There are only a few places where the process can be performed—from the development of the negative strip to working with the actual copying of colour prints in the darkroom. I am able to develop negatives and work with the black and white. After this, however, my knowledge dives down into a hole. One of the primary conditions of my photography has proved to be the colour: “The colour as an asset of light.” This is why all my post-production is digital. I scan the negative strips and they are absorbed into my system. I am imagining a small socialistic mechanism. Everyone has to become sluiced in through the same port, through the scanner, into the organism. A jumble of entities that breaks away from hierarchization.

I scanned the Polaroids on an Epson flatbed scanner: model 4870. I have retained the Polaroids’ original format. Around the pictures, a coloured frame has been fashioned, a fake passepartout of a kind that stems from the scanning process, there where the scanner moved beyond the picture’s edge: where it illuminated itself, and saw itself. It looked at itself and it was green. This became my jumping-off point for working with the Polaroids, as a part of my archive. We moved from each having our own nature to having to live with one another’s nature. They have been digitised, have obtained a frame, etc. This is their nature now, as is similarly the case in my photography that has a given format, which has been predetermined. In the underlying structures, I am working out the condition of the things at hand; I am searching for their understanding; and I am hoping that this will jibe with my own. Hoping that we can find a way of being side by side.

One of the stories I am telling has to do with my relationship to my mother and with the works that this relationship has spawned. Works that leap forth, in a very different way, from an intimacy between her material and my hand. I am transforming figurative material. I am struggling with this material: with its proximity and its distance. These works seem to be more closely connected to writing. Maybe this is why I have thrown these particular works into relief here. Like documents where I scrape away the original texts, overwrite them, and attach new meaning to them. My meditative and transitory landscapes can be found in these other works. They are in possession of their own confidential silence. I know that they are lying latent and I am trying to unearth them.

**Diary Entry**

He is getting tired of the city, of the people and of the surroundings.
I’m going for another walk. Serpentine Gallery, Jimmie Durham, *Museum of Stones* (2011–12). The glass vitrine functions as a support stand for the exhibition. The exhibited stones could otherwise have been placed in the corners of the room, or could otherwise be found in a quarry.

The anti-monumental in a face: a smile breaks out, bursts, is packed away.

**Diptych**

(Greek: *diptycha* = folded together, *di* = two, twice + *ptýssein* = to fold)

The diptych is a pair of pictures (or carvings) on two panels, ordinarily connected by hinges. A foldable construction. A picture can be packed together. My father’s view of religious space has to do with cultural heritage and history. My father’s view of God, on the other hand, is that God was merely stirring up wars. We’ve spent many of our holidays in churches and in chapels, as an integral part of my general enculturation. I’ve seen altarpieces, ecclesiastical paintings, and ornate catacombs. I have stood many times in front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled. I carry the ecclesiastical space’s front of Peter Paul Rubens’s extravagant movements: his baroque scenarios and their dominant scale, and I have been dazzled.

The sentence *atom bombs exist* (as a quote, as a historical fact, as a poetic explosion) collapses with the sentence *as a day, the twenty-seventh of January* (a concrete indication of time). The weight from the two will give way and will fall down over the sentence *as the Milky Way: a ghastly scent that drizzles down into the underlying water* (a painting, also a mood or a life of feelings) and form a triptych or a constructed memory.

Moving into a sentence is like moving into a conception of space; the space would be a construct of several times.

Later on, I was reading the text “*Det Som Fjerner Seg*” (That which removes itself) by Eivind Hofstad Evjemo, from the *Seeable Sayable* exhibition. Evjemo circles around, among other things, the author Tor Ulven’s use of time and capsules. The capsules can be, among other things, what death leaves behind: shards of pottery, carcasses, sculptures, or a thought, and what is common to all of them is that they lie beyond the author’s capacity to apprehend their essence. They can only be attained through empathy. One “is forced to balance on the boundaries between seeing the world in his/her life, before-life and afterlife. Ulven has a distinctive sensitivity for the simultaneity of dissimilar times. ... Poetry is concerned with getting back to points that elucidate how a community can arise between certain living conditions: signs of life which will come, life as it is lived, and life that has been lived.” Ulven is in possession of a fantastic sense for joining multiple time axes together and for letting them coalesce into a single form.

**Blue Is Silence**

I see worlds rise and fall in the blue (I perceive the things’ blue reflection).

*Under hjerget* (Under the mountain). Here, his light-toned skin finds repose. The fatty wax. I imagine him growing up in a garden filled with bees. Death touches life: as things are lying, so have they become disentangled. Emil Westman Hertz, thirty-seven, graduate of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, sculptor.

What my thoughts continue to circle around are Westman Hertz’s exhibition catalogues. Catalogues of a photographic character. These are materials that show registrations of situations, photocopies, documentation, and *kairos*. They show totals, landscapes, snapshots, and utopias. In one photograph you’ve stepped into a garden with strangely magnified plants in bloom. A cat’s eyes have become acid green and yellow because of the camera’s flash shooting at it. It’s that which everybody knows and that which the days are filled with. *The photograph’s opening* might always have been its proximity to reality. Like two glove-wearing hands that interlock: feeling the pressure, the muscles that flex and tighten up. Separated by the gloves, the hands will always be without direct contact.

Around my studio, there are small stacks and piles of books and catalogues by Wolfgang Tillmans. There’s a certain similarity between Westman Hertz’s and Tillmans’s ways of compounding pictures: for one thing, the pictures are tangled closely together. When it comes to their place of origin, one could be tempted to believe that they stem from widely different media. Everything conjoined into one chronology. Tillmans’s installations, for me, function as compressed bodies. Bodies that lie in layers and generate connections. The most important things about the collective are the crowd and the gathering. The shared experience. Tillmans’s photographs are often characterised by this, as can be seen in his ego-dissolving club pictures or in a delicate armpit, photographed at close range inside a crowded train car. In documentation of a Tillmans exhibition can be seen two pictures that were allocated in two adjoining rooms. The photographs seem intimate
and indirectly linked, and what it was that existed between them, this dialogue, could be captured if you stood at one specific point in the exhibition, between the two rooms, with a view into both of them. In “Picture Possible Lives: The Work of Wolfgang Tillmans,” art critic Jan Verwoert calls into play the concept of “sensuous community,” which was conceived by cultural theorist Paul Willis in his book Jugend-Stile. Zur Ästhetik der gemeinsamen Kultur (Moving Culture: An Enquiry into the Cultural Activities of Young People). The concept is clarified thusly: “A temporary and informal alliance of individuals formed through a confluence of personal energies, desires, interests, musical, sexual or sartorial preferences.” One could also read both Westman Hertz’s and Tillman’s installations in this way—a community of free individuals. That’s how I imagine the two pictures in the adjoining rooms functioning. They found their form, for a while. Thereafter, they were cast out into a new one. Nothing perishes; everything is transformed for the sake of a new beginning.

Claims I make to myself: photography will start all over again, will melt back into my world, leaning up against the bones’ inconsequential outcome; beauty has a relative influence; depression mimes death by drowning; posthumous reputation appears to be an insecure prospect; and death is something that will transpire in a fleeting moment.

I’m moving my way through the room at Helena Almeida’s exhibition Corpus. I’m circulating in a clockwise direction, and I come to a wall with four black-and-white photographs titled The Wave (1997). I start out by reading the photographs from left to right: Black dust on the floor creeps closer to a person clad in black, in each of the four pictures. She is being forced—closely—up against the wall. After a little while, I feel the urge to see them again, so I walk back and now I meet the pictures from their right side: Black dust on the floor gives a person clad in black more and more space and is left with a breathing hole. I’m now moving repeatedly from right to left, from left to right, from right to left, and from left to right. The wave of black dust now creates a universal constant, much like the tides, as a consequence of my movement in the space.

First the lightning (the momentary character) then lightning gives way and moves over into rain (liberty)

Diary Entry

the one person is running out through the door

“That’s what being born feels like.”

from a bright spot on the wall, the intimacy is seeping forth and delineating layers of colour

Cyans Are Coming

Taking too much in at one time is like eating oysters from the Limfjord. The size of these molluscs seems almost grotesque when it comes to matters of appetite and consumption. You have to turn the creature over several times in your mouth, using your tongue, before you grasp whether it is actually possible to swallow it or whether you have to give in and spit it out again.

I cannot ascribe more meaning to events than the purely animal logic. A person defends themself when the sky falls, as I defend my embankment when meaning tries to inundate it and create havoc. A woman steps into a room and comes to discover the final chapter. She walks out again. It’s not until later that a sense of understanding sets in. If the gaze isn’t occasionally turned away from the dead, the gaze will burst. Understanding appears to be retrospective: at home on the living room floor, I’m busy patching fragments of my memory together, either to find cause and effect or to attain some understanding of everyday life. It feels like I have no knowledge that can help me, even though I have woken up in my bed many times in the past and have walked down the stairs in my entrance-way before.

I have been attempting to construct different types of cartographies for my definitions and classifications (excerpts: sea and land, differences in level, planting density, ditches, etc.). The schematic diagrams of weather phenomena adapt themselves, as well as the archive, under these classifications. The archive, in itself, is built up of classifications such as “digital” and “physical,” but also of specifications of years, stacks of letters, and pictures, etc. I take out parts from the archive and make a stab at establishing new points of reference, new mappings for what already exists.

“If a mathematician sees the numbers 1, 3, 6, 11, 20, he would recognize that the ‘meaning’ of this progression can be recast into the algebraic language of the formula: X plus 2, with certain restrictions on X. What would be a random sequence to an inexperienced person appears to the mathematician a meaningful sequence.”

The colours in my photographs establish levels or additions to internal codes for contexts; they become parts of the grid. I find other internal grids in collections of short stories. Each and every story is a turning point into which the reader is thrown. These short courses of events have been amassed into one and the same volume, under one title, like different colours that are circling around one and the same thematic, spurred on by different assumptions. I am trying to find the connection between events (people’s and nature’s patterns), but there is no complete map for doing this. I’ve got to experience it by doing and by repeatedly ascertaining: faced with a new situation, how would I then act?
The symbolic meaning, which remains like a residue on the surface of things, is helpful in calming the modest soul. But it also becomes an intoxication. Notions about walking through a speculative terrain: objects and shadows could be one of the natural sculptures, just as limestone or an arrangement of bedding and linen could be. Hair on the legs blossoms, in the manner of soft unfoldings of roses and nodding as one saunters on by. The colours especially become moments without impediments and harbour no hopes of understanding all contexts.

“If mankind can never describe the world as it is, then the mandate must instead be to see it clearly.”

Cyans are coming
all is going to settle like snow.

We Rise with the Sun
I am trying to get back to what immediately makes its effect on the body. The movement. I am moving for hours (trying to open up a trauma). Hour after hour, the body keeps itself going, and the soul, which had previously seeped out through an opening in the cranium, is gripping around the body and dragging itself down again. Believing in the individual is a form of idiocy. My bare toes can sense the shared movement that plants itself into the earth from the bystanders. I’m starting to look up again. Silently. I have not managed to reach the conversation yet. The individuals are gathered together and are dispersed loosely in the crowd. My belief in the individual is of an antinomic nature. It must have its limits; otherwise, it will dissolve. The individual has to be agile; otherwise, no connections will be created. The atomic nucleus’s fission is a splitting into two approximately equal parts. This sounds sad. The division is explosive and gives rise to chain reactions. The energy creates new energy, new explosions.

The connection with the pictures is the body. The light is the colour. The body absorbs.

After the fission, I carry myself into the blue. Colours are devoid of any hierarchy. There is no good one; there is no bad one. The assessment lies closer to the human psyche, in a way that is similar to projection. So I place a colour in the scene. It resembles what I believe it should, so I believe in it. Whether it does is not necessary. The occurrence of the abject tears away a part of me, as I share myself from what was closest to me.

Diary Entry

“Consider the blue, you said, and released the colour from the sky.”

Waiting for the second it breaches. I’m standing in the midst of doubt. Hallelujah!

The pathway through the labyrinth will lead you to freedom. Installed directly in the underground. The passageways' bifurcations, which lead below the actual house, with its foyer for receiving visitors, and its dining room, with its guests, and the living room, etc. One simply moves down along the basement's staircase, through the storage rooms, out through the scullery, and up through the back stairway. You walk through the garden (trying not to run), around the back side of the house, and out through the hole in the hedge, after which you break into a sprint.
Left: *Untitled*, 2017. Acrylic glass, water, green algae (Chlamydomonas). 105 x 97 x 2,2 cm. Glue and indigo pigment on linen, 110 x 105 cm. Tina Kryhllmann.

Top: *Untitled*, 2017. Acrylic glass, water, cyanobacteria (Microcystis) in front, green algae (Chlamydomonas). 105 x 97 x 2,2 cm. Glue and indigo pigment on linen. 110 x 105 cm. Tina Kryhllmann.

Micro algae cultivated by Rengefors Lab at Lunds University.
Untitled, 2017. Acrylic glass, water, cyanobacteria (Microcystis). 105 x 97 x 2.2 cm. Glue, indigo pigment and water on linen. 110 x 105 cm. Tina Kryhlmann
Becoming

There is an hour constantly moving around the earth, that is, as we all know, it is the earth that’s moving, and so the hour stands still. Time is there forever; it is our ability to move, our temporal nature, that allows us to pass through moments. This hour is confined to the parts of both hemispheres that bend towards what we think of as up and down, north and south; these latitudes themselves tangential, touching a concept of edge. Maybe it is the liminal nature of this space that allows the hour to take place there, to dance over its surfaces, transforming every object in its vibrant light into bearers of knowledge. Knowledge about the light that is touching them.

Dusk and dawn are not the beginning or end of day and night, they are in the middle, in-between—“where things pick up speed.” The light at this hour—morning or night—makes the objects appear in their own right, makes them emanate their proper names in the form revealed by reflecting that light; the know-how of a craft immanent in the tool itself. Still, so still … riveting with possibles, but completely still. They truly look like they’re all in on a secret. The secret lying in the subliminal sublimity in the skies at this moment, gradually changing, barely detectable, but felt?

They are so absolutely still! Mute, vibrant.

(The only way I know to get to such a quality of objecthood, in-between states, loaded with possibles, is through the monochrome painting. Not necessarily only through the completely monochromatic, but perhaps even more so through paintings with an ever-so-slight transition to a different colour or nuance, one that you don’t even really detect, but possibly anticipate.)

So, is this quality an intensity that, as a sensorium, is able to dissolve and rearticulate subjectivity? Invoke a process of pure becoming?

That is the moment, the state I’m after; when a severe alteration is about to take place, but with no idea about the outcome, I read in a notebook of mine from the past year.

The state of in-between in its initial phase, the light waning as I write, sounds of rush-hour river cars brushing up against the outside wall; in through the open window, letting my face catch the last rays of the sun before it goes behind the block across the street. I yearn for that light, to be at the level of the objects’ vibrant stillness, grounded, small, among them, where boundaries dissolve and everything is on the brink of alteration. Just as freed and full of possibles as they are … To emanate my proper name?

A heavy streetlight is beaming in through the window, the strength of the beam increasing with the gradually fading light outside, creating a constant shadow play of the branchwork of the cherry tree outside. Rain stains on the windowpane make the picture appear like the projection of an old celluloid film on the opposite wall and parts of the sofa. The branches sway constantly, swiftly. I notice a strange sort of nervous quivering near the base of the largest branch, and wonder what is causing it. Is it the large branch itself that’s moving, or is this nervous movement only in the eye, a result of all the smaller surrounding branches moving in different directions? Could it be the lamp post, shaking ever so slightly in the strong south Swedish wind? Maybe it’s the heartbeat of the cameraman himself. (Why would his hands tremble?!)“Do we have a heart(beat) to keep track of time? If your heart is beating, then time is. Is time what makes your heart alive, if a living heart is one that beats?

“We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing else. It is not immanence to life, but the immanent that is in nothing is itself a life. A life is the immanence of immanence, absolute immanence: it is complete power, complete bliss.” (Deleuze, 2001, 27–28)

The British naturalist John Hogg named a fourth kingdom in the classification of life to accompany Carl Linnaeus’s Lapides, Plantae, and Animalia: Protocista, or Regnum Primigenum, literally meaning “first rulers,” meant to signify a kingdom of first beings, “as these entities were believed to have existed prior to animals and plants.” This kingdom of Protozoa consists of micro-organisms such as cyanobacteria, dinoflagellates, pathogens: diffuse groups we might refer to as plankton, micro-algae, or diseases, some plant-like, some animal-like, some virus-like, but none really belonging to any of the other classifications. Oceanic cyanobacteria are credited with the Great Oxidation Event of approximately 2.3 billion years ago through photosynthesis. This obviously gradually made the earth suitable for the development of other life forms, but it’s also responsible for the first great extinction, that of obligate anaerobes and microaerophiles. Thus, this event is also referred to as the Oxygen Catastrophe, the Oxygen Crisis, the Oxygen Holocaust, the Oxygen Revolution, and the Great Oxidation.¹
Maybe what first led me to work with algae was something I read on a package of chlorella powder while I was working in a health-food store: “captured sunlight,” the idea of the energy of the sun stored in the photosynthesising protists being one of the earliest life forms on earth. This project became an exhibition consisting of thin aquariums made of acrylic glass hung from the ceiling, filled with water and algae, catching, modifying, and reflecting natural light from the windows, as prisms, as lenses, displaying the algae as it paints a picture through its means of reproduction: cloning. The sculptures’ art historical frame of reference is set by monochromatic pigment paintings, which mirror the algae, but with intense dryness, a sucking up of the light in the material, creating an infinite void on a flat surface.

(While I was researching algae, I came across a beautiful strain of dinoflagellates called Pyrocystis lunula, a bioluminescent protist that does not photosynthesise—capture—light, but produces it. Fittingly, its cells are shaped like a crescent moon. The phenomenon of bioluminescence in water is called “morild” in Norwegian, which literally means “mother-fire,” though “mor” (mother) here originates from the old Norse “mar,” meaning “the ocean”: “ocean-fire,” the ocean being our ancestral mother: morild—the mother of fire in water, an alchemist, bringing together all the elements, creating gold.

A desire to touch the light? In a sense, that is what painting is about.)

The rather vast and indefinite group of protists have managed remarkably well throughout the ages, highly adaptive as they are. With a generation span of just a few days, they adapt quickly—even in the Anthropocene. (Will they adapt to a sculpture state during the exhibition period?) Through my work I am contemplating a return of the era of the protists; a return of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a turn of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a return of the protists; a return of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a turn of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a return of the protists; a return of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a turn of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a return of the protists; a return of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a turn of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a return of the protists; a return of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a turn of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a return of the protists; a return of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a turn of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a return of the protists; a return of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a turn of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a return of the protists; a return of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a turn of the first kingdom, the first rulers: a return of the protists; 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an instrument of thought—the world thinking about itself through me, through material, through colour. Colours are entities of the world, with strong inherent attributes; like life, as fields of force.8

I am juxtaposing the sculptures in which life comes into being—the protists—with the vibrancy also present in non-living art or non-living entities—the pigment. Could these works be points of intersection between species—and indeed other entities in existence?

“In philosophical nomadism this mode of becoming is rather linked to a sense of inter-connectedness which can be rendered in terms of an ethics of eco-philosophical empathy and affectivity which cuts across species space and time.” (Braidotti, 2006)

“Empathy is to experience content in matter: Experiences is … the only immanent attribute we know of and so the only known candidate of being the content of matter. If panpsychism is correct and the content of matter is experience, how could we perceive this content? This is where I see a link between matter, panpsychism and empathy. … by perception you grasp objects outside of yourself, by empathy you grasp experiences outside of yourself. … Empathy is to experience content in the form of experiences in matter outside of oneself.” (Eklund, 2017, 9, my translation)

Within a flat ontology, I would want to extend the plane of pure immanence from life to that of existence.

“There are possibles in God’s understanding, and all these possibles tend towards existence. That’s why essence, for Leibniz, is a tendency to exist. All these possibles have weight according to their perfection.” (Deleuze, 1980)

(Reading this makes it impossible not to think of Agnes Martin. I see her pictures leaning in on her, tending towards existence, until they reach sufficient perfection in her mind, to come into physical presence through her. (Not to say physical presence alone determines existence.))

“I. Everything which exists, exists either in itself or in something else.” (Spinoza, 1883)

Thoughts meander through me, stains from them in heaps of notebooks scattered around my working table, some left behind in other places, other working spaces. All spaces are a working table. Most tables are working.

I have picked out a coil from a spiralling movement and read it like it had a beginning and an end, because this concept is so convenient. As Robert Hurley suggests, “Deleuze will say, we always start from the middle of things; thought has no beginning, just an outside to which it is connected.”9 (The motion of a continuous contraction and expansion (breathing) could also be that of a spiral turning, seen at a distance.)

Right in the middle of things, I happened to come across an exhibition of Lisa Tan at Galleri Riis in Oslo. The 2016 exhibition, Sunsets, Notes from Underground, Waves, was a part of her doctoral dissertation at the Valand Academy in Gothenburg.

I entered a room painted charcoal grey, floor covered with wall-to-wall carpets, large screens hung from the ceiling, hovering over the floor in front of sofa chairs, equipped with headphones as well as loudspeakers that let the sound out into the room. Another room further in with a third screen. I went deepest in first, sat down in a sofa chair, put the headset on, and gazed at a huge screen displaying two other screens with two sets of screensavers on them, one showing planets—Saturn phasing into Jupiter phasing into the moon—and the other, an open laptop displaying a picture of a galaxy. Gleaming letters on the laptop’s keyboard, constituting a universe of endless possibilities on its own, mirroring the starry image on the screen; in the background, a window with either dusk or dawn, this Nordic light, that ever-moving hour. Faint, nasal voices, something I recognise without being able to place immediately, a man and a woman—Is that Portuguese?—next to a woman’s voice, closer, clearer, reciting in English, talking about her own work as if she’s answering questions: “Yeah, I put it aside or I tear it apart—yes, I tear it apart.” The faint voice of the man again, some sounds I can’t grasp—It is Portuguese, isn’t it?—the English-speaking woman’s voice again: “Is this a product of a reflection on something, or is it an emotion?” The answer is delivered with certainty: “Anger, it’s anger.” Now I know where I’ve heard this before; in the same instant, the picture changes and as it’s all falling in on itself inside my head, Clarice Lispector’s face from a 1977 TV interview appears on the moon screen: “I’m tired.” “Of what, Clarice?” “Of myself.”10

My interests in Gilles Deleuze’s thought, Clarice Lispector’s writing, of the ever-eluded present, the liminal state, and the process of pure becoming, all intersect in Lisa Tan’s work. “Interests” is too weak a word; it’s more like a dent in the fabric of existence, gravity pulling. It is necessarily so—it happens to be the fabric of my existence, the rhizome I’m in the middle of. A gravitational force also drew me to Tan, and in this maelstrom I even find a location in the north of Norway where I used to live in one of her videos, shots from the ferry between Bodø and Svolvær. As this was the place where I first heard the song “Who Knows Where the Time Goes?,” atmospheres and thoughts from the time spent there revisited me as I revisited the song—which made me write that little passage on hummingbirds and frozen stones. The morning after I wrote that, I read an essay on Tan’s work by Lauren O’Neill-Butler,11 who writes...
about Tan’s work through the framework of this very song, specifically a version by Nina Simone, accompanied by a soliloquy on time. In the essay, titled “Time Is a Dictator,” O’Neill-Butler connects Simone’s thoughts on time, through Heidegger, back to Tan and suggests that Tan’s time is both that of the quotidian and one that looks towards the horizon, to primordial time.\textsuperscript{12}

“Where does it go? What does it do? Most of all is it alive? Is it a thing that you cannot touch, and is alive?” (Simone, 1969)\textsuperscript{13}

A screen we put on both sides of now, time is what makes before-too-late possible, a measurement, like space, just in another direction. Time is anything but the present. Yet the present is absolutely necessary to make time possible.

A particular sunset this summer gave me the distinct feeling that it was there forever, my temporal nature allowing me to pass through the \textit{now}, to visit the sunset.

Why should \textit{now} be any more elusive than \textit{here}?
"Radical painting is the root source that 'exists as a concrete object in the real world [and] presents the least information and the most sensation of all painting.' The sensation to which he refers is color; and through color, he aspires to give his viewers an 'experience of some primordial essence.'" (Morgan on Marioni, 2012)

Dealing with the here and now, Joseph Marioni and Günter Umberg published a manifesto on radical painting called "Outside the Cartouche: The Question of the Viewer in Radical Painting," which focuses on the relationship between viewer and artwork. In a sense, their paintings are themselves hieroglyphs, presenting an experience rather than representing meaning: "the intense is sensation become sign, and thought is the discovery of potentials indicated by such signs. ... Hieroglyphs present sense: They distinctly, yet obscurely embody sense."14

As a painter, as an executor of work, what if this relationship were to become an overly obsessive one, shifting the places of subject and object?

And so, I lost my connection to the wor(l)d(k).

To myself, my proper name.

Did I just equal the world, to my work, to myself, to my proper name? Being an instrument of thought?

Seeking existential entitlement in the work, over-identifying with it, I left no space for any "I," nor any space for circulation, for the light to come in, as Ieva Misevicūtė pointed out to me in a studio visit.15 A passage from a book by Maggie Nelson rang a little bell in me: "She writes about a lecture by Anne Carson from a book by Maggie Nelson rang a little bell in it was suffocating. It was my head; she writes about a lecture by Anne Carson where she was introduced to "the concept of leaving a space empty so that God could rush in."16 Nelson compares this to the principle of growing bonsais, where you plant the trees a little off-centre in the pot, to make space for the divine—"Act so that there is no use in a center." 17

Forgetting intervals, forgetting contraction and expansion. Forgetting to breathe during my sleep, I dreamt that I saw my body in a black, starry void as it was suffocating. It was my body and it was a body, a life, as such it was the centre of the universe; my "I" only a time-share in it: "The Life in me does not bear my name, I' inhabits it as a time-share."18 As I drew breath back into it, a spiralling porcelain plate, illustrating the universe, turned up. It was explained to me how the movement was such that whichever point you pick out, it is equally distanced from the edge. That is, every and any point is the centre of the universe. And as such, it is my responsibility to breathe properly: "The inter-connectedness of entities means that self-preservation is a commonly shared concern."19 (Existential entitlement? I exist, therefore I am.)

"God is a circle whose center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere." (Nicholas of Cusa, quoted in Ramey, 2012, 46)

(I mistakenly wrote "nowhere" at first, and maybe that was no mistake. God's circumference being in the now-where, the ever-present, at the point of pure becoming? The now moved outside of here, it is where? skewed from here, to make you rearrange your boundaries?)

"The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps on and the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle." (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, 28)

In a move rather contrary to the idea of the painting “existing as a concrete object in the real world,” as stated in his radical painting manifesto, a later Günter Umberg goes so far as to deprive the painting of its objecthood: “It isn’t a thing in itself.” Emphasising the in-between, between subject and object, he points at desire, a desire that must remain unfulfilled and therefore skews time from space—the present, the now from here to a now-where?—thus presenting a possibility of pure becoming:

What is a picture?

Perhaps one comes closer to the idea when attention is devoted not only to the picture but also to the space between the spectator and the picture. I call this a ‘blank space’ or “zone” rather than a “distance.” It needs to be filled, to be charged. My picture is related to our physical presence. It isn’t a thing in itself.

The more a picture is hermetically sealed, an asessable and assembled thing, it positions itself outside of our co-presence. It is a construct, a thought structure, something conceived of in hierarchies. I call this a self-assertion of the picture. But we cannot appropriate a picture. It is instead an opening up, a flowing out, a streaming in, an expanding. It is the infinite movement of approach, the yearning for tangibility, the wish to touch it.20

A desire that must remain unfulfilled. ... As Rosi Braidotti says: “Deleuze has an almost mathematical definition of the limit, as that which one never really reaches.”21 Clarice Lispector yearns to “grab hold of the is of the thing ... to possess the atoms of time. And to capture the present, forbidden by its very nature: the present slips away and the instant too, I am this very second forever in the now.”22 In Bluets, Maggie Nelson describes her love affair with the colour blue:
But what kind of love is it, really? Don't fool yourself and call it sublimity. Admit that you have stood in front of a little pile of powdered ultramarine pigment in a glass cup at a museum and felt a stinging desire. But to do what? Liberate it? Purchase it? Ingest it? ... You might want to reach out and disturb the pile of pigment, for example, first staining your fingers with it, then staining the world. You might want to dilute it and swim in it, you might want to rouge your nipples with it, you might want to paint a virgin's robe with it. But still you wouldn't be accessing the blue of it. Not exactly.23

I admit that I have stood locked in at the local art-supply store, through the staff's entire lunch hour, staring at a jar of indigo pigment. Without a clue of how to work with it, I still couldn't leave it behind. How to access the blue of it? Can we ever access the blue of it? Do we evade the grasp of desire altogether by dissolving subjectivity? In the process of becoming, there seems to be an oscillating movement between dissolving and finding “oneself.” Remembering by means of forgetting, as losing and finding are intertwined concepts, dependent on each other. I think desire triggers this process, a desire to become, not through mirroring the self, but finding the self's limits, through being held; to find the boundaries by skewing them, questioning the identification of subject and object. What is it that emerges between you and the painting? Emptying yourself into a monochromatic void, is it you looking back at yourself through the painting, or what could it be in the painting that is looking at you?

In an interview in relation to his 2015 exhibition Territorie in Vienna, Umberg said:

These are the things that fascinate me: ... the fact that the act of seeing implies the painting, or, in turn, giving it a certain meaning as it were. Although in my case it is not a literary or verbal “meaning.” This kind of state I like to call Befindlichkeit, the act of being confronted with a painting, and “finding yourself” in front of it.24

He paints as Lispector writes:

I'm aware that I can’t say everything I know, I know only when painting or pronouncing, syllables blind of meaning. And if here I must use words, they must bear an almost merely bodily meaning.25

While Umberg seems preoccupied with the space between viewer and painting, Joseph Marioni puts an emphasis on colour as the essence of painting through his concept of paint as liquid light, with it addressing the space in the painting. In a review, art critic Karen Wilkin writes: “Marioni says that deciding where the light is located, in each of his paintings, is a major preoccupation. Is it deep within or close to the surface? Different degrees of radiance, different intensities of light—the result of shifts in metaphorical depth—help to give individual paintings their distinctive characters, modulating the effect of the dominant hue.”26

I see monochromes as the threshold of painting, making up a frame for the history of paint—not historically and chronologically, but conceptually and literally: this is how far you can take it. (In the words of Marioni and Umberg: “The painter involved in the investigation of the radical painting seeks an understanding of painting that will fit the entire history of painting.”27) As a frame, monochromes seem to say: From here to the other side, there are endless possibilities in between, but we constitute the edges of what can take place. The edges that are equally distant to the centre, to each other, ever-turning edges, edges at the centre of storms, of black holes. The last resort of painters in crisis. As singular intensities, they gently remind you of what you are dealing with, by force of forgetting. Soothing and gesture free, monochromes let you exist as a being capable of (interacting with) colour, viewer and painter alike.

(The second meaning of the word “singularity,” the one of physics and mathematics, reads: “A point at which a function takes an infinite value, especially in space-time when matter is infinitely dense, as at the centre of a black hole.”28)

“But what about the egg? This is precisely one of their little ruses. As I was talking about the egg, I forgot about the egg. ‘Keep on talking, keep on talking,’ they told me. And the egg remains completely protected by all those words. ‘Keep on talking’ is one of their guiding rules. I feel so weary.” (Lispector, 1996, 85)

“As a painter, and nothing else but a painter, Van Gogh adopted the methods of pure painting and never went beyond them. ... The marvelous thing is that this painter who was only a painter ... among all the existing painters, is [also] the one who makes us forget that we are dealing with painting.” (Antonin Artaud, quoted in Deleuze and Guattari, 1999)

“When someone asked Woolf about literature, she responded, ‘To whom are you speaking of writing? The writer does not speak about it, but is concerned with something else.’ I think her ‘something else’ was just what merely is. Lispector called it the ‘it.’ Or the ‘is of the thing.’ Or even better, ‘whatever is lurking behind thought.’ I feel like it’s jellyfish that have this down best. Their formlessness leads to encounters with the source of any given thing. Their knowledge is not bent towards possession or productivity. They've got other reasons (or non-reasons) for their self-absorption. A recent pop-science article reported on an invisible jellyfish that 'lives most of its life transparently, appearing in full only when the risks that
I wonder if Tan knows about jellyfish being one with their swarm (also poetically called “a bloom of jellyfish”), not ever perceiving itself as an individual. The Norwegian biologist Dag O. Hessen has said that jellyfish are a dead end in the food chain. They seemingly have no function, though certain species can be beautiful to look at ... (Simplified here, of course, but he did write that.) Very few animals seem to have them on their menu, since, as they consist of 97 percent water, like cucumbers, they are of low nutritional value. Further, they perform a “will” of the bloom, which scientists have a hard time locating in the individuals; having no central nervous system, they do not seem to have any individual “I,” only a collective superego.29 Jellyfish indeed seem to be the perfect agent of “it.” (“It” being a pure plane of immanence?) Lispector’s perhaps most fluid novel is Água Viva, literally meaning “living water,” but in Brazilian Portuguese, denoting the sea creature “jellyfish.” Spinelessly chasing the present, being outstretched on the plane of immanence, the novel hunts the now:

Let me tell you: I’m trying to seize the fourth dimension of this instant-now so fleeting that it’s already gone because it’s already become a new instant-now that’s also already gone. Every thing has an instant in which it is.30

In an issue of SITE magazine from 2007, Lars-Erik Hjertström describes a process of pure becoming in his encounter with Spencer Finch’s work.31 He writes that Finch’s work necessarily needs to produce a metamorphic subject, to be actualised as a work of unity. It is not in the object, but in the production of a subject, in the meeting between the two, that the work of art emerges. Calling upon Jacques Rancière’s notion of the sensorium, “a sensible that has become a stranger to itself and the seat of a thought that has also become a stranger to itself,”32 Hjertström’s subject is split in two, oscillating between sight and thought:

The unity of the work consists in the necessity of the leaps, leaps by which thought and sensibility try to establish an “adequacy.” At the same time as these movements tie the work together and trace the image of the work, the subject is constituted as the work’s necessary and immanent counterpart. ... The subject and the unity of work exist in the meeting between the two, that the work of art emerges. Calling upon Jacques Rancière’s notion of the sensorium, “a sensible that has become a stranger to itself and the seat of a thought that has also become a stranger to itself,”32 Hjertström’s subject is split in two, oscillating between sight and thought:

Finch conceptually recreates moments of time passed by recreating the colour of the light at the hour that has moved from the time and space he’s referring to.33 Making here a there, he skews a now from a here, recreating the moment in a now-where. Not only does this make Hjertström’s subjectivity dissolve—it makes him photosynthesise:

I became a hermit in the desert night. My empty mind coincided perfectly with the obscurity of perception. This subjectivity was extended to an identity with the visually empty space, containing nothing but my seeing and the anticipation of a possible light, a possible work of art. ... my entire being turned into a plant searching its fundamental condition of existence.35

Becoming other, becoming zero, becoming a plane of immanence, becoming cockroach.36 Losing and finding the “I,” Becoming a Landscape.37

Another artist who addresses which emerges between viewer and work as the work is Roni Horn:

I want to make sensible experience more present. ... I try to reach the viewer by addressing the bodily and not just the mental/nonphysical being. The viewer must take responsibility for being there, otherwise there is nothing there.38

Horn explores becoming through the mutability of her own identity; indeed, through identity as such, as a landscape, as the weather. In A Kind of You, Hélène Cixous writes of Horn’s work that “she paints the singular plural.”39 A field of portraits—a field of multiple yous to become me: for an “I” to become in the subject? During a visit to Rengefors Lab at Lund University, I learned that dinoflagellates mate by finding their counterpart (they’re either a plus or a minus) and, together, they form a zygote, a kind of embryo, that sinks into the sand and stays there until it’s time to hatch. From the zygote two new individuals arise: one plus and one minus. In the meeting with the other, they rearrange their boundaries and become the next generation. These then clone themselves in an algal bloom, painting the singular plural indefinitely.40

Reading Horn’s Dictionary of Water (2001), I become a vessel for the concept of water, a temporary container of Horn’s idea of water, as she presents it. She uses the water as she uses the model in You Are the Weather (1995); that is, by causing the viewer to be affected by the surroundings of the object, the object’s state. Leafing through the photographs, I gradually feel the state of the water—the content of matter being its experience, as philosopher Jakob Håkansson Eklund suggests? The coolness, the waves, the movement, this huge body of force’s impact on mine; before my body gives in to the pressure of that outside, and inside and outside merge, I become one with it, I am the depicted water now. That is, I am divided into at least two: one sitting on a chair in my living

room and the other an avatar becoming that heavy mass—the distinct body of water depicted, my mind drawing conclusions from what I see in the picture, influencing what my body as water discovers. What is the bottom like? What is leaking into me from that corner? How sour am I? How vast am I? Where do I empty and where do I fill?—Wait, that’s not the water speaking, that’s the space, the container of this particular body-of-water—me, the water, is only passing through—I seep into wherever I can, I evaporate, I am all of these places simultaneously, I enter you, I am in you as we speak, I get to see everything, experience every corner of the world, the inside of your lungs, your heart. I also feel your mind, your thoughts affect me. (In what state could the entire body of people be like that of water? How divided into individuals is the entire body of water on this planet? Is it like that of the “living water”—the jellyfish? Is the entire body of water in the universe a uniform body of water? Not experiencing individual “I”s in its molecules? Or is the unity of any being indeed confined to location—and that’s how we are able to alienate people outside of our “local tribe”?)

“The unknown is where I want to be.” (Horn, quoted on Artsy.net)

A reading experience similar to that of Dictionary of Water—though also completely different—is that of All Around Amateur (2016) by Fredrik Værslev. Looking through page by page of one-to-one copies of a wall of several paintings, the work in total constituting a fifty-six-metre-long sunset of turpentine-diluted lines made with a football field marker. The similarity of the experiences lies in the repetition, of course, of blanking out space in your head, becoming sheets of colour, becoming acutely sensitive to minute details, a tiny speck of concentrated colour turning into a big bump in the road, sending shockwaves through your body-of-coloured-field. The paintings themselves, marked by time in their process of becoming paintings. Becoming the sky at the brink between states—apropos a yearning for the tangible: I am holding in my hands an attempt to materialise the horizon. Am I accessing the it of the limit? Of the paintings? The limit that one never really reaches: my centre, my “I” (?), is pushed equally far into me, as the horizon comes closer. It’s making me rearrange; we oscillate together, back and forth, and find our relative sizes as I realise the sunset in the colour on the canvas is behind the canvas, not on it.  

“The colored or, rather coloring void, is already force. … In short, the area of plain, uniform color vibrates, clenches or cracks open because it is the bearer of glimpsed forces. And this, first of all is what makes painting abstract: summoning forces, populating the area of plain, uniform color with the forces it bears, making the invisible forces, visible in themselves drawing up figures with a geometrical appearance but that are no more than forces—the forces of gravity, heaviness, rotation, the vortex, explosion, expansion, germination and time. … Is this not the definition of percept itself—to make perceptible the imperceptible forces that populate the world, affect us, and make us become?

“Painting’s eternal object is this: to paint forces, like Tintoretto. Perhaps also we rediscover the house and the body?” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1999, 181–82)

Is it the now that is looking back at you from the field of force? The now and Zoe? When now and here meet in a temporal I, the world observing itself—the camera of being?

Intensity in line and colour … An intensity that makes me become a whole set of entities playing out a situation, a moment, an atmosphere that all parts take part in, is found in the strokes of both Peter Doig and Daniel Richter. They make their vibrant, coloured lines stand out. Representational, suggestive pictures with narratives you can only guess at, still dripping with fatefulness. It is those colours, the stark contrasts, that open holes into each other’s respective domains. Becoming the situations they represent, the paintings become vibrantly alive, confronted with them, I am not a colour, or a zero, or a plane, as with a Barnett Newman, but rather I am in the plane. I too become a situation of force. The forces are not necessarily in harmony, but perform their respective agencies in a never-ending field of tension, an isolated drama constantly played out; forces that renew and repeat differently in each viewer. Doig and Richter catch “it,” perhaps by opposing neither themselves nor their work to the world they live in, their life. At an exhibition of Richter at the Louisiana Museum in Humlebæk, it was stated on the wall:

When people try to practise pure painting, a problem arises: purity is always insufficiently complex. The longing for it, however, has a refreshing radicalness. But even a religious or esoteric painting always contains the world. Painting comes from the world and goes back into the world, making different pictures of it. A Rothko is asking just as much for reality as a Manet.  

The hunt for the now, pushed here too far away and took a sense of reality with it. Questioning teaspoons, I slipped out of the habit of existence and into pure life, which has no habit. As opposed to daily life as repeating practice, it was a day-to-day experience, pouring existence from one day into the next, though continuously as it never happened, or rather ever-happens. I was a cup of water constantly overflowing, constantly on the brink, not knowing my boundaries, always in a state of excess and still being short of water, not knowing whether it was too much or too little. I stayed on the threshold of the present, splitting past and future into equal proportions.
“This is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present, becoming does not tolerate the separation or the distinction of before and after, or of past and future. It pertains to the essence of becoming to move and to pull in both directions at once. …—Which way, which way? asks Alice, sensing that it is always in both directions at the same time, so that for once she stays the same, through an optical illusion; the reversal of the day before and the day after, the present always being eluded—‘jam yesterday, but never jam to-day’.

“All these reversals as they appear in infinite identity have one consequence: the contesting of Alice’s personal identity and the loss of her proper name.” (Deleuze, 1990, 1, 3)

Becoming imperceptible: “We need new cognitive and sensorial mappings of the thresholds of sustainability for bodies-in-processes-of-transformation.” An egg forgetting its own shell, not sensing it, sensible only of the thin pores enabling it to breathe; no longer distinguishing an I from any other I, being being that of an oasis—all impressions leaving a permanent imprint, without the borders bouncing back, but forming, reshaping the I, until reaching a new state of becoming-woman in the world, joining an oratorio of “Joy [of] giving something away for free—even if you’re not sure of having it; give it for the hell of it, let it go for the love of the world.”

2 “A holy secret” in Portuguese.
7 This song was written by Sandy Denny in 1967 and appears on Fairport Convention’s 1968 album Unhalfbricking.
15 “In the void of the nothing facts and things insert themselves. What you see in this way of transforming everything absolutely into the present state, the result is not mental: it is a mute form of feeling.” Clarice Lispector, A Breath of Life (Pulsations) (New York: New Directions, 2012), 124.
16 Maggie Nelson, The Argonauts (Minneapolis: Graywolf, 2016), 49.
17 Anne Carson, quoted in Nelson, 2016, 49. My emphasis.
25 Lispector, Água Viva, 5.


Apple Dictionary, s.v. “singularity.”


See, for example, Finch’s Snow Shadow, Moonlight (Luna County, New Mexico, July 13, 2003) (2005), West (Sunset In My Motel Room, Monument Valley, January 26, 2007, 5:36–6:06 PM), 2007.

Hjetström, “The Hermit and the Plant,” 5. He continues: “[Finch’s] work cannot suggest a subjectivity to be shared by several subjects, since they do not constitute the subject’s conditions of possibility. Instead, the work determines the actuality of a subject who in return is the actually unifying part of the work itself. From the point of view of their existence, they each other completely, not sufficiently. That process of actual determination is a sensorium as an intermingling of a restless experimental philosophy, a patient artistic practice opening up a sensuality, and a life of short moments.”


Personal conversation with Karin Rengefors, professor of limnology in the Department of Biology, Lund University, April 7, 2017.

Frederik Værslev, All Around Amateur (Berlin: Sternberg, 2016).


Eyes Uncoupled, 2017. Video, 11:00 min. Viktor Landström
Eyes Uncoupled

I know exactly what you are going through, because I have gone through the same thing. All of it. I'm in pieces, you know. Just like you. My words aren't matching up or following the rules of reality. They bend and move. Throw themselves around violently, like an ocean where everything is connected. But what good is there in someone else connecting a few dots, if the big picture itself is completely useless? What's the point of it all? And how does this change who I am as a person?¹

It's December, and there is a film screening at the Panora cinema in Malmö. The screening is organised by Filmögon magazine, in tribute to the late Skåne-based artist Richard Vogel. Personally, I've never heard of him before, and this isn't such a strange thing. Vogel wasn't too keen to exhibit his art, and during the last ten years of his life, his lung condition caused him to lead a secluded life, rarely leaving his home. Vogel started out as a painter but moved over to working with photography and video later on. He produced a bunch of peculiar video collages, and a selection of these are being shown at Panora.

The programme is a bewildering mixture of finished films and rougher sketches. At times, it's difficult for me to keep the various parts separate, and some of the subjects reappear several times, in new forms and combinations. TV footage is mixed with odd staged situations and sequences from Vogel’s home. Everything is overlaid with a chaotic soundtrack of radio music, TV noise, gusts of wind, birdsong, and video static, and occasionally captions with short phrases like “Bedrövliga symboler” (Miserable symbols) or “Kiosken är stängd” (The kiosk is closed) appear on the screen. My brain is working desperately to decipher this incomprehensible stream of information. The camera rotates around three mandarins on a kitchen table. Then, suddenly, a brief sequence from Seinfeld. A postcard with the phrase “Tack för alla dessa år tillsammans” (Thank you for all the years we've shared). A child dancing at the top of a hill. A group of covertly filmed people standing in line at a kiosk.²

It's like some absurd riddle, in which the answer seems to be hidden somewhere in the gaps between the odd and evasive pieces of the puzzle. And at the same time, it is a hyperrealistic depiction of everyday life. After all, this is exactly how fragmentary, random, and contradictory life really is! The films are extremely personal, even private at times. But they also give me the feeling that Vogel is a rather detached witness. He seems to be standing beside the world somehow. Beside his material, beside himself. He treats all material the same way: combining a lack of respect for its original meaning with a great sensitivity for its inherent potential, without separating the private from the public, or family photographs from advertisements. Nothing seems to be fixed or tied to its original meaning. Everything could potentially be something else.

It's weird to think that all this happened as if viewed through a remote camera. How was it really possible to take a picture of myself out of a room, shrink myself, and then put my image back into this ready-made puzzle? I kind of feel like I was making a simple life experience into a super complicated equation or something. But the thing is, I was actually speaking a coded truth. Let me translate.³

My encounter with Vogel’s films gave rise to an immediate sense of kinship. His working methods and approaches are very different from my own, but there are also similarities. The screening at Panora took place while I was still busy working on my own video, Eyes Uncoupled (2017). The narration in this video consists of found texts taken from blogs, online forums, song lyrics, newspaper articles, and comment sections. I've cut the material up into small fragments, which I've subsequently fused into a new coherent text. I've worked on the visual material the same way. Found holiday videos are blended with infographics, stock footage, and abstract animations to form a flowing stream of images in which the moods and subjects are in a constant state of flux.

This is an attitude that I have been approaching gradually for some time, and during my two years in the master's programme at Malmö Art Academy, my work has resulted in a series of essay-like collage videos, of which Eyes Uncoupled is the
most recent. Apart from their format, these videos are linked by their different explorations of the role of the individual in an increasingly chaotic, connected, and confusing world. How do we relate to the stampeding progress of information technology? How do we navigate the flow of information, and how do we bring order to the chaos? Can it actually be brought to order? And would doing so even be worthwhile?

I've never left a comment before but I need to say something. Not sure what though. I arrived here by accident, too much to drink, too much to think about, too much pressure. At one point I couldn't find my marijuana pipe and got so angry at myself that I yelled “FUCK!” and punched my head as hard as I could, something like twenty times. I feel the extreme emotional pain of all the other people in the world. I've spent hours crying for them and I know my struggles are nothing compared to what's happening right now in the world: War in Syria, the situation with refugees, but still ... What have I done? Why do I feel so alone? What's wrong with me?

“The destabilised world seems to have become part of our normal existence,” conclude the curators Ruth Anderwald, Katrin Bucher Trantow, and Leonhard Grond in the exhibition essay for the group show Dizziness: Navigating the Unknown, which was shown at Kunsthau Graz from February to May 2017. My friend Sebastian Wahlforss and I participated in the exhibition with our video Fractal Crisis, which we made together in 2016. The video is made in the same spirit as Eyes Uncoupled, and the narrator describes both an internal and an external crisis in which anxiety over climate change and refugee crises are jumbled up with confessions about addiction, unemployment, and mental illness. The story branches as it progresses and opens up to an infinite number of parallel crises that play out on various levels. The curators of Dizziness go on to write: “Every day reports of crisis send us into a state of frenzy, whether real or fictional. The feeling of menacing unease and fear of unpredictable change conjures up the image of a floundering society on a floundering planet.” Maybe that’s it? Has this unreasonable, incomprehensible, and unreal reality become an accepted fact, business as usual?

These last few years, our reality has been shaken up quite a bit. Borders have been torn down and fences have been raised. Opinions, words, and actions that were only recently considered extreme are suddenly commonplace, while ideals that used to be obvious, such as compassion and equality, have been exposed as hollow promises. When old truths falter and your self-image begins to fall apart, it’s tempting to shut the world out, look away, and cling desperately to simplified fairy tales about the past. How can we keep from closing ourselves in this way and getting trapped in resignation and reactionism? How can we find a way to progress instead? Can new possibilities and strategies be discovered by facing and embracing the complexities and contradictions of our time, rather than shutting them out? Anderwald, Bucher Trantow, and Grond seem to regard this situation optimistically: “Dizziness is also a trigger and catalyst for creative thinking and activity. By observing its dynamics, we gain an insight into our capacity to ‘navigate the unknown.’”

Today, we live in a constant stream of information. We sift through vast quantities of data that are practically impossible to sort or evaluate in any rational way. In the face of this chaotic digital jumble, we have no choice but to develop new navigation systems—calibrated for grasping contexts, movements, and patterns of reasoning that cannot be captured by conventional logic. This understanding of the world accommodates many different perspectives, which overlap and influence one another in a constantly oscillating and mutating whole of contradictory reports and parallel narratives.

Mindful eating, gentle stretching, guided meditations, inspired journal writing, the macro–microcosm of music making and other creative practices: all this interesting and fruitful work will definitely have a big impact on the evolution of all humans. It is the key to the golden age. It’s the link we are looking for to marry science and spirituality. The possibilities are endless as the union of physical pleasure and astral matter create those things you see in science fiction movies: perfect therapy, perfect neurobiology, and perfect new ways of thinking about being in the world. When people become conscious of where they come from and who they are, they will start stretching together as one relaxed, safe, and playful community. Selfish people who lead for personal benefit won’t fit with the electrodes inserted into their brains anymore and they will be giving themselves electric stimulation every now and then. Most people don’t even take this seriously yet, but it’s spreading exponentially every time a new person awakes and teaches others.

Adam Curtis’s dystopian documentary HyperNormalisation (2016) paints a picture of a chaotic and confusing world that appears to be on the verge of disaster. In his characteristic way, he weaves together global political events, psychological phenomena, and references to popular culture into a complex and conspiratorial web where everything seems to be connected. He draws dazzling connections between Muammar al-Gaddafi, Patti Smith, UFOs, and cyber hippies. It is almost impossible to follow or summarise this train of thought in its entirety, but Curtis’s assertive and authoritative narration, as well as his skilled dramaturgy, somehow make it all seem reasonable. We all live in a fake world, he claims, in a self-elected state of denial in the face of the complex nature of reality. In actuality, we’re all more or less aware of the ongoing collapse of our dysfunctional political systems and societies. But as we are unable to imagine any alternatives, we willingly embrace this simplified and false
fake world that has been constructed by the political and financial elite to give the appearance of a stable and functional society.

_HyperNormalisation_ itself is a strangely contradictory and ambiguous film. Curtis uses the very same manipulative and authoritarian techniques that he criticizes. The viewer is overwhelmed by fast-paced information and claims, all accompanied by suggestive music and footage from the BBC archives that alternates between the seductively beautiful and the shockingly violent. The film’s fast pacing and sudden shifts leave no time for processing any of the information before one’s attention is directed elsewhere, and this effectively draws the viewer deeper and deeper into the web of Curtis’s thought. His narration has an almost psychedelic quality to it, in that the associations he bombards you with produce a sense of profound and interconnected realisation, which seems impossible to recall or implement as soon as the closing credits have rolled, but still lingers in your mind somehow.

*See how it all fits together like a puzzle—the image, the underlying intentions of controlling others’ perceptions, the compulsive behaviour and the fear itself, which is very close to the bone. I gave and gave and gave. I became feverish. Took out my notebook, with loud music on, I cried to myself, called my wife to locate the flaws of many of our family members. And it gave us an insight—you can play the game, you can act the part, but you know it wasn’t written for you. The pain is still there. But we can manage this, creating a personality that fits in. I want to enjoy life again.*

The anxiety that seeps out through the cracks between the simplified logic of everyday life and awareness of the true complexities of reality is referred to as “cognitive dissonance” in the field of social psychology. We’re prepared to construct surprisingly bizarre delusions and lifelong lies in order to make the world seem more understandable and bearable, and thus dampen our cognitive dissonance. In fact, research suggests that we only cling harder to our explanatory models the more flawed they prove to be and the more evidence we are shown that contradicts them. In their study *When Prophecy Fails*, social psychologists Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken, and Stanley Schachter describe an absurd series of events that illustrates this phenomenon. In the beginning of the 1950s, they became aware of a small, introverted UFO cult in Chicago called the Seekers, which revolved around a woman referred to as Marian Keech in the study. Keech experimented with automatic writing and claimed that she had received messages from extraterrestrial beings through this practice. They had told her that the earth would be destroyed at dawn on December 21, 1954. She was also told that any earthlings who truly believed this prophecy and were loyal to Keech would be rescued by a UFO at midnight, just hours before the apocalypse. To prove their loyalty, the members of the group were asked to abandon their jobs, their assets, and their families. In other words, there was a lot at stake as the time of the supposed end of the world drew close. Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter, who had managed to infiltrate the Seekers, were present in Keech’s house along with the rest of the group on December 21, when the big moment was due to arrive.

When dawn came, and none of the events prophesied by Keech had occurred, the group was stricken with despairing apathy for a few hours. But then, instead of abandoning Keech and her by then completely disproven claims, the group quickly proceeded to construct an adjusted version of the prophecy in which the aliens had granted humanity a second chance at the last moment. Now this group, which had been so secretive and introverted before, initiated an ambitious public relations campaign in which they even turned to the media to spread their message. To ease the cognitive dissonance that arose from the apocalypse that never happened, the group found itself in need of stronger affirmation from each other and the world at large. They went deeper into their convictions, because the alternative would have caused far too much anxiety. Strangely enough, the cult went on to recruit new members and grow significantly as a result of their basic tenets of faith being disproven.

*When Prophecy Fails and HyperNormalisation* both describe how a contradictory and incomprehensible reality is a wide-open target for anybody who has simple truths to offer. Our fear of complexity, inconsistencies, and confusion is so strong that we’re prepared to accept the most blatant of simplifications as long as they make our lives easier to comprehend and endure. The cultural theorist Mark Fisher, who passed away recently in January 2017, also described these mechanisms, although he did so in economic terms. In his book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, he concludes that the worldview offered by our capitalist system, despite having been proven to be untenable, oppressive, and false so many times, is still considered the only possible option today. The massively simplified logic of capitalism has, since the fall of the Soviet Union, come to be regarded as given by nature, and thus applicable to all aspects of life. Like Curtis, Fisher views the current times through a dystopic lens, and has described capitalism as “the perfect cyborg”; a blend of human and machine, in which the machine took control a long time ago. The only task of capitalism (the machine) is to maintain its own existence, and in this context humans are just instrumental resources. In other words, humanity has been enslaved by its own invention: a self-replicating machine run amok, out of all human control.

*It’s still kinda hazy. My mind is like a Bing commercial, like every thought just falls out of my head and I can’t think. Most of the day, however, I’ve been in acute and agonising pain. The main pain seems to be in my back and through to the front—as though the base of my spine were fused to the bladder. I was just in the*
hospital and they believe my “vault” has been hacked, containing dozens or hundreds of different logins I may have accumulated.\(^1\)

To some extent, philosopher Rosi Braidotti shares Fisher’s analysis, but her attitude is more optimistic. In her book *The Posthuman*, she describes an age in which the humanist worldview has finally been exposed as a fraud and disqualified. She calls herself an anti-humanist and claims that we mustn’t let fear keep us from abandoning our anthropocentric perspective. This perspective, according to Braidotti, is by definition always exclusive and repressive, stuck in its rigid definitions and demarcations. Not only in the relationships between humanity, nature, and technology, but also in interhuman relationships. Just like Curtis and Fisher, she paints a picture of a contemporary age in crisis, but Braidotti’s image is no dystopia. On the contrary, she views this crisis as the dawn of a new era. She urges us to remain open to the opportunities offered by a humanism in decline and emphasises the positive aspects of the dissolution of the human species and the individual.

Braidotti builds on Donna Haraway’s idea of the human as a cyborg,\(^12\) a crosser of boundaries, who moves freely between various temporary identities and kinships—a perspective that is more about inclusion than exclusion and that permits the world to be complex, multifaceted, and contradictory. Braidotti writes: “Instead of falling back on the sedimented habits of thought that the humanist past has institutionalized, the posthuman predicament encourages us to undertake a leap forward into the complexities and paradoxes of our times. To meet this task, new conceptual creativity is needed.”\(^13\) Perhaps art has an important role to play in this new conceptual creativity? After all, doesn’t the great power of art reside in the fact that it can move freely between various domains and systems of thought? That it is allowed to be inconsistent, ambiguous, and uncertain? The fact that it is free to explore, discuss, and ask questions, without taking a stand or offering any answers?

*Let’s consciously uncouple our eyes! See how the image disintegrates in all directions, hundreds of hands, moving everywhere, all at different speeds. A large shimmering web covered with dew, each drop refracting sunbeams, bejewelling the air, stretching from one delicate, extended limb to another. Have you broken through the glass yet? Does it hurt, like it’s burning? Anyway, I want to thank you for making a brave choice.*\(^14\)

At the 2016 Berlin Biennale, artist Simon Denny showed a pedagogical and information-dense exhibition that revolved around the digital currency system Blockchain. Denny’s aesthetic brings to mind the world of advertising, trade shows, and information design. An eclectic mix of images, text, and objects was displayed on screens and in vitrines and printed on large banners. In preparing for this exhibition, Denny collaborated with three of the major players within the Blockchain market, and their business ideas and visual identities were each presented in booths of the kind you’d expect to see at a trade show. The exhibition left me with a strange and uncomfortable feeling. Is this to be interpreted as an ironic critique of the neoliberal start-up culture? Or is it actually a celebration of it? Or both?

Denny’s fascination with Silicon Valley’s tech industry and neocapitalist techno-utopias is hard to pin down. It is as though he refuses to take a stand either for or against the power structures and systems he describes. In an interview with the art publication *Spike*, he had this to say: “I think an artwork that expresses that feeling of having an ambivalent relationship—something that you love and are confused about at the same time—is a worthwhile cultural expression for this moment.”\(^15\) He refuses to simplify, refuses to take sides. Perhaps what Denny’s critics have called spineless opportunism is actually an act of true courage? Perhaps it represents the only reasonable approach to the complexities of our age? Without any fixed views, in a state of constant openness to other perspectives?

Could it be that Denny, Braidotti, Fisher, Curtis, and Vogel are each in their own way suggesting a similar attitude? An attitude where understanding is reached not through simplification and demarcation but rather through a large number of parallel and contradictory perspectives—an attitude that revolves around seeing contexts and movements within a single, mutable whole. Around resistance to the impulse to simplify and streamline. Embracing contradiction, and refusing to be consistent.

*Imagine being mingled so completely with another, you no longer need your physical self—you’re one. I’m disappearing from the inside outwards. Presently I would say that I am about 60 percent “here” most of the time. This is still a tremendous improvement from levels of what I would guess were 30–55 percent “here” as an adolescent and young adult. My body is splitting, like I’m a collection of smaller units all moving together, like a flock of birds. You can hold them in your fingers, together with this “lump of flesh” that is “me.”*\(^16\)

I have a background in graphic design, and I’ve always enjoyed working with materials that were produced by others. It is a kind of parasitism that offers me the opportunity to take part in something bigger—a way to go beyond my own frames of reference and limitations. In time, this attraction has led me to a sort of cut-up technique, where I work entirely with found material and for which the internet is my natural source. My projects tend to start out with vaguely defined themes or headings, which then mutate gradually as the work progresses. My method for seeking and gathering is, I suspect, a true case of “internet surfing” in the sense the librarian Jean Armour Polly intended when she coined the phrase in the early ‘90s.\(^17\) I’m guided by randomness and arbitrariness through an associative
Fractal Crisis, 2016. Video, 06:21 min. Viktor Landström & Sebastian Wahlforss

flow, in which I willingly allow myself to be distracted and sidetracked by spur-of-the-moment fancy.

Author Kathy Acker’s cut-up texts are from the pre-internet era, but they seem in some way to originate in the same fancy-driven restlessness as my own cutting and pasting. Her storytelling is a complex blend of original and appropriated material. She mixes diary entries with stolen anecdotes, her own memories, and the memories of others, compressing them all into a single narrator’s voice: an incoherent “I” that is to equal extents also a “you” and a “we.” She has described her approach like this: “I have become interested in languages which I cannot make up, which I cannot create or even create in: I have become interested in languages which I can only come upon (as I disappear), a pirate upon buried treasure. The dreamer, the dreaming, the dream.”18 While I may not regard myself as a “pirate,” I still experience recognition in reading Acker’s description of the titillating and intoxicating taste of unlimited possibilities that collage and appropriation provide. Using other people’s words and images allows me to access an unbounded language in which everything is possible.

This appropriation also serves as a way to circumvent my own debilitating self-criticism—the distance to the material gives me an alibi of sorts, which means that I am able to delve into all sorts of topics and issues without ever really “knowing what I’m doing.” The words aren’t mine, after all. Sometimes I think of myself as an editor rather than a creator, in that my work revolves around organising and reshaping content that actually belongs to somebody else. In a sense, this is a voyeuristic attitude, which turns me into a vehicle or carrier for the experiences of strangers—a kind of channelling or role play that stems from a desire to expand and dissolve my own boundaries. This point of view can be incredibly liberating, but there is no doubt that it is also a form of
self-deception. My interest in the found material is often superficial, and highly subjective. I cut up, decontextualise, and mix up the material to such an extent that it often loses almost all of its original meaning. What eventually remains is no more than a mood or flavour, along with single thematic markers. The individual words may belong to others, but the voice of the whole is, at the end of the day, my own. Or is it really that simple?

The length of a spiritual pregnancy is variable, much more so than a physical pregnancy. If there is a change of plans such as a later date, he can just stay there like in a limbo kind of waiting state, which I am finding out myself as I speak and channelling him about the feelings I’m experiencing. My inner vision, the light, granted me to rip my garden apart and make a mess of my inner temple. From whence it came I still do not claim to know, but the result of my possession (or passion) waits where the womb is externally. He is a blend of Alice Bailey, Timothy Leary, Carl Jung, Alchemy, Jesus H. Christ and of course a little of ME is put into the mixture.  

In his video *Dream English Kid 1964–199AD* (2016), artist Mark Leckey uses found video material to re-enact his own biographical history. In an associative fashion, the anonymous and appropriated images are used as placeholders for his own highly private and fragmented memories. The material becomes a mirror, a tool for Leckey’s personal introspection. Or is it actually the other way round? Is he offering himself up as a placeholder for some larger collective narrative? Art historian Alex Kitnick borrows the title of Gertrude Stein’s *Everybody’s Autobiography* to describe Leckey’s body of work. I think these words express beautifully the quality of double vision that Leckey displays through his blending of introspection...
and extrospection—a mutual mirroring, in which the lines separating him from his environment are blurred, and which complicates the division of roles between the creator, the audience, and the collective.

I wanted to produce a similar experience with *Eyes Uncoupled*. In a way, this video is deeply personal. Through the words and images of strangers, I express and wallow in my own private experiences of stress, anxiety, confusion, and my own chaotic relationship to our fragmented and contradictory world. But I am interested in the general nature of these experiences, the collective narrative. The narrator of *Eyes Uncoupled* shifts constantly between speaking of “me,” of “us,” and of “you,” and towards the end of the video, it begins to speak for the viewer by describing what he or she is experiencing. The identity of the narrator is blurred, as are the borders between the experienced, the invented, and the discovered. My own thoughts are jumbled up with other people’s memories, dreams, and delusions in a constantly shifting story that, to use Kathy Acker’s words, suggests “the idea that you don’t need to have a central identity, that a split identity [is] a more viable way in the world.”21

Is there any way I can make you destroy me? Pixel by pixel, frame by frame—into a pattern so tiny, it becomes a texture. Or a texture so strong, it makes a pattern? What if I try to bend the body a little, and maybe some rotation, while falling? You can think about it as a dance if you want to, an exploded image, applied on a plane, everywhere and all over at once. It becomes a spatial configuration. A flake of skin. An echo of itself.22

Further References


Finding the One, Being the One, 2016. Video, 15:12 min. Viktor Landström & Sebastian Wahlforss

Eyes Uncoupled, 2017. Video, 11:00 min. Viktor Landström
Untitled (Best Friend), 2017. Oil on canvas. 22 x 27 cm. Marcus Matt
Marcus Matt

*For William Blake*, 2016. Oil on canvas. 19 x 28 cm. Marcus Matt
"Life, from being made up of little separate incidents which one lived one by one, became curled up with it and threw one down with it, there, with a dash on the beach." 

I am swimming in a pool in a bathing house just by the ocean. I move through the tepid, chlorine-stinging water and look up across the surface, out through the large windows facing the beach, and see the horizon. For a second, I can sense the brine on my skin, hear the frothy waves as they sleepily rock me outwards. But it is winter now, and the sea, with its biting cold, banishes all yearning human bodies to the shore. To live under the surface of life, in the gaps, where I subsist but for a few seconds in the midst of the flow. Painting takes me there, and in painting I can make these disparate, rare moments permanent.

"In the pure and shining sarcophagus, sweet water reposes, warm and perfect, bride of the body's form. Light and free, the nude settles down and is assuaged. Everything is easy in the fluid where the exempted legs are as alive as arms. Here man has laid his stature down; here he has glided his whole length into which his height has changed; he stretches out until he reaches the limit of his own extent; he feels commensurate with his feeling of his capacity to relax. Blissfully he changes his point of support; one finger holds him and lifts him; and his floating powers, half melted in the calm mass of the water, dream of algae and angels."

In my properties a thought wanders. This thought seeks indefatigably to be in more than one place at a time, in order to perceive the world as a whole. Inevitably, however, it encounters the world, which forever resists the thought's intertwining with being, and is struck by the realisation that it will never open itself completely; that each moment is isolated from the next. Instead, the thought picks up things it finds as it wanders, things that come from other places, scattered randomly, as it were, by the careless hands of time. They just seem to appear, suddenly and apparently without meaning or purpose. The thought places them next to one another, in an attempt to invoke some form of observable unity of the things, a connection.

My properties are a shattered terrain, held together by glue made of water and air.

Reality is perceived as fragmentary; in quantities. We could, like the thought, place things next to one another, and even join them up in various ways, but the myriad forms can never be combined into units. In dreamlike states, we could say that we visit this world of fragments, this museum of moments, and they seem jumbled together and connected—(In a recent dream, I was in a place, which, when I tried to describe it to myself, was a giant skating rink-or-playground-or-schoolyard-or-park. In the dream, the place was all this at once, and probably more. In language, it has to be divided up. In an image, I can say the whole place at once.)—but when you wake up, you once again become brutally aware that things are separated.
My properties are surrounded by the world’s oceans.

“More than alone on the shore of the ocean,
I give myself like a wave
To the monotonous transmutation
Of water into water,
Myself into myself”

×

The night is long and fruitful. The world dreams itself.

The morning is dressed in giddiness. Waking up is vertiginous. Everything becomes too clear in the sudden rupture from sleep’s anamorphosis. Coffee and nicotine become my parachute, and the heart regains its weight in my chest.

“For the time being stand on the highest peak
For the time being be in the deepest depth”

I search for this. This slightly misty, sun-warmed state. Focused. Slumbrous (“we are in the realm of sleep, without sleeping”). Far from worry. Looking around and finding paths. There are doors or windows everywhere. Correspondences. Postcards. A letter in a language I don’t understand. A contact with being, that which I sense is ajar. I am a stranger in this land. I look out and know that none of what I see is mine. I am born when my gaze is met.

I seek closeness. A genuine closeness beyond all barriers (walls, tools, gloom ...).
“Now I’ve stopped using picks another thing between me and my guitar now I’m strumming away every day when I feel blue I’ll write a strummer for you.”

Painting is a way of penetrating these barriers. (“I am ‘a mass of irritable substance.’ I have no skin.”) This is to dive deep into Heraclitus’s river, in which I otherwise am only permitted to dip my feet. To speak through the crack in the wall does not suffice. The crack that becomes the rod of lightning that splits Nicolas Poussin’s Paysage orageux avec Pyrame et Thisbé (1651) in two and forever separates the lovers. I must float through the crack. Sometimes I can. In painting, I can make these rare moments permanent. But there is nothing absolute or monumental about the work itself; it is in the process, in the mind—of the moment—that this permanence is created. The painting then joins the mass of moments and resounds through time.

In certain light, Giorgio Morandi’s containers, filled with air and dust, seem to recede so as to give room for something else. Or to be transformed. His paintings flicker, like venetian blinds in a window that are opened and shut very rapidly so that we see both the blinds and the landscape outside simultaneously. A gap arises between matter and mind, a short-circuit. That is where the paintings open up.

“When I say, oh ... when Shakespeare says, ‘In the dread vast and middle of the night,’ something happens between ‘dread vast’ and ‘middle.’ That creates like a whole space of—spaciness of black night. How it gets that is very odd, those words put together. Or in the haiku, you have two distinct images, set side by side without drawing a connection, without drawing a logical connection between them: the mind fills in this ... this space. Like

'O ant

crawl up Mount Fujiyama,
but slowly, slowly,

“Now you have the small ant and you have Mount Fujiyama and you have the slowly, slowly, and what happens is that you feel almost like ... a cock in your mouth! You feel this enormous space—universe, it’s almost a tactile thing. Well anyway, it’s a phenomenon-sensation, phenomenon hyphen sensation, that’s created by this little haiku of Issa, for instance.”

Side by side, the objects reveal themselves. The space between them is minimal and infinite and full of mysteries. In the gaps between the objects and my understanding of them, I find other ways of approaching them.

“The consciousness as it emerges from these gaps, these personal deviations in which weakness and the presence of poisons in the nervous system, but also the power as well as the subtlety of the attention and a most exquisite logic, a cultivated mysticism, all, severely, direct it, the consciousness, then, comes to suspect all accustomed reality of being only one solution amongst many others of universal problems.”

To shift the gaze. What was previously taken for granted is no longer a given.

So, it could be about the banal. The quotidian. Going for a walk. Carefully watering the plants on the windowsill. It could be about travel. Within and externally. Or something far grander. Abandoning yourself to being amazed. To surrender.

“What speaks to us, seemingly, is always the big event, the untoward, the extra-ordinary: the front page splash, the banner headlines ... as if life reveals itself only by the way of the spectacular. ... How should we take account of, question, describe what happens every day and recurs every day: the banal, the quotidian, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the habitual?”

Life seeps into the studio, flowingly; the room is charged with previous events, Morandi’s dust.

It is about precise observations. It is about aiming a light at darkness without expecting it to stop being dark.

New paintings are made next to previous ones. I am (physically) surrounded by and (mentally) dependent on my earlier output, but the paintings do not relate to one another in a strictly serial way. They are singularities that enhance each other, perhaps by virtue of their differences rather than their similarities. Even the paintings I get rid of remain in the studio like a subterranean sound.

The work originates in practically anything. Impressions from within and without linger in my mind, like a wave sketches its shadow on the sand when it returns to the sea.

“Colour, grief, memories; surprises and things expected; the tree outside, the rustling of its leaves, its yearly change, its shadow as well as its substance, its accidents of shape and position, the far off thoughts that it brings back to my wandering attention—all these things are equal.”
The painting is done when there is a shimmer under the paint. A shimmer of something indefinable that seems to appear more or less without my involvement. When the painting comes into its own and resides in itself, when the paint moves without the need of a brush. That is also when it separates itself from me and becomes a self-supporting object/subject?. The painting no longer needs me (but I need it).

When I see a work of art that moves me, it seems so real. Reality is shaped around it.

“I do not look at [the painting] as one looks at a thing, fixing it in its place. My gaze wanders within it as in the halos of Being. Rather than seeing it, I see according to, or with it.”

A painting, 17.5 x 21 cm, almost entirely covered by what appears to be diluted cadmium-red oil paint, with a few awkward, paler shapes along the edges and one slightly below the upper edge. The title of the painting is Love.

Something about Raoul De Keyser’s painting gives me the intangible sense of understanding. A mood arises, a weather. It is familiar and yet foreign, beyond reach. The word “Love” rests in the painting, and the painting rests in the word, and both rest in themselves.

You have to see the word in the same way you see the painting, allow your gaze to wander around in it.

“There is hardly a story, there is hardly an image, there is no excuse. Looking is the only thing that remains. Looking even into the most distant corners.”

Despite their widely disparate intentions and interests, I discern a link between the way De Keyser’s and Forrest Bess’s paintings communicate. Both artists work with phenomena they have observed: De Keyser with his gaze wandering from the inside out, and Bess with his gaze moving from the outside in. They are linked partly in how they combine colour and language. A totally abstract painting that defies description or interpretation (which has to be seen) is given a title that draws the beholder both into the painting and in a different direction. That invites conversation.

Bess’s paintings are created inside the eye. This eye is a solar eye, whose retina meets the light from within. (“Colour does not belong to the physical order of causes, but to the virtual iridescence of effects that condition its existence from within the affine interior of a solar eye.”) He depicts his visions carefully and exactly, in order to continue studying them. If the interior of the eye is an affine representation of the exterior eye (the sun, that which is enveloped in its light, that which is experienced visually), Bess paints an exterior reality translated, but from the same roots, the same elements. A reality that arises between the eye and the objects.

A focused, lingering gaze is required to accomplish these paintings, and a focused, lingering gaze is required to truly see them.

“Bess wrote about “Untitled (No. 11A)” (1958), saying it requires thirty minutes of focused energy spent gazing upon the canvas in a darkened room:

Tests prove that it will cause the viewers to have the vision, very dimly lit of the earth, white granite with pits—wind—and the feeling of very great loneliness. I have even had dragline operators cry over it. Farmers cried.”

Hippolyte Taine claims that “every perception, every image, every sensation is by nature hallucinatory.” The hallucination creates, and gives us access to expressing “the excess of the visible,” of which every painting is an example.

The image, the sea that the sun-eye meets at the horizon, when light is coloured by shadows.

In Amsterdam I saw a floral still life by Henri Fantin-Latour titled Flowers from Normandy (1887). Suddenly, I am there, breathing the same air.

I float away from language and towards it again (or it floats towards me). Titles become keys that open new doors, set things in motion, both in the viewer and in me. They are generated in reaction to the painting. After a painting is finished (if the work was successful), the title will sooner or later appear near (beside) the painting. The text (title) is read and deciphered and understood and transformed from abstract shapes into words with meaning in the beholder’s mind. The text is borne by the viewer (inside) and is written on the painting (outside). Here, the second movement begins.

“An abstract shiver, a shiver in the workshop of the brain, in a zone where you can’t shiver with shivers. How, then, will it shiver?”

The second movement defies definition. Henri Michaux takes a deep breath and dives down into the nervous system. In stormy waters, without a life jacket, he hopes for the best. In his experiments, he is reduced to a particle inside himself, in total surrender to the tyrannical violence of the body and mind. He uses drawing and automatic writing to document his
experiences, and then translates them into a kind of prose description of the voyage:

Since I could not present the manuscript itself, which directly translated the subject, rhythms, shapes, and chaos all together, as well as the inner defences and their breakdowns, we found ourselves in great difficulty, facing a typographical wall. Everything had to be rewritten. In any case, the original text, easier to feel than read, as much drawn as written, would never have been adequate.24

Thus, an untranslatable experience is translated twice over. The enormous emotional eruptions must be doubly reduced in order to be made comprehensible, and something is lost. What to do, when words do not suffice but go up in smoke or move in zigzags? When they dive and resurface and die and are reborn, uncontrollably? Perhaps something can be gained by leaving them alone. Perhaps the words should be allowed to remain as drawings, allowed to be exempted from reduction and understanding, and left to live in full chaos, in themselves, even if this means that we will not be able to grasp them.

“Most of us, given a choice between chaos and naming, between catastrophe and cliché, would choose naming. Most of us see this as a zero-sum game—as if there were no third place to be: something without a name is commonly thought not to exist. And here is where we may be able to discern the benevolence of the untranslatable. … In the presence of a word that stops itself, in that silence, one has the feeling that something has passed us and kept going, that some possibility has got free. For Hölderlin, as for Joan of Arc, this is a religious apprehension and leads to gods. Francis Bacon doesn’t believe in gods but he has a profound relationship with Rembrandt.”25
Tomorrow, 2017. Oil on canvas. 24 x 30 cm. Marcus Matt
Bon Voyage, 2017. Charcoal on canvas. 29 x 22 cm. Marcus Matt
I found a dream I sometimes have in a book:
Evening. Rain falls on the empty desert hills.
Chalk and flint and the smell of dust being wetted
after an arid summer. A wish stirs: to be what I
would have been had I not known what is known.
To be before knowledge. Like the hills. Like a
stone on the surface of the moon.
Simply there, motionless, and trusting
in the length of its shelf life.

Could this evacuation of the self make my heartbeat
synchronize with other, earlier hearts?

The paintings become islands in the same ocean. A
kind of archipelago in the water adjoining my prop-
erties. I travel between them in the direction of the
waves; there is no end station in sight. A nomadic way
of painting that belongs nowhere, but from absolute
necessity is forever in flight (although this flight is
sometimes very slow, also out of necessity). Itinerant
thinking. Continuously renewing one's estrangement
from oneself in painting.

“Paul Cézanne has—disparagingly—been called an
“eternal seeker,” since he never joined “those who
find.” Could there be a more exquisite insult?

Aiming the light at darkness, without expecting to
find anything in particular.

“It is after long, fruitless effort which ends in despair,
when we no longer expect anything, that, from outside
ourselves, the gift comes as a marvellous surprise. The
effort has destroyed a part of the false sense of fullness
within us.”

The fullness is replaced with a void that is big enough
to hold me. There in the void, there is room to paint.
There I can work out of necessity, not under duress.
Calm and observant, floating through life. The paint-
ings become part of the filled void.

“Certainly she was losing consciousness of outer things.
And as she lost consciousness of outer things, and her
name and her personality and her appearance, and
whether Mr. Carmichael was there or not, her mind
kept throwing up from its depths, scenes, and names,
and sayings, and memories and ideas, like a fountain
spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white
space, while she modelled it with greens and blues.”
Untitled, 2016. Oil on canvas. 27 x 22 cm. Marcus Matt
Marcus Matt

10. Karen Wilkin refers briefly to the “myths” around Morandi and mentions “his cluttered but spartan studio, the thick ‘unifying layer’ of dust on the objects that served as still life models.” Karen Wilkin, Giorgio Morandi: Works, Writings, Interviews (Madrid: Ediciones Poligrafa, 2007), 11.
14. “I merely substitute one night for the other. To darken this darkness, this is the gate of all wonder.” Roland Barthes, “And the Night Illuminated the Night,” in A Lover’s Discourse, 172.
17. Raoul De Keyser, Love, 2007, oil on canvas, 17.5 x 21 cm.
22. Alliez, The Brain-Eye, xxv.
27. In the 2010 documentary The Cave of Forgotten Dreams, for which Werner Herzog was allowed to film the paintings in the Chauvet Cave in southern France, the silence in the caves is described as being so intense that you can hear your own heartbeat if you listen closely. Herzog asks himself: “These images are memories of long-forgotten dreams. Is this their heartbeat or ours?” This reminds me of Carl Jung’s short description of the mythological situation in his lecture “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry”: “The moment when this mythological situation reappears is always characterised by a peculiar emotional intensity; it is as though chords in us were struck that had never resounded before, or as though forces whose existence we never suspected were unleashed. ... So it is not surprising that when an archetypal situation occurs we suddenly feel an extraordinary sense of release, as though transported, or caught up by an overwhelming power. At such moments we are no longer individual, but the race; the voice of all mankind resounds in us.” Carl Gustav Jung, “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry,” in Collected Works of C.G. Jung, vol. 15, Spirit in Art, Man and Literature, ed. Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 82.
29. Émile Bernard declares himself, in L’esthétique Fondamentale et Traditionnelle d’Après les Maîtres de Tous les Temps (1910), to be “solemnly Against Cézanne,” stating: “Let us learn from those who find, and not from these eternal seekers, for whom the search only leads them deeper into the morass; let us seek, but by paths that are sure.” Alliez, “Ten Variations on Cézanne’s Concentric Eye,” in The Brain-Eye, 324.
31. Woolf, To the Lighthouse, 238.
Nicklas Randau

Installation view from Igår droppar idag / Yesterday drips today, MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Nicklas Randau
Untitled (Aguellis nyår), 2017. Oil on canvas. 208 x 348 cm. Nicklas Randau
It’s Raining over the Island

In the hallway, just before morning has begun to glow red and with sleep still residing in the depths of my body, I see both the courtyard and the street. Here, two lights and two blankets of sound flow towards each other. They meet in a brief flux (reminiscent of Ancient Sound, Abstract on Black (1925) by Paul Klee, in which a dark grid pattern seems to be momentarily lit from without or within in the middle of the painting) that somehow makes this moment, this compressed space of time, act like a subjective pillar supporting the picture space in which my painting exists.

Text and image are constantly intersecting. If we like, we can think of a woven fabric in which the warp is the text that is always intersected by the weft—the image. Both image and text can be said to belong to language, or conversely that language is built up out of these images, both interior mental images and images in text.

“We sense the entrainments that the dedicated weaver adds to her cloth, in other words that search for a track and an idea that sets in as soon as we have lost another one.”

When such a fabric of language is hung up in the air and a light shines through the gaps, then what emerges is a language-less light.

The interior image vanishes and is of lesser importance in its short-lived clarity. It is not this that lingers on, but the space that gives it the possibility of existing. For me, it is painting that constitutes this space; here colour is possibility, and in a certain sense it is text, primarily poetry, that is its source. (The picture spaces of skies and wind that René Char, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Marguerite Duras describe through written language occasionally lie like a mist over the palette in the studio.)² The capacity of an interior image to constantly shift position as soon as it begins to take shape can be compared to the horizon: it exists, constantly vanishing.

And yet we see it.

“Perception does not give me truths like geometry but presences.”³

We imagine—we see—a room with angles in shadow. Letting the gaze become accustomed so as to make out the differences in the shadows involves entering into a sphere, the insular, the inner space. There is a possibility here to see and to follow apperceptions,⁴ in painting and in the paint.

Specifically in the mixing of the paints—as Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes about perception—it is not forms of truth, but forms of presence that are central, since all colours relate specifically to some other colour, which involves there being an infinite space between a certain silvery blue and a somewhat warmer blue, a space that is perceived through presence.

Since the picture has shown itself to be insignificant, the picture space as presence—form—has stepped forward as a possibility. The picture space is live.

Need’s Poetic Streak

For a few summers, I worked as a substitute carer at an LSS⁵ residence. A man lived there whose behaviour was occasionally strikingly like my working process in painting. He had a need to understand and to put events into context. Occasionally, small and apparently insignificant events; occasionally, major global ones. A need that most people feel, one that is human and constantly relevant, and which spans innumerable areas: language, love, empathy, anger, maths, history, humour, grief, art, relationships, and so on. Things that he had read in the newspaper, in the dictionary, or seen on TV had an impact and demanded, if not an explanation, then at least reflection.

This found expression in a ceaseless harping on and repetition that required me, in my capacity as carer, to confirm or deny the assertion or fact.
One day, a memory involving a jacket that was made for either a boy or a girl was apparently critically in need of clarification. On another day, it was absolutely necessary to try to understand how Fidel Castro could run Cuba despite his great age. On a third day, it was of the utmost necessity that I understood, in detail, what Swedish and Danish army uniforms looked like on the occasion when a frozen strait was crossed.

This repetition, this harping on, was experienced as the resonance from the cord that had begun to vibrate when I read Göran Sonnevi’s words: “I repeated myself stuttering, I became language.”

Sometimes, everything was very mysterious. On one occasion, he sat on the sofa in the common room, now lying down, now staring very thoughtfully in my direction. His gaze had the concentration that is required to do croquis drawing, knowing that everything that is drawn has to be seen by the eye. That everything that seems self-evident has to be re-examined.

Every day, sometimes several times a day, he wrote on a notepad in his room, one or more, but rarely more than five, words that, as it were, summed up the mystery that drove the commotion during the day. This was written in a way that I had never seen before, as though he were trying to carve the letters in, as if he were in a hurry. It was pointless to pay attention to the lines ruled on the paper, they were meaningless; when a word would not fit, he bent it. The word was extended, its direction altered, carried on along the margin, and occasionally upside down.

Bending a word struck me as the most poetic feature that need could compel.

I read:

*Wide-awake dreams,*

*Boy jacket girl, wizard, simply magicking away, androgynous, 1963, batista*

Unlike a picture that can be moved around and translated between different media, the picture space is and has to be live—it is a pocket of time with a specific construction. The construction of colour, surface, movement, sound, or scent is reconstructed each time, like a musical or drama performance.

In painting this perhaps becomes most evident when a painting is photographed and is thereby frozen—in one set of lighting conditions captured by the camera, which usually does not show more than a lapse of a few hundredths’ or up to a few seconds’ flow of light. What the colours relate to has been cut out and it becomes impossible to build the colours up into presence forms.

Initially there is always an inner image, which has its origin in a human experience, either in text or in the world, with a body and senses. Wonder, too, warmth that has sprung from a crack or a gap between lethargy and concentration; like answering “Hello?” when the alarm clock rings and waiting for a conversation. The period of waiting—the break between sleep and wakefulness—bears meaning right then, *in* the moment.

The poet and artist Karl Larsson in an interview spoke about a prosaic structure in society, in which poetry’s area of use or application can be to break up this prose—not solely as it does in text, but also in everyday existence, in life. He explained:

*So the question is, what is reality? Is it this kind of image, is it our language that we speak every day? Or is it actually that we have a fiction that makes us discover a sudden reality here and then, when we break with a prosaic structure?*

This “sudden reality” lies very close to what happens when an apparition occurs in painting, when the paint ceases to be only paint and appears as all that it can be beyond paint.

**Distances in Drowsiness**

Describing a distance in words is a pervasive theme among pages with dog-eared corners. For Virginia Woolf in *Jacob’s Room,* the gaze of the narrator switches between the perspective of the boat and of dry land, or from the flower-filled window frame to the ship there far out to sea. The ship is also visible exactly at the point between the leaves of the flowers, albeit on the other side of the glass.

It seems impossible to say how great the distance actually is. For a moment, the flowers and the boat overlap. Through the narrator we understand that both places exist beyond this overlaid optical illusion and the distance between the places requires no description. In painting, this distance is narrated through a time aspect; it can be said to be filled by the gaze. It is such a distance that makes Åke Göransson’s painting *Modern sovande* (Mother sleeping, 1930–32) tell us about two places that exist simultaneously. Dream and wakefulness. For the viewer, in addition to being a pillow, the pillow is a cloud for the sleeping mother. The painting has something about it as strange as an abstract natural light.

*I myself am lying on a mattress, and resting or waiting.*

The most dust-laden moment (if dust, suddenly visible in a ray of sunshine, metaphorically can stand for the overlapping of two places or sequences of events) occurs just before or just after sleep, when a dream explanation is still logical.
Occasionally, I fall asleep in front of a painting. When I awaken, it can be too late and the painting whose dust was, only a moment ago, swirling around the whole room, becomes like a brush that sweeps up the dust.

Sleep: an Achilles heel or a precondition for dreams?

**Colours, Meditativeness in the Shadows**

Colours are applied with tools or directly with the hands. They shade and alter the light—the changeable light flow that constitutes the spatiality in which the body exists—in the studio; the whole distance, right up to and behind the planar field that is usually a canvas. At some point, breathing comes to play a decisive role. The spatiality that arises in painting inhales air from the studio and slowly exhales into the room. This happens slowly and quietly:

> student in garrets.

A great deal is concealed by electric light, but it comes out in the daylight. It is as though a meditativeness resides in certain colours. A gloom that awakens and, in that moment, has an impact.

A certain clarity emerges when you squint, or shut your eyes. I don’t experience this as something occult. Occasionally, an atmosphere of mysticism or something magical arises, but it is paint that causes the break in the prosaic structure—not illusions.
Insularity

“If men, sometimes, didn’t by choice close their eyes, they would end up not seeing what is worth seeing.”
—René Char, *Feuillets d’Hypnos* (Leaves of Hypnos)

I have thought a great deal about what actually took place on the occasion when a blackbird sang and I, *shutting my eyes*, saw it; about why its song put me into one of the most intense feelings of intoxication of belonging that I have ever experienced. I don’t understand it. Of course, I like birds and, of course, the song of the blackbird is particularly beautiful, but that is not sufficient reason.

It was during an exercise at a butoh-inspired performance course9 that I experienced this wordless self-evidence in the encounter with the world. After having gone around with my eyes closed for over thirty minutes, everything that the eyes had shut out became accessible: I was there, in self-evident speechlessness. All the sounds that usually lie like a dense duvet over a walk that is embedded and condensed, broke up, flew around. But this was not a chaotic series of events; it came about quietly, it seemed to float in the air. A footstep on the ground was not only felt, but also heard more clearly. The leaves that were trodden on told me that it was wet, the car tyres likewise, and the intervals between the different vehicles that drove along the main road allowed a new, unobtrusive sound to emerge; a whisper, the whisper of the space between, breathing.

“Åke must have had this painter’s sense when he breathed rather than brushed on the light-blue and pink tones in his painting of his mother on the pillow.”10

Footpaths, differences in the size of the gravel, small variations in height, differences in smell, the hundreds of interior reflections insisted on attention and told of their existence in detail. A rarely witnessed happiness.

Visible and inaccessible, like the compromise of always waking up just as sleep vanishes?

There were no barriers, no distance from the blackbird that sang in that tree obliquely overhead. There is something specific that constitutes a picture space without actually being a picture; when your eyes are closed, the distance vanishes and vision seems to begin again, to go into another breathing.

“Or the horizon whose distance from me would be abolished—since that distance is not one of its properties.”11

It was out of such an experience that the painting *Insulärt Regn* (Insular rain) (2015) came about. The title is borrowed from a line by Édouard Glissant, which seems to describe a particular state: “or among the clouds in an insular rain.”12 Since I did not know what the word “insular” meant, I was forced to look it up in a dictionary: “resembling an island,” it said. The state that the closed eyes revealed, in which language was superfluous, was reminiscent of an island: isolated, but existing somewhere.

“The trouble is that something physical is present but never appears.”13

There is an island in the brain that, because of its location, is called the insular lobe:

There is constant signal traffic going on between the insular lobe (“the island” lodged between the temporal lobe and the frontal lobe) and internal organs such as the heart, stomach, genitals and lungs. The Insula plays an important role when we are to interpret information from the body that is connected with feelings.14

A medical study with the title “How Do You Feel —Now? The Anterior Insula and Human Awareness,” which combines the results from MRI and PET scans of brain activity subject to various stimuli, demonstrates that the insular lobe is highly active during perception. It explains:

First, Ploran et al. tracked brain activation in subjects watching a screen on which an image was slowly being revealed. They found a gradual increase in activation in brain regions that are involved in object identification, but a sudden burst of activity in the AIC and the ACC at the moment of recognition (that is, coinciding with the awareness of the percept itself).15

A medical explanation for the hundreds of internal reflections that, as it were, rain down on the inside of the closed eyelids?

About Ivan Aguéli at the Gothenburg Museum of Art, 2015, and Cy Twombly at Hamburger Bahnhof, 2014

The light is both highly charged and fragile, and the motif seems almost to hang in the air. Suspended between the charged and the fragile, the gaze does not roam around the whole painting, but goes in an arc into the painting’s space. That there is paint is noticeable only in the brushstrokes and in the traces that they have left in it. Those traces constitute the distance between illusion and paint. There is nothing photographically realistic about Ivan Aguéli’s paintings, but the charge and the fragility create such a taut intensity that the air just in front of the painting seems to quiver.

The light in the space of the painting comes from another place. The painting’s cosmic background radiation is tangible here. These paintings echo with the cave painter’s fascination with their own shadow.16
In some paintings, it appears as if the artist suddenly became conscious that they were painting—but instead of freezing, they were astounded by this, and painted in this astonishment. Philip Guston writes:

To paint is always to start at the beginning again, yet being unable to avoid the familiar arguments about what you see yourself painting. The canvas you are working on modifies the previous ones in an unending, baffling chain that never seems to finish. (What a sympathy is demanded of the viewer! He is asked to “see” the future links.)

Consciousness and analysis of the moment, in the moment, risk ruining an intuitive painting by freezing the moment like a camera does. But there are paintings that seem to go into another form of breathing, and in doing so retain both the analysis and the intuition. Philip Guston, Cy Twombly, Joan Mitchell, and Thomas Henriksson all paint in large format, and with a kind of openness that I believe requires this second wind.

Henriksson’s openness becomes evident when he says that he does not have, and nor could he ever have, any idea about how the painting will end up. The mixing of colours takes a considerable number of hours, sometimes days, before the right tone is achieved. The actual application of the paint onto the canvas goes a bit more quickly and is done methodically: first, a pastose layer of a primary colour is applied over the whole canvas, then a new, equally pastose layer of a usually lighter or contrasting colour on top of the first. At the last moment, a grid is created by scraping out squares with a spatula. It is not until the last square is scraped out that it is possible to see the whole painting. The squares become gashes in time—the oil paint dries slowly and will continue to change over the next hundred years.

There was a room at Hamburger Bahnhof showing paintings by Cy Twombly from the Erich Marx Collection in 2014. There was an altogether distinct self-evidence in the room. Twombly’s painting frequently bears a peculiar self-evident atmosphere consisting of both rhythmic scrawls and, at the same time, a cosmic calm—a cosmic order—since everything in the painting relates to everything else in a way that is reminiscent of a stellar constellation. There is something constant and something temporary in this, in which the viewer plays a major role. It is possible to travel to and in painting; that is, depending on your frame of mind and emotional state, it is possible to travel, like a tourist, to certain parts of the painting.

There seems not to be a classical relationship between light and shadow, as there is with Aguéli, who creates this calm, this cosmic order, but rather there is a permission, an invitation, to partake of the picture space. The paint here does not claim to be anything other than paint—but it tells us something about a whole universe. The large, open sections of unpainted canvas make the patches of paint and the scribbling less into a picture and more into a series of events, a falling. A fall that is actually not especially far away. The extension out into the room and the risk of falling with or of falling in is an impending one.

After having travelled in a painting, time outside it has passed, too.

In such an understanding of Twombly’s painting, however, a classical relationship between light and shade enters in. Depending on where/how/when we find ourselves in front of a painting like this, the blotches and traces appear to be in front of or behind each other; the longer you look, the more the patches of paint and their relationship with each other come across as something very specific. The gaze and seeing commit them to memory. There are a great many of them; it is not always possible to see them. A part of them, and thereby also the underlying composition, only becomes evident once the eye has gotten used to the light in which they are shown. It is surely the same with all painting, that is to say, the viewer has to become accustomed to it, but in painting like Twombly’s, acclimatisation plays a critical role.

It makes a big difference if, as a stargazer, you find yourself in the city or in the desert when darkness descends and your eyes begin their acclimatisation. With the large, unpainted canvas surfaces of Twombly, Mitchell, and Monet, I am hurled out into a kind of desert.
Untitled, 2017. Oil on canvas. 38 x 42 cm. Nicklas Randau
Peninsular echoes (no 4), 2017. Oil on canvas. 165 x 180 cm. Nicklas Randau
Peninsular echoes (no 2), 2017. Oil on canvas. 200 x 240 cm. Nicklas Randau
Insulärt regn, 2015. Oil on canvas. 200 x 300 cm. Nicklas Randau


Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Lovtalt till filosofin [Eulogy to Philosophy] (Stockholm/Stehag: Brutus Östlings Bokförlag Symposion, 2004), 46–47. Translator’s note, regarding the word “apperception”: “A simple example is a house that one views from in front; even if in the strict sense one only sees a façade that might conceal the hole in the ground left after a building has been pulled down, then one still perceives a building with stairs, apartments, people: in this act the back, inside and so on of the building are apperceived.”

Law of support and service. See the Act Concerning Support and Service for Persons with Certain Functional Impairments.


The course, “Cascade of Idiosyncrasies,” was led by the artist Ieva Misevičiūtė at Malmo Art Academy during the autumn semester of 2015.

Olle Bauman, En blomforma möte med sin blå bakgrund [A flowershape meeting with its blue background] (Verona: Raster förlag, 2002), 41. See the painting by Åke Göransson, Modern sovande, 1930–32, 38 x 48.5 cm.


Glissant, Relationens filosofi, 122.


Agneta Lagercrantz, “Här är byggestenarna i din emotionella profil” [Here are the building blocks of your emotional profile], Svenska Dagbladet, October 9, 2012, https://www.svd.se/har-ar-byggestenarna-i-din-emotionella-profil.


See Cave of Forgotten Dreams, directed by Werner Herzog (Canada/USA: Creative Differences, History Films, 2010).


Cy Twombly, Untitled (The Empire of Flora), 1961, pencil, oil-based house paint and wax crayon on canvas, 101.2 x 148 cm; Joan Mitchell, The Lot, 1971, oil on canvas, 280 x 180 cm; Claude Monet, Blue Water Lilies, 1916–19, oil on canvas, 200 x 200 cm.

Further References


Right: Poppy, 2017. Wood, cotton threads, hair, wool. 111 x 25 x 111 cm. Samaneh Reyhani

Bottom: *Loom (Persian)*, 2017. Detail. Samaneh Reyhani
Executive Desire

Silent
The world will know nothing about your wounds and scars. Wearing a well-rehearsed smile, you bravely make polite conversation, and when the day is over, tears will accompany you into a troubled sleep. I was myself in such a state for a long time. In isolation for too long a period, so that all I could see was ugliness and nonsensical games of war. This mind and this body of mine are still suffering from the invisible tentacles of religious propaganda and the shackles of tradition. Liberation might be obtainable through the death of this infectious God, but what about the pain of separation?

"Hearing to the reed-flute, how it complains,
Lamenting its banishment from its home:

Ever since they tore me from my osier bed,
My plaintive notes have moved men and women to tears.

I burst my breast, striving to give vent to sighs,
And to express the pangs of my yearning for my home.

He who abides far away from his home
Is ever longing for the day he shall return.

My wailing is heard in every throng,
In concert with them that rejoice and them that weep.

Each interprets my notes in harmony with his own feelings,
But not one fathoms the secrets of my heart.

My secrets are not alien from my plaintive notes,
Yet they are not manifest to the sensual eye and ear.

Body is not veiled from soul, neither soul from body,
Yet no man hath ever seen a soul.

This plaint of the flute is fire, not mere air.
Let him who lacks this fire be accounted dead!"
Venus, 2017. Plastic. Each leaf approx. 300 x 60 x 80 cm x 6. Samaneh Reyhani
Poetry

“Though Hafiz be lost and gone,
He has as yet an intimate tie of oneness
With grief and sufferance in love—soul mate
By grace of that ancient covenant.”
—Hafez

As an Iranian, I have an intimate relationship to Shams al-din Mohammad Hafez. It is a pleasure to read his poems. In fact, it is an integrated part of a Persian upbringing. From our early childhood and throughout our lives, together with friends and family we make wishes and then randomly open the Divan, a book with the collected works of Hafez—which in a Persian home is as precious as the Koran. The incidentally found poem is thought to heal wounds of the heart and foretell the future. The text of the poem, which is read symbolically, is open to interpretation and is taken as gentle advice. Many regard Hafez as if he is, in a mysterious way, giving them personal advice, magically opening the book through their fingers to the text that is relevant just for them at that moment. He has the status of a kind and respected demigod.

Mythologies and ritual beliefs are a natural part of the Persian and Islamic culture. In the world of myths and sorrows, the Persian poets used a variety of literary devices such as metaphor and rhythm to embellish their expressions; these tools are familiar to those who understand the language. The wording of poetry is symbolic, and the imagery has been used over and over through the centuries, so that poems have become part of our everyday language. They no longer retain their original meanings. The imagery has become iconic: A glass of wine is widely accepted to mean an erotic lover, and wine itself is a symbol of love. Rubies are lover’s lips, the moon is a substitute for a face, and blood is a natural allegory for the spirit. ³

“Although the thorn hurts your spirit, the rose asks pardon. For this wound; the sourness of wine is more easily tolerated when one remembers the sweet flavour of drunkenness.” ⁴

The poets inspire me for many reasons. They were well versed in the poetic works that preceded them and would compose their poems based on works of the old masters, reassembling, almost reinventing, and distilling convention. Persian poetry and Persian art is elegant and rich, assimilating dramatic and rhythmic elements. ⁵ They contain endless subject matter that I can distil and then utilise certain aspects of in my own works. In this way I feel I am building on tradition but also freely expressing cultural references in a way compatible with our contemporary era.

Figurative speech, which contains metaphors and symbols, supplies a variety of interpretations. This is a natural and interesting tool for me, like a love lyric, a ghazal, containing poetic expression full of pain and sorrow, of separation and the beauty of love. I mingle these ingredients with personal stories. In my art I am a storyteller without words. Instead, I employ objects.

“This is also why, in order to get the truth to speak, it is not enough to suspend the subject’s active intervention and let language itself speak—as Elfriede Jelinek puts it with extraordinary clarity: ‘Language should be tortured to tell the truth.’ It should be twisted, denaturalized, extended, condensed, cut, and reunited, made to work against itself. Language as the ‘big Other’ is not an agent of wisdom to whose message we should attune ourselves, but a place of cruel indifference and stupidity. The most elementary form of torturing one’s language is called poetry.” ⁶
Manuscript
This is the beginning;
all the stories start with her,
with a slice of her memory.
I might play different roles in her stories,
a malicious person, a villain
... a beautiful lover, like a flower,
a sea creature, or only a man.

Like a Persian manuscript, my stories need to be illustrated. Manuscripts have to be completed in two stages. A calligrapher writes a portion of the story that’s intended to be illustrated. They are then followed by a painter (illustrator), who composes pictures in the spaces left by the calligrapher. The painter can be you, and with your memory, together we will make the work complete.

Disclosure
We are strangers and alienation is within us. Could it be that love relationships have never existed; they’re just illusions? We are alone, and loneliness should be accepted. What we call love is finding in someone else something that we are lacking in ourselves. The ordinary path of love is nothing more than a desire that you will never achieve. Holding on to an image of our beloved, which brings us jouissance, is a state of suffering. My love is that “mystical love in poetry.” I feel it, I observe it, and I live with it. This path is a path to divine love.

“Through Love all that is bitter will be sweet
Through Love all that is copper will be gold.
Through Love all dregs will turn to purest wine
Through Love the dead will all become alive.
Through Love the king will turn into a slave!”

“ONCE a beloved asked her lover: ‘Friend,
You have seen many places in the world!
Now—which of all these cities was the best?’
He said: ‘The city where my sweetheart lives!’”

Sufi poetry includes an image of love in which the lover’s love is a shade of divine love. The story of Layla and Majnun10 is a perfect example of mystical love, a story of suffering, a story of separation, and a story of finding the love of God. The love of souls, the mystery of hearts, Majnun is the mad one. His beloved Layla is his tie to divine love. A glass of wine from Layla transforms Majnun into a slave.

“But layla could bewitch with one glance from beneath her dark hair, Majnun was her slave and a dervish dancing before her. Layla held in her hand the glass of wine scented with musk. Majnun had not touched the wine, yet he was drunk with its sweet smell.”

And this wine, this love, is a dangerous substance, addictive and intoxicating. Mystical love is beyond desire when Majnun tells Layla that it is not her that he wants, it is the Love of Leila that he loves.

“So firm is my longing for you
What need do I have of that form of you?
To have you in my love is crime of association
Either love is my man or you.
When your love shows its face
Absence best becomes your face”

We all desire love, searching for it throughout our entire lives, and we can obtain it only through pain and death. From our emergence on earth, our destiny is chained to the misery of pain; we become separated from our beloved, from our roots.

“Every one who is left far from his source wishes back the time when he was united with it.”

Venus
“My relationship towards tulips is inherently Lynchian. I think they are disgusting. Just imagine. Aren’t these some kind of, how do you call it, vagina dentata, dental vaginas threatening to swallow you? I think that flowers are something inherently disgusting. I mean, are people aware what a horrible thing these flowers are? I mean, basically, it’s an open invitation to all insects and bees, ‘Come and screw me.’”

—Slavoj Žižek

Flowers can be beautiful, deceiving, and exotic, sometimes even deadly. The Venus flytrap is a carnivorous plant that attracts small insects and catches them as her prey. She is a mysterious flower, a beautiful creature that grows in the wild. Her colours and scent allure you to touch and come closer. She is attractive, but you should be aware of the six trigger hairs—if you strike one of those twice, you are doomed. She will trap you inside her prison bars, and while you might manage to escape, most are trapped and killed.

This flower is a goddess, beautiful and vain. She is a master of seduction, no matter if the prey is god or human, all will be enticed. No one can resist her beauty and charm. Be sure, she is a cheater; she is called Venus, goddess of love.

Lost Memory
I was eight years old when I copied the painting White Trumpet Flower (1932) at one of those popular Iranian summer classes that teach you how to copy from classic masterpieces. Though I was unaware of who the artist was at the time, I was copying a painting of a flower by Georgia O’Keeffe. I find it wondrous how we collect images and how lost memories have come back to me when writing this text. O’Keeffe’s style of painting, its
lyrical abstraction, smooth lines, and use of colours, make her art hugely significant. To her annoyance, many inaccurately judge her work as depicting erotic sexuality. I want to see her as a bohemian, as a mystical and suggestive woman who stayed honest to her work. She once said: “When people read erotic symbols into my paintings they’re really talking about their own affairs.”

In religious doctrine, Venus symbolises deadly sin. She is perhaps best known for her connection to the realm of lustful fantasies. Many artists have historically used Venus as their core of creativity, her poetic force luring men to fall in love with her. Venus as a male desire—no wonder Judy Chicago didn’t invite Venus to her Dinner Party (1974–79). She may well have been the best-known mythical figure in the Middle Ages and might remain so today. The most famous depiction of Venus is possibly The Birth of Venus (1484–86) by Sandro Botticelli, which in a Neoplatonic context represents the ideal of divine love in the form of a nude Venus. The painting depicts a huge seashell bearing the nude Venus with the Graces covering her body in loose fabric, thus transforming her into a mother or a saint.

When female sexuality is equated with female power, it seems to create fear in men because they see an image of a liberated, in control, and forbidden woman. Islamic tradition holds that women distract from the truth and that their sexuality is a barrier between man and godliness. Women by their very nature cheat men and godliness. Women are a threat, and lie and provoke men. Their physical presence distorts men from seeing God, and women should therefore aspire to be invisible. Women are a threat, and by veiling them, it creates an illusion that beneath the veil is the feminine truth. This truth is about the power of feminine subjectivity. The Czech film Kladivo na čerchěnice (Witchhammer) (1970) offers an extremely stylised black-and-white picture of life under a totalitarian regime. Women are symbolised as harpy and harlot creatures and men are sinners and saints. In the film’s opening sequence, we see shots of young girls bathing overdubbed with the voice of a monk describing the demanding torments:

Through woman came sin into the world. Woman is sin. The womb of a woman is the gateway to hell. Bodily desire is the root of evil, in woman insatiable. The embrace of woman is like unto the snares of the hunter. Woman works her trickery with the devil who appears in the form of a man.

Shadow

“Life, coolly and dispassionately, reveals to each person his own reflection, as if everyone carries several masks within him. Some, the thrifty, constantly use the same mask. Naturally this mask becomes dirty and wrinkled. Others save their masks for their children, and there are still others who constantly change their masks. It is only when they begin to age that they realize they have run out of masks. It is from behind that last mask that their real faces emerge.” —Sadegh Hedayat, The Blind Owl

The human subject fascinates me. We are all individuals and we are all different. We might all have experienced the limitation of losing contact with our objectives. The identities that have been forced upon us are not real. A mirror shows you the physical material of your body, but who are you really? The moment of losing yourself is crucial. One might never find the real self. You are a formless mixture of desire and images and thoughts. Inside you might be polysexual, disordered, and ambivalent, but on the surface you might appear stable and composed. As Slavoj Žižek puts it:

But our well-formed, pruned appearance gives away no secrets or clues to the outside world. Our common everyday reality, the reality of the social universe in which we assume our usual roles of kind-hearted, decent people, turns out to be an illusion that rests on a certain ‘repression,’ on overlooking the real of our desire.

I look at myself and I look at the other like a “jailor and prisoner.” We play our given gender roles with perfection. Which one of my many selves has the power? Power excites me. I distance myself from who I really am and idealise myself with stereotypes; I have been conditioned from the time I was conceived. I survived in a society ruled by religious beliefs, even though it was intolerant of the likes of me; in some way we are all looking for freedom. Now I think: How to break out from the boundaries and limitations? If I stay with the thoughts that are familiar to me, none of this will change or have a chance to change. I am complex, as are we all, and we can’t stay in categories where we don’t feel comfortable or that have been forced upon us.

Energy transforms from one character to another, moving from one place to another. Language is forever changing, ideologies are forever changing, and reality is forever changing. In the words of Judith Butler, “We are no doubt permanent subjects of a language that holds us in its power. But we are subjects in process, ceaselessly losing our identity, destabilized by fluctuations in our relations to the other, to whom we nevertheless remain bound by a kind of homeostasis.”

Speech is only a string of words, words to fill the gap between inside and outside. Words are sounds, some are outlandish and some are violent. More often than not, language doesn’t do justice, often being insufficient in communicating the right feeling or conveying precisely enough our intentions. Art is a mysterious,
Art is liberty (in the best-case scenario), and by knowing myself I hope I understand others and brush aside convention, opening freeways. We are strangers united in a bubble of temporary transmission, for a short space of time, perhaps even achieving mutual understanding. I will allow you small signs to follow and let you make your own story through mine. I will transport you to somewhere new, a place that has no connection to your past. There you can make a new version of yourself.

In the culture in which I lived, I felt like an alien, and in the culture that I am living in now, I still have the sense of being an alien. How can I identify with myself? There is a battle raging inside me to break out of this shell. I am here, and I have the feeling of not being normal. Is this feeling an integral force in my art that generates my craving to communicate through the medium of art? Is it the trying to understand that is art, not the actual understanding?

I don’t understand you and you will not understand me either. We are from different worlds and this crushing conflict is critical. Differences compel us to too strongly judge our actions and words. The differences fabricate fear between us, and you feel insecure when I enter your world. As two strangers, we shall not dare to share our secrets and we do not speak the truth. I shall keep secrets and protect myself from you. All of us hide behind clothes and masks that we bear like shields. We perform like actors in a play, displaying the light and sweet side of our personalities, keeping control to hide our stress, our anger, and our sadness.

Art is liberty (in the best-case scenario), and by knowing myself I hope I understand others and brush aside convention, opening freeways. We are strangers united in a bubble of temporary transmission, for a short space of time, perhaps even achieving mutual understanding.

**Bizarre**

“In life we either hate or love.”

—Me, and Joel-Peter Witkin

Am I pretending to be alive, or am I already dead? Just watching from somewhere above. A heavy chest makes me wonder if they have already buried me in my grave. I have a sense of death, under a mass of chilly soil. My first thought is to wonder if they washed me well. They will scrape my tattoo with a stone until they rid my skin of its pigment. But does this matter to my soul? Assuming I have a soul. Do I care if my body is dirty or my skin is removed? This body is already sloppy and stained by cuts and lacerations.

Maybe I should have sprung for a holy shroud that would have protected my body from insects, ants, and worms. Worms, oh worms ... exiting my holes.

I reap myself in every object. I exchange power with materials; we are in a constant fight, sometimes it is rough and sometimes it is emotional. We will hug and cry, we will fight and cut. I need to beat you to forget that memory.

As a teenager my grandmother would take me to religion classes. We would be told that in hell all bad women shall be hanged from their hair and their skin will be burned off and afterwards new skin will grow back and then again the skin will roast and this will never end. I was still very young when I read a book called *Greater Sins*, outlining all the sins that will never be forgiven by God. The book contains descriptions of punishments in hell that are really disturbing and disgusting and that have remained etched in my mind.

During my teenage years, I often passed the time by digging into forbidden subjects. My memory on this point is not entirely clear—was it with the book *Greater Sins or The Blind Owl*? Regardless, it was during this time in my early teens that my obsession with the absurd and the surreal began. I enjoyed reading, and after studying the history of film at the University of Tehran, I saw and read further materials that are normally not available, which further fuelled my fascination. Now I sometimes revisit my teenage era in my work, and on occasion I go back to those books and read them again. They are still exotic, full of the supernatural, and reading them gives me a similar feeling to, for example, what I experienced when I visited the Torture Museum in Amsterdam. They excite me and at the same time frighten me. From my visit to the museum, I retain haunting images of nightmarish objects such as chairs and beds covered in nails and hanging machines intended for punishment. They inspire a weird feeling. In the book from my grandmother’s religion classes, *Greater Sins*, it explains what will happen to a Muslim woman if she falls in love with another woman. It goes almost without saying that she will end up in hell—but what a hell! She will be forced to wear dresses of fire and her vagina for all eternity will be poked and penetrated with red-hot irons. It is worth reiterating that this hell never ends.

Some nightmares make your heart beat faster and harder and, like a scary movie that can take you to the deepest darkest thoughts, some art can also raise your heartbeat. Joel-Peter Witkin creates beautiful photographs of desires, and in my opinion he is an artist who delves into the lives of people who are marginalised by society. To me he conveys a love of every single person—no matter how different or how much of an outsider they are, he loves them all. His photographs make a difference and make beauty out of what might be called ugly; he brings light to darkness and confusion.
Black Roses, 2017. Screen prints. 63 x 44 cm x 6. Installation view, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Samaneh Reyhani
Through his work, Witkin takes us into a grotesque world of disembowelment. One particular picture, Portrait of Nan from 1984,35 is a portrait that is almost identical to an image locked in my distant childhood memories from the religion lessons with my grand-mother. In the photo we see a woman with her hair twisted and nailed to the wall. She is wearing a super-imposed mask depicting an enlarged, unreal face on her own face. Many of Witkin’s pictures help me recall a slice of my forgotten memories. I try to live through my sculptures as he lives through his photographs.

He is a man of traditional means, modifying his pictures only during the printing process, through which he creates a new reality of mystery, of madness, of fetishes and taboos. He has made pictures of all times and cultures. Some of his works border on the erotic, revealing that we all have sexual reveries.

God is important in Witkin’s works, and through his photographs he searches for divine love.36 About his work, Witkin once said: “The images tended to repel and shock. Yet, I believe they possessed tender and enlightened qualities which were strangely moving:... the figures were always isolated because the Sacred is always beyond nature, beyond existence.”37 He goes on: “My work shows my journey to become a more loving, unselfish person.” His art is the way he perceives life, and if it is a sacred work, it is because he makes his work his prayers. He calls himself “a dark poet.”38

Bad Memory
I strive to be honest in making what is true to my mind, although I am not always successful. Self-censorship is a recurring problem for me. It is probably a consequence of not being free to be my true self and my habit of instinctively acting out the roles of someone else. I seem to often play the norm I perceive is expected of me, and I continually monitor myself. Primarily I am seeking approval from my family, from authorities such as school, and ultimately from society in general. Time and experience have taught me to police myself and occasionally my mind will go to extremes of self-criticism, plunging me into the depths of despair. My work becomes a projection of myself.

In these states I write no stories, because my memory will have been betrayed by nightmares and hallucinations that can result only in the retrieval of a forgotten memory—but is it real or fake, my memory serves me badly.39

It is in the unconscious condition that you will be completely enshrouded. Yet if it can collect false memories as well as real ones,40 how can one put this into a structured system? Words lose their meaning and signifier chains are broken. A memory or experience can change through a new experience; a word in a text can change the whole meaning of what has been written so far. If you can’t trust your own memory, then it comes to pass that you mistrust everything, and even question your existence.

The overarching conviction in my work is that the unconscious becomes dominant when one becomes master of materials. By way of contradiction, even if one thoroughly understands and masters the skills necessary to work, for example, stone, wood, and plastic, one will never know them as well as one knows oneself. Emotion is generated from the heart, and with time the body will learn the correct physical refinements that will eventually evolve to become skill. If the intellect is disciplined, it creates space for the unconscious to instinctively dominate form. All things running optimal to this recipe (on a good day), I see work that apparently is mine and I am genuinely surprised to discover a new secret about myself.

My work contains many elements from many cultures. I grew up in the Middle East with its traditions and culture, but I also grew up in a globalised era in which the cultures of both the West and the East have trickled into my veins. The problems, hardships, and emotions of people are universal, and what we as artists transmit is a universal language in a personal way.

“Once Love became my tutor in the art
Of fine speech, all my words became
Key postulates of debate in every coterie.”39
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Installation view from *Both Sides (Now)*, MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Selma Sjöstedt
Installation view from *Both Sides (Now)*, MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Selma Sjöstedt
A new scenography is taking shape. Four sections chosen from the large painting I originally made for a play about Edvard Munch are mounted so that the reverse side of the canvas is exposed. They were presented as 4 Nudes (2016) in the water tower in Pildammsparken. The title refers to their nakedness, as the previously hidden surface has not been overpainted. The indirect traces showing through from the back blend with marks from rough handling (like scars and bruises). The English word “nude” sums up the human body, with one short word, as naked and referring to an actual body. The title also alludes to the objectification of human bodies throughout the history of art. Mounting these canvases and presenting them as paintings has a conceptual point of departure that takes me to a listening confrontation with painting’s materials.

The oblong canvases hang between the pillars in the exhibition space of the water tower, screening off a square in the middle of the room. We are four artists, and all of us have adapted to the architecture of the building, which dominates and frames the works. The naked paintings are like camouflage in this setting: they reflect the surfaces of the room and lead the eye outwards rather than confronting the viewer. A gallery space has a different potential to bring out their painterly qualities more distinctly, or their subjectivity, if you like. Or, as art historian Isabelle Graw puts it:

By according a subject-like power to painting, Hegel laid the ground for what I would describe as the central trope around painting in the twentieth century—namely, the assumption that there is thought in painting, that painting itself is able to think. French painting theorists like Louis Martin and Hubert Damisch in particular have put forward this argument—that painting is a sort of discourse producer that arrives at its own insight. Once it is declared to be able to think it becomes subject-like.

The idea that painting has an inherent authority as declared art, and can be perceived as subject/object, is present in the contemporary discourse on painting.

When I return to my old painting and meet its reverse side, it is like letting history in through the back door. The abstract signs that seep through the canvas seem to be someone else’s doing when they appear on the stretched surface. I paint over them with other images in my mind, but it gradually becomes clear that there was already something there for me to work with, listen to, and react to. It is as though I suddenly find myself in a bigger shared field.

A quick recap: painting was a way of immersing myself in, interfering with, and lingering in the visible world. It wasn’t after all, the bottles on the table I was painting, but the impression they made. Their shapes were something I could turn around, push against, and fill in, poise on the surface. I found moments when people were watching TV, to portray them, and the illusion opened another world between us—photographs could come to life. Colours have the capacity to represent volume, and by approaching the surface and flatness, this quality materialised in a distilled form, as something magically dual.

In the same way that I had previously stood before originals for motifs and observed the world around me, translating my impression into painterly expression, I now stand before the canvas. More attention is focused on communication, with the material, the external world, which dwindles in front of me. A kind of vacuum has formed in the surface. Every side of the painting is tangible to me. In front, behind, and the body’s encounter with a predetermined format. Even if the illusion or depth is reduced, I not only seek to exist on the surface but want tension and movement between the surface and the object and that which is represented through painting. I am not entirely sure whether this is an interruption or whether it is linked with my previous paintings. A shift has taken place, from the desire to capture images of my surroundings and remember them through painting, to wanting to be surprised and to create something I did not know I wanted. Negotiating to find a viable representation/non-representation, to figure out the level at which painting is located. It is impossible to ignore that it perpetually comes down to an exploration of the medium-specific problems or possibilities that painting involves.

Peter Paul Rubens, The Descent from the Cross, 1612–14, 420 x 310 cm.
however, to remain with painting.) A painting by Rubens, a vague image connected with his name, has been at the back of my mind. Why this particular painting fascinated me as a nine-year-old I had no words to explain back then, but I do now. With hindsight, I’ve developed an idea about my recurring focus, namely the figure: an object in the motif that corresponds to the painting as an object, in this case the dead Christ who is taken down from the cross.

It was when I read the novel *Wittgenstein’s Mistress* by David Markson that I was reminded of the image in the art history book. The main character, Kate, is a painter, and she writes, “One of the things people generally admired about Rubens, even if they were not always aware of it, was the way everybody in his paintings is always touching everybody else.” When I read this, I imagined it was something about the rhythm and the physicality of painting, of touching one’s motif, that I relate to, and that is perhaps accentuated in Rubens’s compositions of human figures. And it is true, what she says. All his compositions in the book are densely populated and events are interwoven in bombastic compositions. But in *The Descent from the Cross*, I find that the close connection between the people contributes to the same narrative, in a conjoined figure that condenses the drama and the presence of weight. Jesus as dead weight. The complex figure dominates the surface. Illusion is not the carrying element; the form is, and it can take as much room as it wants, because it has a surface to exist in as volume anyway, so it is illusion, after all. Painterly volume, rather than illusion. The depth in the image is fairly shallow, only a vague lightening down to the left in the picture ventilates it so it does not suffocate. Darkness and light are taken to extremes, pushing the limits. I bring Jesus along as a symbol for the painterly figure, that is the logic I propose here. It can be a body-like thing that is defined in the surface, a gesture can form a figure; in this case, the surface itself is the “carrying figure.” Which, on the strength of that distinction, can carry further elements if needed. A thin layer of whitish glue on the raw canvas is like foundation—a smooth face to pat. The paintings I find on the reverse of the large canvas are inserted into my practice and comply with my logic (which is emotionally based but possible to translate) in a way that is somewhat surprising to me.

When I write about a figure as the focus and meeting point, this refers to how I look out at the external world. This is not a view but a crime scene. I see delimited matter with the potential to change. The weather can alter everything (the light). The physical laws imbue what is heavy with a special gravitational pull. I observe and feel empathy, like an elephant.

“Materialism demands that we understand nature in such a way that there would be no absurdity in affirming that it produced us.”

To translate one’s impressions in the attempt to understand, to allow material to have its way, to be led by a medium that pilots me through events on its own. I am divided, faced with the organising, framing, the desire to cast nets of logic over existence in order to find meaning. In the long run, the back of the hand and the bark of a tree are the same thing.

“A single screw of Flesh/Is all that pins the Soul.”

I leave the figure, for now. The existence of painting, existing through painting in the sense that it is a language that defines us. Signs (of something), and I find the same or similar signs in much of contemporary art, not least in painting. Thoughts spread at the speed of light. The effects and timbres of surfaces. A wide tonal register. By adjusting the controls, movement and depth are created—gravity is regulated. The decorative that just wants to be attractive, inject energy, and alert attention. Facades that reveal themselves and set new standards for beauty. The various phenomena interplay and make us see things, fantasies that are real, since they are bound by and dependent on the eye. On a trip to Iran, I noticed how they were building there, on the outskirts of the city. Three out of four walls in effect supported the more opulent facade (the front). And in public, women had to cover every part of their bodies except their faces. Faces that had often been transformed by surgery, epilation, and makeup. Clothes hide yet emphasise. If I take something off when I paint, I simultaneously raise shields, enveloping myself in these canvases, masking myself. This hiding and showing co-exist. In line with my logic, a face is an outward facade, but its profile is a figure, in the sense that the figure is what delimits a volume. Different kinds of painting—painting as this ambivalent relationship to a figure, a volume that is there, albeit flat. Decorating with these figures, as with brooches. Paintings are objects and facades in a greater structure. What carries them, apart from wood stretchers and walls? Ideas. Associative structures, metaphorical structures. Linguistic systems.
This is what I mean when I refer to “valid” images, actions. To know what you are leaning up against.

It is with a nod to Jacques Lacan that I compare painting to undressing. He proposes that if a bird were to paint it would be by shedding its feathers. In me, this translates into a desperate gesture of punching my hand through the window, mentally. Perhaps I feel that way because my gaze, according to Lacan, is held by desire as a perpetual lack in the field of vision, always beyond the image (object/window). In his lecture “What Is a Picture?,” he refers to a film that shows Henri Matisse painting. It is in slow motion, and Lacan points out the sense of unreality that arises when it looks like every brushstroke was made after careful deliberation. It is not, thus, a case of choosing, in the moment of painting, but of something else, that leads Lacan to the bird. This taming of the gaze in painting is a concept he argues, and to “shed its feathers” is the first act in this laying down of our gaze, which entails that we enter into something that materialises. He continues: “Let us not forget that the painter’s brushstroke is something in which a movement is terminated. We are faced here with something that gives a new and different meaning to the term regression—we are faced with the element of motive in the sense of response, in so far as it produces, behind it, its own stimulus”9. The gesture is the movement that is most closely related to painting. The gesture creates its meaning backwards in time, and its (de)limit(edness) could be said to be fulfilled in the viewer, as a form of understanding, the moment of insight.

It is related to impulses, I believe. My impulse to punch my hand through the window as a reaction to the impossibility, for lack of feathers and other materials at the moment of reading. Gesture as response, as consecutive impulses? I draw this link to Sigmund Freud in my mind. He refers to artistic creativity as sublimation, that is, impulses, reactions to desires we cannot satisfy. Thus, creativity is a form of surrogate action.9

**Two Contemporary Artistic Practices**

Alma Heikkilä graduated from the Helsinki Academy of Fine Arts in 2009 and currently works in Finland. The monumental scale of and approach to presenting her paintings intriguingly expands the impact and effect of painting.

Heikkilä’s exhibition: *Cohesion, hydrocarbons, aspen, search engine, language and the others: Things that are massively distributed in time and space.*10

Large walls installed along the middle of the gallery space. The illusion is not of windows looking into other rooms; the reverse side is exposed, and the effect of the surface is highlighted. The way the works are hung instructs the viewer to stand close. This is a shallow optical illusion, which seeks to be physical in a mysterious way, accentuating surfaces in our surroundings that we would otherwise ignore. She finds surfaces that live. And she finds screens with information that she equates with surfaces in nature. The surface of the skin is a recurring motif in her exhibitions, a correspondence with the body that is easy to relate to. She sheds a lot of colour, and some of it lands outside. On the floor in front of the wall-like canvases lie clots of paint that resemble fungi.

I find the same mystique of surface in the work of Yelena Popova, a Russian artist now working in Nottingham who took a master’s degree in painting at the Royal College of Art in London in 2011, after studying set design and construction at the Moscow Art Theatre School. Her road from set design to fine arts is intriguing. Her images are on the verge of dissolving; at first glance they resemble my “naked paintings,” but they are more distinctly intentional in their abstract designs. Some of the smaller canvases have non-square frames. Again, the paintings spill over their frames. Lines in the motifs recur in the wood shapes that connect the canvases in large installations on the wall. She has said, “I’m not interested in making single objects, but in creating a complex network of facts, fictions, emotions, gestures, materials and images, which could relate to the world outside it.”11

These artists inform my practice. Seeing paintings as elements in a linguistic system is an idea I circulate in this text.

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Self-development—spreading oneself.

To think, through the material, on a different plane. All the words and sentences I hear create thoughts that support me, making up the world in my mind. Seeing is thinking. Reflection relies on the gaze, and language has form.

The painting is a link to reality, outside the head, feeling a presence of something real that I cannot fully comprehend. (Jutta Koether describes painting as a quasi-sexual, quasi-religious activity.)

Instead of breaking down and (psycho-)analysing, I can add, expand language and being, with new images. What makes these images valid? The action itself, the practice, makes them valid. Could it be that when I find something I recognise, I have made contact with the external?

Inside/outside

The body’s relationship in the execution, giving the experience a resonance of intensified time. Ideas that have materialised. The boundaries are where colours meet. Ideas, abstract with symbolic value. Fluid materiality
meets ideas and solidifies. Controlling chaos, deciding what is allowed to exist. Claiming space among the others. The role of architecture in that encounter.

Volumes and figures arise that are possible to reflect on because they have only one side; the perspective cannot vary. They are protected in their dimension. A painting from the side = a line.

The body that takes aim, and if anything is problematic it is how meaning should be conveyed. I find it in the doing and the attempts at repetition. Self-development is language development. The stories we tell about ourselves, to ourselves, we give and take and borrow words from each other. Exposed in every expression by all that remains unsaid.

Fusion before clarity. Holding together within boundaries. Different weather conditions succeed each other in the mind. Meeting today’s fog with cigarette smoke on the balcony.

To be present demands energy because the colours are so inert. Inertia as a temporal aspect, reflected in everyday life; the continuity is, after all, in the mind rather than in the body. Does tiredness actually have a voice? I float up to the surface and lie there bobbing a while.

Need to get under the surface, where the beautiful, the weird, is hidden. I need to defy the weather. Need to move, but in what direction? Looking for a path under the asphalt. Need something new ... in dialogue. This is to forget, but also to become high on possibilities. It can’t be this dull all the time. The circumstances touch me, but can I also touch them? Try to remember the future.

Figures of thought. Even here there is movement. They materialise and dissolve. Found an approach for myself, the world was split in two and our thoughts floated around on the same level, blending in the airy parts of the indestructible matter. Tranquility behind the eyes in community. This was an experience, not an idea.

Figures in matter. Metamorphoses from chaos into transient form and back. The figure as an encounter with the others. It happens that I think I have cloned myself, but I’m only there in my mind. I search for my Self and find many others.

The desire to be where it is happening. It is not happening in the writing just now.

Self-consciousness comes as a demand. I can turn that inside-out as well. The demand to be fine is associated with community. Community in a contemporary discourse, so as not to be lonely and sad. Like all practices are always collective, aware of where I am with whom.

Refer to yourself as part of a practice, the painting refers to itself (as a painting), for sure.

Like voices when they howl, groove. Was abstract painting really invented in the early twentieth century?

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Mark Making

Painting can be summed up as that. Within the frame, on the surface, marks are made. The frame: a boundary pointing to the middle, see here, pointing in many directions. Performative painting, which requires preparations, temporal dimensions. Different ways of applying paint create effects and also incorporate time as part of the medium. Two seconds, one gesture. (How long before the spray can, which had been jammed, was emptied of paint and gas.) Medium gas, without contact with the canvas. We can trace the arm’s movements in front of the surface. Or, like Fredrik Værslev, who, with his series Nobody’s Chant (2015), has erased the hand’s gesture and extended his repertoire by using a kind of wagon as a tool for making marks. Another kind of gesture, but nevertheless with a performative approach to painting. The size of these paintings is crucial to supporting the execution, which appears as “interfering with the visible world.” The difference between seeing and painting has to do with empathy. They approach each other on that level. These paintings are like dance routines. His method problematises painting as a craft, by transferring the action to an external instrument, a form of indirect action. It is a distancing, but not the retreat from production in real time that Wade Guyton effected with his Black Paintings (2007–08) (laser prints). Here, the gesture is almost entirely moved to a mental plane. Or at least to a digital, immaterial plane, where the work of art instead problematises the transfer of information in a more comprehensive way. The actual exposure of these paintings is a gesture that adheres to Lacan’s definition of the gesture as a movement that is terminated, or completed, in the viewer. An idea is materialised, art is produced, the artistic practice is shaped, through halting movements.

Isabelle Graw asks herself: “So, how to define painting once it has merged with other procedures—from the readymade and linguistic propositions to the insight of institutional critique? How to determine a practice that renders impossible the rigorous distinction between what is intrinsic and what is extrinsic?” A great deal has happened since Rubens. Painting as a craft becomes fine art, and the perimeters of the medium are challenged. I came to art through painting, and I still say I paint, but it is not entirely obvious what I mean by that. Therefore, it is interesting to me to read what Graw has to say on the subject. Here is her answer: “I want to propose that we conceive of painting not as a medium, but as a production of signs that is experienced as highly personalised. By focusing on painting’s specific indexicality, we will be able to grasp one of its main characteristics: it is able to
Untitled, 2017. Oil and spray paint on primed linen canvas. 200 x 140 cm. Selma Sjöstedt
Untitled, 2016. Oil, spray paint, hide glue and pigments on cotton canvas. 200 x 140 cm. Selma Sjöstedt
*Untitled*, 2016. Hide glue, pigments, crayons, oil, wood glue and various traces from outside (dirt) on cotton canvas. 200 x 140 cm. Selma Sjöstedt
suggest a strong bond between the product and the (absent) person of its maker.\textsuperscript{15}

Graw identifies this \textit{mark making}, as exemplified above, as the fundamental quality and definition of painting. And she also includes Guyton’s practice: “the more negation there is of handwriting, the more this negation will be considered to be the handwriting of the artist,” she writes.\textsuperscript{16} Even if this is perceived as recognition for a painter, and I can agree with much of her text, I nevertheless find it rather unproductive. And she also irritatingly links the artist-subject to art’s value, when she argues for painting’s superior capacity to represent its creator. Is such a definition of painting really necessary, on top of its long history?

It is more exciting, instead, to develop the concept of medium, as Rosalind Krauss does in her book \textit{Under Blue Cup}. She revives the concept with a logic that differentiates between medium and matter. (Painting is no longer secured as a medium in a specific material.) Her reasoning leaves room for the artist to invent new media and create structures in which subject and object are merely positions in a larger complex of relationships. As a consequence, more significance is attributed to the materials in the creative process. She writes:

But what if a medium were not its material support—oil on canvas, tempera on wooden panel, pigment on wet plaster—the materials worked by

\textit{Untitled (4 nudes), 2016. Oil, wood glue and various traces from outside (dirt) on cotton canvas. 244 x 122 cm x 4. Selma Sjöstedt}
the guilds? What if it were the very foundation of representation, the way painting’s chessboard supports the actors on its stage? What if it were a logic rather than a form of matter?

Structural linguistics discovers meaning as the sum of two opposing terms, which it calls binaries and Roland Barthes renames “paradigm.” The opposition of male to female could be said to generate the paradigm of /gender/; while the opposition of front to back projects the paradigm of /depth/, and high versus low gives us /verticality/.

Since the paradigm is a logical support, it can substitute itself for physical substance in founding the rules of a medium. Constituting a unified field, the medium’s paradigm might be considered the foundation of all the possible variations open to a physical substance—pigment supported in turn by canvas, wooden panel, leaded glass, or plastered wall.17

I recall when I began to find terms for phenomena in painting during my foundation courses in art. Some of the magic seemed to evaporate as my awareness grew. But even if that may seem problematic, there is no return. They retain their mystery, those secret moments when something is created, syntheses. Fundamentally analogous with life. Self-development = language development. I sometimes try to forget everything, so new things can be created out of oblivion. And I try to remember, gather experience. This is a driving pendulum. Language development = self-development.

Notes
With the following quotes, I would like to hand over language to three inspiring artists, and, for now, to summarise the significance/insignificance of the artist-subject.

Jutta Koether: “It was important for me to take care that the painting must never play the role of a self-contained and self-sufficient subject, that its status as subject remains forever embattled. … More like a subject that is truly open, that must always be continued afresh. In analogy with the artist-subject, which must likewise not be closed and is exposed to the power of certain social conditions. Of course the picture is not in this sense I. But it relates very closely to the artist-subject, and is ultimately also an image of that subject, among other things. Yet not in the sense of a singular, let alone perfectly self-contained person that has these specific qualities, but rather as a plural being that is entangled in all sorts of things.”18

Amy Sillman: “Many artists—not least of them women and queers—are currently recomposing the terrain of gestural, messy, physical, chromatic, embodied, handmade practices. I would argue that this is because AbEx already had something to do with the politics of the body, and that it was all the more tempting once it seemed to have been shut down by its own rhetoric, rendered mythical straight and male in quotation marks.”19

Maria Lassnig: “The problem of ‘female beauty or not’ or ‘making female art’ or male art has never been an issue for me, nor have I been tempted to make an issue of it; accordingly, I’ve never dealt with ‘issues’ at all, because it’s intentional.”20

On the Border
I am in a borderland, with the random marks generated by rough handling of the canvas mixed with the marks I made on the reverse. Thus, I stand in the conceptual, the method and idea behind how these surfaces arose, as I integrate my non-ideas, the physical impulses and reactions I have with the material. Painting as a concept provides me with a foundation on which to stand, but it has to be reinvented every time. The canvas as a readymade and the paint materials I use are what support my work and enable me to shift between the more or less defined shapes in my paintings.

Much has retreated to the back, and a far more abstract image world arises than any I have previously been in. I am situated on the border to nothing. Yelena Popova explores abstraction and disappearing images in her paintings. She refers to one of her suites as The Evaporating Series (2014). The larger surfaces have a kind of curly, geometric figure (touchscreen gestures) in very translucent colours. Her smaller paintings often have round shapes. When the figure hides in the illusion of the surface, the frame gives it a profile. This cautious game is an examination that is relevant to my latest works.

The materials I apply stand in contrast to one another and form a mental space to figure out. The smell of hide glue evokes museums, while the spray paint gives off the scent of industry. In the contradiction between forgetting and remembering, the present time, now, arises. Nerves run between the immaterial and the matter. (The immaterial beauty of music.) I want to forget my body and I am drawn to the darkness where it is easier to be lost in reverie. The eyes are easily blinded by all the impressions. But if you want to focus, keep your balance, it helps to have something to gaze at. In daylight, the eyes are busy with the infinite continuity. It is not the painting’s intention, however, that you should focus on it, but to follow how it dreams, and then you understand that painting is associated with time. The surfaces that have been marked externally have a temporal dimension that I interfere with.

Taking in something external. Leaving the paintings outside in the weather.
Graffiti: site-specific paintings. Mark making, signatures in the city, along the road.

What happens in the move to the art field? A smaller audience, potentially. A different audience (discussion), most certainly.

What they share is the desire to make marks. The risks are slightly different. (The adventure.)

If you want to move your paintings out into the city, can they survive the scattering that will be inflicted upon them? Not the paintings I have standing in my studio now, however; they rely on their context. (The water tower’s exhibition space overpowered them as paintings.) They approach dissolution in the motif, and need space; despite their dimensions, they are not particularly loud. They are like small walls—“object” is almost the wrong word, due to their scale, which looms over the viewer. Monuments (over us?) with no definite place. They need the sprawl that the surface claims, like part of the outside brought in to be viewed and discussed. I am thoughtful with these canvases, to maintain the dialogue.

“Now consider the example of a signature stamped on a coin which determines its value. In this case, too, the signature has no substantial relation with the small circular metal object that we hold in our hands. It adds no real properties to it at all. Yet once again, the signature decisively changes our relation to the object as well as its function in society. Just as the signature, without altering in any way the materiality of Titian’s painting inscribes it in the complex network of relations of ‘authority,’ here it transforms a piece of metal into a coin, producing it as money.”

I’m thinking that painting serves as that kind of signature in art production. Traditional materials inscribe the object in a practice, with many preconceived notions, expectations on authority and authenticity. Using the traditional forms and materials of painting to enter into a field where one’s existence is justified, and to use this as a vehicle for all manner of impulses. (Freud calls this sublimation.) Metamorphoses, the transformative quality of painting.

I desist, a great deal, faced with that which the reverse side of the canvas gives me. Mostly I look, search. For I also want to be included there, and intuitively I find ways of integrating my gestures with the surface. But not much is needed for the image to be filled; that can be a quality in itself, but I also allow it to spill over onto new canvases. I have a primed canvas that is less absorbent than the cotton canvas. This clean, white surface holds the paint in a different way. The figure appears more distinctly, along with the effect of the colours. The found images inspire new ones on the blank surface. I find impossible objects in my imagination, which almost materialise as they are painted; they exist in a borderland. The factory-primed canvas is given a new status alongside the other, more vibrant canvas. The materials communicate—the paintings come with different terms and present their contents in specific ways. Communication takes place on several levels in painting, and this becomes clear when the materials bring their history into the discussion.

André Leroi-Gourhan writes about the development of the human capacity for expression through symbols. More precisely, material symbols, figurative art and writing, and their shared history. He refers to two fundamental functional pairs in anthropoids (human-like creatures) in general. These pairs are “hand–tools” and “face–language.” In these relationships, motor function determines how thoughts take shape, either as instruments or sounds. And he stresses the distinction that arose with the birth of graphic signs, when a new relationship was established between the two components of these function pairs: the ability to symbolise something on a mental level is the fundamental nature of this relationship. And this mental capacity is exclusively human. (The use of tools and the early stages of language development are also found in animals.) He sets up two new function pairs: “hand–graphic sign” and “face–reading.” The gaze or vision is predominant in these relationships, and Leroi-Gourhan concludes that technical and linguistic expression in anthropoids is generally determined by motor function, while graphic signs require reflection.

The graphic signs that appear on the screen are linked and form sentences—preprogrammed into the computer and in our capacity to reflect. Jumbling the order and mixing expressions require reflection in varying degrees. Some things we rarely reflect on, and luckily we occasionally act with autopilot switched on. Intuition helps us skip certain stages.

I go down to the harbour again. As always, the atmosphere is a bit eerie, but I want to feel at home in the peacefulness there and try to read the environment. Twilight and calm—deep-green water, deep-orange quayside. I get the urge to jump in, see more. And it would have been possible to do, and yet impossible to achieve—to come closer to that idea. Intuition aimed in the wrong direction, impossible intuitions are like bad communication. Figures of thought that grow without any intention. Could I trigger a course of events without intention, communicate without recipient? (Miscommunication is ongoing.) Intention is interesting and difficult. In the middle of doing, I occasionally stop and discover that my intention has taken me somewhere new. As mentioned, we don’t always have time to reflect on things until afterwards, but to find new roads, to challenge communication, I need to trick myself into embarking on something impossible. Reflection also reads between the lines, follows the marks. The colour red is a shortcut to the interior of the body, and text gives context to thought.
Edvard!, directed by Anders Nilsson, set designs by Katja Ebbel Frederiksen, 2013. During my first year at the Oslo National Academy of the Arts, I was asked to paint pictures to be used as props in a play about Edvard Munch, on the occasion of his hundred and fiftieth birthday. I had fairly free reign, as long as I included certain themes from Munch’s oeuvre, to assist the narrative. This developed into the stage designer basing her entire set design on my canvases; in addition to ten or so paintings inspired by Munch, I painted the fifty-metre canvas in front of which the play was performed. The painting was rolled up, and the Munch-esque landscapes and settings were unravelled and spread over the stage floor of Hydrogenfabrikken, in Fredrikstad, Norway, as the drama progressed.


This painting is located in the Cathedral of Our Lady, Antwerp, Belgium.

David Markson, Wittgenstein’s Mistress (Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive, 2015), 102.


In October 2016, a group of Swedes, including myself, travelled to the city of Kashan, south of Tehran, where we spent our days at the stone factory working with various kinds of limestone, marble, and other rocks. Sculpting with an angle grinder and hatchet was new to me. The Iranian students who accompanied us during these two weeks of working had an impressive knowledge of materials and craftsmanship.


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Further References


If you were to stand in the Canadian Arctic, near the coast that borders the Bering Strait, you would see how understandable landscape can become indeterminate space. When land and air are equally white, it can be impossible to see where they meet. The ground is very bare. If there is no horizon line and no objects that recede in size in relation to it, there are no coordinates. The description slips to one of a blank page: no figures on the ground, no relationships across space. But of course you’d be aware (probably acutely so) of the depth of this empty whiteness, you’d just not be able to navigate it.

The American anthropologist Edmund Carpenter spent several years in this environment in the early 1950s, living with the area’s indigenous population, the Aivilik.1 He describes how they understood space not by interpreting what is at a distance, but what presses close: the rushing violent particles of snow and air that meet skin and eardrum. Aivilik children learned to interpret the relationships between invisible signs: the creak of pack ice in one direction, the force of the wind ruffling the fur of their hood or threatening the wall of a tent in another. They also learned how to describe these webs of relation. Carpenter alludes to the Inuit language’s intricate system of describing position and spatial relationships,2 reporting that “the importance we lavish on time, Eskimo accord to space.”3 Of course, it is impossible to guess at translations for words to describe concepts I do not possess. However, the importance of being able to accurately communicate the relative position of a glacier, a wind, a field of thin ice, and a migrating herd of caribou without recourse to diagrams or maps is clear, and the idea of a system of language that allows this is exciting. Other behavioural consequences of the Aivilik’s profound understanding of their environment are similarly confusingly brilliant. Carpenter describes the way in which hunters, whose lives were particularly treacherous, would brilliantly, joyfully (and apparently somehow accurately) imitate what they had reason to fear, things like icebergs and the wind.4 They knew themselves to be vulnerably embedded in a continuity of violent, indifferent matter. They also knew they had to be observantly, un arrogantly embedded to keep safe in this physical reality that would dissolve, freeze, and seem to disappear. Materials are controlled by the forces that move in space, which is neither passive nor empty. For many of us, while that idea is obviously true, it can seem of little immediate importance and can go unconsidered without consequence. For the Aivilik, being intimately familiar with this notion had real practical advantages. Many of them had what Carpenter calls incredible “mechanical aptitude.” Despite having access to only the simplest of hand tools, they undertook remarkably complicated repairs and alterations to the workings of the snow mobiles, generators, and boats they relied upon. Their intuitive skill depended, Carpenter believed, on the Aivilik’s unique conception of space, not “as static enclosure such as a room with sides and boundaries, but as direction, in operation.”5 I find this a very useful idea to remember while working in my studio. It is as relevant to my sculptures as it was to their engines.

I have discussed these Aivilik ideas in the past tense. Carpenter made his observations in the 1950s, recording the ways in which Aivilik life had begun to change. Far more recent sources suggest many fundamental principles remain,6 while others are regarded as fading traditions. But as I learned about the self-contained world Carpenter presents, I saw how it is possible for a person’s experience of space to affect their conception of self and the way they make things.
Perhaps if I could think more like an Aivilik mechanic, I could give realistic size and animation to the little flocks of arrows of force that arrive on my drawings when I’m trying to work out the directions in operation in the material of my undependably boundaried objects.

Soon after I moved to Malmö, I began to draw the night sky, turning off the lights in my new empty studio so the glow of the colours outside was visible. I drew to imagine the directions of the energetic particles of air and snow operating among the vast space, which I saw as calm and still.

After arriving at Malmö Art Academy, I’d begun to fear that my ability to think and make had evaporated. Whereas the Aivilik’s awareness of their physical vulnerability made them attentive to their surroundings, my own sense of exposure turned me inward. I could quieten the noise of fear inside by trying to see what was outside as accurately as possible. I was also trying to find visual evidence of something that could not be seen: a model of how the matter of “objects” (from the sky to my pastels) is arranged. Wahdat al-wujūd is a Sufi concept that can be translated as “unity of being.” It says that all things are part of an endless continuum that is the unfolding reflection of Being, or God. Ibn ‘Arabi was a twelfth-century Islamic philosopher whose ideas shaped Sufi thought. He said created things, or barzakh, “continuously change from form to form, constantly and forever. And imagination is nothing but this. ... So the cosmos only became manifest within imagination. ...It is it, and it is not it.” A thing is, surely? It is made of a material, has limits, and can be recognised and named. But Ibn ‘Arabi’s follower, Al Quwami, used the metaphor of water being made of indivisible droplets to remind his readers that such distinctions are made by the human eye and mind. He says a way of understanding barzakh is that “their multiplicity is annihilated in the oneness of the Real, and means understanding what is detailed within the whole, like an expert scientist contemplating within a single acorn all the branches, leaves and fruit that lie in potential within it.” As I drew, I tried to consider separation and fixity as ideas, misunderstandings of self-imposed isolation.

“Oneness” is an ancient idea that many today have sought out and become attached to. In a world of ever-increasing information, exponentially rebounding opinion, and endless purported individual choice that can be experienced as isolation-inducing bewilderment, people search for companionable wisdom wherever they can find it. And they can find it everywhere. You can follow a link, like an image, and bookmark an idea from the twelfth century or the Bering Strait as easily as from now and from Malmö.

The coordinates of belief and philosophy that people use to orientate themselves towards the world have never been so peculiarly diverse, as the internet’s mysterious logarithms of suggestion guide solitary searching for understanding distilled from hundreds of years of shared experience and direct communication.

The sky seemed far behind the window-pane, and the air in front of it went unnoticed. Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests how peculiar and preoccupying it would be to consider space as a thing. He states: “If we set ourselves to see as things the intervals between them, the appearance of the world would be just as strikingly altered as is that of the moment when I pick out ‘the rabbit’ or ‘the hunter’. There would not simply be the same elements differently associated, the same text charged with a different sense, but in truth another world.”

I have a dear relative, a Sufi of sorts. We lived at opposite ends of London. While waiting for the underground train that would take me home after discussing the concept of wajjud with her, it would sometimes fall from philosophy to mind game, as I’d imagine continuity between myself and any mouse that skittered down the tracks. The Aivilik’s attuned reliance on hearing and touch to navigate their treacherous environment, where matter changes from snow to ice to water unpredictably, might make such an idea seem less abstract, and more intuitively known.

As my first term at the Academy went by, I turned my attention from the night sky to the cemetery that my fourth-floor studio overlooked, sitting with my chair on top of my desk to get a steeply oblique view. Obeying the perspective of vision, the rectangular grave plots were front-heavy rhombuses in front of my eyes, becoming increasingly slim and slanting parallelograms at the periphery of my vision. I plotted the shapes onto paper, noticing the pattern my gaze had made of reality. The British art historian John White once said, “Every man is the centre of his own universe that recedes away from him in all directions and undergoes continuously altering distortions as he scans it.” Every object of this universe is seen across an interval: a slither of the transparent void, made temporarily significant by our interest in the object

Before the Renaissance, people thought this void stopped at the outermost celestial sphere and surrounded a world that sat, watched over by God, in the middle of the cosmos. The German art historian Erwin Panofsky describes how the new and thrilling concept of infinity meant this cosmos “outgrew divine omnipotence.” Artificial linear Florentine perspective was a timely invention of the Renaissance that allowed man to map ungoverned and endlessly receding space. It allowed things to be plotted into logical points in space, according to where they were in relation to the person looking at them. For paintings made according to Florentine perspective to “work,” the viewer must place themselves at the point where the painting’s converging lines would meet. You must be pivotal, distant, and still. Pivotal, but also positioned, by your own inclination to make sense of illusory space.

Edmund Carpenter provided a morose analysis of how the Aivilik children’s conception of themselves as part of an unfolding unity of their time and place changed when they encountered this geometric system of making relations that come back to you. He wrote:

Behind the altar in the Catholic mission is a religious painting with three-dimensional perspective which depicts a single moment in time and can be accurately seen only from the single position of the kneeling worshipper. As far as I know, this represents the first contact the Aivilik had with a composition done in linear perspective. It introduced the artistic counterpart of the modern notion of individualism, every element being now related to the unique point of view of the individual in the given moment.

Then came a teacher who instructed the children in drawing according to perspective. Carpenter notes their enthusiastic adoption of the system, unenthusiastically: “They freeze the living, fluctuating wealth of the visual field into a static geometric system, eliminating the time-element always present in the experiencing of space.”

His judgment is frustrating: the abrupt sensory shift those children experienced must be unique, but Carpenter only speaks of the children in condescendingly disappointed tones. I cannot find anything in his manuscripts or other literature that explains in greater depth how senses and minds were reconfigured towards the unreliable horizon, as the children sat learning perspective drawing in a new schoolroom, surrounded by a landscape they knew by skin and ear as much as by eye. Their families had trained their senses to prepare them for being vulnerable irrelevancies to forces stronger than themselves, through being in these forces. Then, suddenly, the children were exposed to a visual model that taught a new way to relate: through separation from matter and individualism. That must have been very strange. It may have led to conflict, both between generations and within the identity of the child. Carpenter talks about their drawings and heady adoption of “Western” concepts and technologies, but doesn’t ask them how it felt to do simple things like stand in the snow, or even to stand in the snow drawing what they saw. I don’t know what questions Carpenter could have asked them to find that out. Children tend to have great ambitions to make their drawings look real. Perhaps: What’s the realest way to know where you are? Ears and skin? Eyes and lines?

They probably wouldn’t have been able to answer. Perception is unconscious. A constant flow of comprehension happens, allowed by the continuous making of relations between body and senses.
and objects. Apparently instantly, the varied matter that completely fills the visual field is constituted into discrete, named things.

In the summer of 2016, I had four hundred papier mâché bricks to make. As I worked, I listened to thirty-one lectures about Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, given by the philosopher Hubert Dreyfus at the University of California, Berkeley.¹⁷ I wanted to better understand how I (and of course millions of other people) perceive. It is not with the tactile wisdom of the Aivilik or the stilled separation of Florentine perspective. The difference between that incredibly familiar and apparently realistic model of vision, and vision itself, is articulated by Panofsky. He writes that Florentine perspective is a "systematic abstraction from the structure of psychophysiological space,"¹⁸ which is determined by our constant movement and "the cooperation of vision with the tactile sense."¹⁹ I thought Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology would illuminate how my own "psychophysiological space" fits me into the physical world when I'm busy with materials.

I worked and listened, noting down ideas with perplexing consequences that question the dichotomy between physical and mental understanding, signs and actuality, subject and world. But the distinctions do not feel problematic. The gaze constantly reinforces the authoritative separation between "me" and "thing," even when there is no physical interval, and bodily responses are made constantly but without need for clear verbal thought. The thing has been constituted and its name can be instantly thought, even when the hands are busy with the thing as it is. An amorphous-still-warm-clod-of-pale-sodden-mush-with-lumps-that-are-colder-and-harder-than-the-rest, whose nature can only be understood by touch. Merleau-Ponty states:

> A thing can never be separated from someone who perceives it, nor can it ever be in itself, because its articulations are the very ones of our existence, because it is posited at the end of a gaze or at the conclusion of a sensory exploration that invests it with humanity.²⁰

But perception's authority is not completely consistent. Sometimes there are short intervals when a thing's identity is impossible to determine. These moments betray what our apparently instantaneous sight usually gives us no time to believe: that perception is a process that we have to do to make what is already there into something we live with, understanding it as reality. Merleau-Ponty describes walking along a sand dune and seeing the funnels and masts of a ship that had run aground in front of the forest that bordered the beach. After a second or two, these wooden verticals became part of the ship, which suddenly appeared. Until then, there was no form he could define. Rather, he "merely felt that the look of the object was imminent in this tension, as a storm is imminent in storm clouds."²¹ (This is a useful metaphor for a half-made thing. There are storms inside storm clouds all over the Academy, I'm sure. I feel the tension of the one I can see as I sit at my desk.)

Very occasionally, we are in a space with no objects to constitute and no horizon line. It can happen when swimming in the sea when the air is misty or when a power cut makes darkness so dense that you can't see your hand in front of your face. Opening your eyes as you swim underwater unthrones the gaze completely. Not only is there no object, there isn't even an interval, and particles hit the eyeball unorganised.

Months ago, I tried to determine the character of sight-with-no-object. First I stood close to walls. Then I stood in the dark, hoping not to adjust. I found this induces a feeling of being held suspended in the present, stuck with what is immediate. This induces a sensation that I think is worth considering but find hard to name, because words all seem too grand or too clumsy for it.

I decided to find the edges of my field of vision, so I could make a thing to fill it. I don't know if this thing will be clumsy or grand. I hope it contains some sense of suspension.

I went to the sea to make a drawing of something that would fill my field of vision. However, the field is very wide, and, sitting on the beach, I could see people walking their dogs in the corners of my eyes. I had to perch on the end of the rock farthest out into the sea I could reach, hunch forward, and rest my drawing board against the bridge of my nose, at eye level. That is where the interval begins.

My empty paper can be thought of as a solid white bit of interval. There is an ancient understanding that white surface has the potential to be turned into a two-dimensional metaphor for deep space when figures are put on it and it becomes a ground. Until then, it can just be the space that it fills. Robert Ryman said he made his painting *Pace* (1984) to consider what a painting could be if it was not a picture, if its surface stayed a surface and did not become ground.²² *Pace* is 66 cm wide and 66 cm deep. It is a fibreglass panel, held horizontally at eye level. It is attached to the wall on one side, with a long slender aluminium rod running from each of the front corners to the floor. Its top surface is painted with a hard, shiny, light-reflecting enamel, while underneath it is matte and light absorbing.

I have not seen *Pace*, only imagined it. It is impossible to know how the difference in light quality above and below would be understood by the eye. I can't think of another object you look at like this, flicking your eyes over and under, over and under. I try it, stretching my hand out in front of my nose and moving my gaze from the top to the palm. It's strange
and tiring for the eyes. The gaze goes down the nose, and it’s hard not to tilt the head or frown. This is not a solid interval of neutral potential, like my piece of paper. It manipulates the viewer’s looking. It is the attention-seeking opposite of what an interval is.

But it reminds me to notice empty space. This pale solid surface is the outcome of Ryman’s intention and attention. Absorbing human effort has been put into a space that, I am somewhere convinced, I should have been paying attention to anyway, because it is important anyway. This conviction feels opaque to me, and it spends more time forgotten than remembered. However, it seems to have shaped this text, because I remember it when I am thinking about sculpture, which fills the untouched with handled material.

Like the white landscape of the Bering Strait, Pace is simple enough to be considered as an idea. After I drew the sea, I imagined Ryman’s panel spreading over the sea like the Kálbadhús, big enough to fill the peripheral vision. This would be an absurd stand-in (or stand-over) for the sea itself: one reflective subtle surface covering another. This one would be more conveniently placed at proper eye level, so there would be no need to perch precariously on tide-threatened rocks. Perhaps it would allow for a similar consideration of what is immediate: what, in time and space, is in front of our noses.

In the Koran, there is a story where Solomon has a glass platform constructed and invites a queen he has met to walk onto it. She is deceived by its appearance, and as she approaches it, she lifts up her skirts, thinking it a body of water. The story is an allegory of the uncertain moral virtue of art: the glass platform was beautiful, but it was also deceptive, appearing to be both what it was and what it was not. Ryman worked among the minimalists in 1970s New York, who also distrusted the illusory image. He did not use paint to depict or mimic, but to see how the materials would be clear and engaging. And, surely, a glass platform could never really look exactly like water. I like to test this balance between imaginable mimicry and material reality.

I find it useful to attach ideas that preoccupy me, like these conceptions of space, to images I know very well and that seem to contain the same information. These two-dimensional images contain symbols that have material equivalents, which I can seek out and make use of.

For a long time I’ve had a small red book called *Spanish Frescoes of the Romanesque Period.* In it there’s a foldout page showing a painting from the thirteenth century. It depicts *The Last Supper.* Five men stand behind a white tablecloth, which is shown in flattened, frontal perspective. It is set with plates and bowls and goblets. It, and the men, hang in mid-air, surrounded by large stars. There is a stilted reality in the animation of the men’s varied gestures and the slim oblique ovals of the bowls’ rims.

The colours are simple. The robes and bowls are either blue or red or yellow, and the sky is blue. Everything else is a grubby white base colour: the stars, feet, hands, cloth, and the plates on the table.

The material reality of Lili Dujourie’s lead sculptures defines their identity. They look quite like real things, but it is not how they look that is most important.

I saw the works in a book. They were photographed while installed together in a simple elegant gallery with large open doorways. In one room, two short, horizontal wooden poles are held away from the wall by metal brackets. Over each one hangs a folded sheet of lead, similar in size to a large towel. The folds are kimono neat, and the surface of the lead looks immaculate. Three more hanging sheets recede away in the next room. Another photograph shows a low rectangle, like a very minimal bed, made up with neatly folded sheets of lead. Then there is something like an altar table with the heaviest possible tablecloth as well as a large lead cube with gently flared sides.

All of these are made of lead. They are cold, still, dense, and heavy. Looking at the photograph of the hung sheets, I can imagine running my fingers down a smooth and malleable edge, knowing that in the next room there is the same meeting of densities, where between the folds, transparent and energetic particles are surrounded by dense grey ones. The cavities of the large cube-like forms hold air, and the folds form channels for it. Perhaps the lead would muffle and dampen whatever noise the air might have, so the sculptures become concentrations of real silence, surrounded by air carrying the normal scuffles and coughs and sirens. Or you could think they have some sort of very low, quiet sound, which could only just be heard, but which seems to be coming from the various directions of the sculptures. Either way, I realise that an object’s capacity for sound or resonance or silence can be an important part of its identity.

The way I respond primarily to the weight and coldness and quietness of these things makes it easier to understand that objects relate to each other. There is cold quietness hanging there, and in that room and that room. These relationships remain intact whether or not the sculptures are being looked at, trapped at the end of an interval that ties them only to the subject. The Aivilik’s language apparently gave them a way to think accurately about the spaces between things, not only between themselves and things. These lead things are contained concentrations of qualities, spread about in rooms. That is true of all objects in all rooms. It is just that these relationships are harder to notice when the qualities are more everyday and less exceptionally sombre.
Here, white is not interval but matter, temporarily bound in objects of different material and position. The plates are white too, but they make no illusion of being the size or material of plates. They are circles. They are of the absolutely flat plane of the book’s page, not the steeply tilted one of the tablecloth (on which they do not sit). The disjuncture between these direct symbols and the lively dinner scene means the painting has a very strange mood: cheerful and austere, immediate and imaginary.

The circles are about a centimetre across, roughly the size of an iris. Their outline is a very even printed line, of a similar weight and width as the graduation marks on a ruler. In this way, the circles can be thought of as units of space, a circular centimetre, which could be held up between finger and thumb. Solid grubby whiteness could become transparent, like a clear ruler. The circle could be peered through to make you aware of the usually so forgettable truth that the bit of matter behind—regardless of whether it is foot or cloth or star—is part of a continuum of matter in time and space. It might even give a sensory experience to instil something of the Sufi conviction that apparently distinct substances are actually the unendingly unfolding matter of God, as it is experienced by human beings. The invention of this little imaginary tool is one way to use the picture. Another way is to steal the circles and consider their potential. In writing this text, I’ve come to realise how my work is driven by lyrical imaginings and anecdotal interpretation of appropriated wisdom that I can’t prove or be sure of. These can seem childish and wild and preposterously profound. It is useful to make things, because realised objects do not propose theories, or prove points. Materials do not allow you to simply decide and execute a meaning. Virgil wrote, “There are tears in things.” When you lose something at the bottom of your bag, you sometimes say “It’s in there somewhere.” I think Virgil’s sentence is beautiful because it suggests a similar possibility for an idea or emotion to be inside an object in the same unreachable, frustrating, disorganised way.

When you make an object that mimics several things at once, the associations of the objects it mimics get combined and submerged in ways that are impossible to organise or predict. I tried to make an object that would be a map and a tombstock (or folding ruler). The idea began when I was making drawings of the sky and the graveyard. I became aware of the vertical axis above and below the ground. I considered the tombstock, which satisfyingly opens out its usually snugly folded lengths. I wanted to make an object to measure and map.

I traced the drawing of the graveyard and then cut up the tracing, using each rhombus or parallelogram representing a rectangular grave plot as a template to define the profile of a piece of wood, each a little over a metre in length. These were attached with hinges I took from tombstocks. I planned to cover the wooden surface with one of my fuzzy renderings of night-sky colour and mark each bar with little red lines of measurement. This thing would then imply measurable altitude, unplottable air, and mappable ground! And, with the clack clack clack of an unfolding tombstock, it would spread down the lengths of the school’s corridors.

In fact, it ended up so heavy that it could only stand carefully poised in the centre of my studio. It would never measure. What it had gained from the joints it had inherited from its ancestor, the tombstock, was a precarious stand-offish stance, which I hadn’t predicted at all. A stance is a very independent, personifying characteristic for a thing to have. I sat next to this thing, wondering whether to risk upsetting its balance by engraving its surface with the tombstock’s little red lines of measurement. Making can be a process of keeping up, as well as choreographing. I realised in time that making the lines would be to smother an independent attitude with my own fussy one and to ignore the logic of what I was seeing. Like waking a sleeping child to give it unnecessary pyjamas.

A device for measurement had become something more like a body. It had changed from one category of thing to another. If you consider a bit of matter through an imagined little black-ringed circular centimetre, invented for the purpose of noticing the complete continuity of energetic physical matter, you would also notice the particularity of the matter. We put it into categories. A foot is a bit of body. A brick, a bit of architecture. Lines on surface, a bit of drawing. Distinctions between categories are usually clear and predictable. Working in the studio, though, I have found that the category a thing falls into as it becomes itself can best be decided in retrospect. I began to learn this from a piece of architecture that became more like a drawing.

I planned to make a dome to be installed in a brick-walled chamber of Malmö’s Victorian water tower. It would not be lofty, but awkwardly close, so that you met its wide brim at eye level and would need to duck to get in. I wanted to be able to stand inside the chamber and gradually lay the bricks, with the apex of the dome being within fingertip reach. The bricks had to be light (their only support was a wooden ring wedged precariously against the chamber walls), so I made them from papier mâché formed from unprinted white newsprint.

A dome is formed when rows of bricks are laid in a circle. Every brick touches it neighbours by its front four corners, but the angle of space to each side, and above and below it, becomes larger with every row. In instructional videos on YouTube, these gaps are filled up completely with a wedge of plaster or mortar. I carefully made hundreds of wedges to fill...
Directions in Operation, 2017. Cardboard tubes, tissue paper, superglue, cellulose dope, banana oil, thread. 232 x 270 x 193 cm.
Installation view, MFA Exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Georgina Sleap
the horizontal gaps between bricks of the same row. However, when I built a quarter of the dome on the floor of the studio, I realised the shapes I would need to make the vertical curve were hopelessly, infinitely variable: no system presented itself.

One evening in the studio, I suddenly realised that the bricks just had to be held at the right angle. When you prop open a window, you don't fill the entire space with a wedge, you use a metal rod. A metal line. I made hundreds of papier mâché lines, each a square centimetre in diameter to mimic the mortar lines in the water tower’s brick walls.

On the first day of installation, I used only two of the four hundred lines I’d made. Despite the lesson of the window stick, I’d thought I’d shore up the structure with plenty of black papier mâché lines. But, just as you only need a thin coin to make a wobbly table stable, one little slither of line made the first rows of bricks as stable as could be.

Gradually, the angles got higher and the lines longer. After months of necessary decisions, there were a few days of little subjective choices: a long black line at the back of the brick, or a shorter one towards the front. They sat between, rather than on, the white papier mâché “pages” of the bricks, which stayed empty bits of filled interval (which I met at eye line and nose tip as I worked). But the choosing and the gluing in of lines felt like making a drawing.

I had copied the way people have made domes for thousands of years. But this preconceived system had to be put aside in the process of making, which depended on me remembering making drawings, propping open windows, and wedging coins under wobbly tables. Only then could I understand (and act according to) the logic of the thing. I don’t want to exaggerate: it looked like a dome. But it needed to be thought of only as itself to become itself. Its “category” was decided in retrospect, and by other people.

Eva Hesse once said about her work:

> It is the unknown quantity from which and where I want to go. As a thing, an object, it accedes to its non-logical self. It is something, it is nothing.\(^{34}\)

Describing her work is difficult. The phrase “if it looks like anything, it’s a …” seems useful here. Expanded Expansion was made in 1969. Broad tubes of translucent fibreglass lean steeply against the wall in a long row. They almost touch the ceiling and stand about a door’s-width apart. Running down the length of each tube is the edge of a sheet of cheesecloth, which has been covered with latex. These sheets flop heavily between the poles, connecting them in a row as long as the wall. If it looks like anything, it looks like a set of curtains, but curtains don’t stand at an angle, or have any stiff parts. If Schema (1967–68) looks like anything, it is a tray of truffles. But the squat brown latex domes are far too large and shiny to be chocolates, and are continuous with the “tray,” which is a sheet positioned on the floor that’s so thin the floorboards beneath are clearly visible. Schema doesn’t really look like a tray of truffles, but it probably looks more like that than anything else.

Maybe it is the fact that their categories cannot be determined, even in retrospect, that makes these things no-things. But Hesse’s works are obviously, compellingly, somethings. They are meticulously strange, with low-rumbling resemblances and unreachable “meaning” hidden in the fluff. They don’t look much like anything, but they do, just enough, to make you try to make them, and that awkwardness keeps you stuck and interested.

Hesse’s process makes me think about how big the space can be between what we know already and what we can imagine. It also challenges my recent hope to notice the logic of a thing as I make it. What would its non-logical self be? It cannot be pinned down. When a thing is made, it is a mixture of what’s logical and what’s just what. The mixture of these is a thing’s identity, and a thing with a convincing identity is a something.

I used to teach drawing to children at the Horniman Museum in South London. It has a room of stuffed animals, with a walrus the children loved. It had been stuffed in the 1880s by someone who had never seen a walrus. They rammed it so full that it looks inflated and tight. I don’t know what is non-logical or logical about this thing as a walrus. But there is an unnecessary joy in its absurdity, which is its greatness.

Hesse searched for the “absurd” in words and in her objects. She said it was not “the thing, but the sensation of a thing.”\(^{35}\) A sensation is not recognised, but felt. So Hesse looked for it in combinations not of objects, but of matter and action. It could arrive when clumpy and fat presses down on slithery and thin, or translucent and elegant is pulled by rubbery and saggy. When she saw flickers of the absurd, she would stoke them with repetition: “If something is absurd, it is much more exaggerated, more absurd if it’s repeated.”\(^{36}\)

This process needs a very careful attentiveness to things as they are and as they could soon become, in the way familiar to Aivilik mechanics. They needed to feel and predict the physical forces of winds between mountains and gasoline through engines. You’d need to be able to see what directions are in operation, whether those directions are of material particles or visual tension. In fact, the connection between sensation and force is close and real: the absurdity of the walrus must lie somewhere just under the almost pneumatic tight tension of his skin.

The sensation must have arrived as he was stuffed and stuffed. I do not use repetition in that way. Repetitive activity is necessary to make what I want to make.

Right: *Held air can be noticed and balanced*, 2017. Pencil on paper on MDF. 110 x 70 x 1 cm. Installation view, MFA Exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Georgina Sleap
But perhaps the object that is left after the faltering churn of making is done contains, in its identity, a low buzz of the absurd. This can best be sensed by others, after the privacy of the studio has broken.

“He showed me a little thing, the size of a hazelnut, in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball. I looked at it with my mind’s eye and thought, ‘What can this be?’ And the answer came, ‘It is all that is made’. I marvelled that it could last for I thought it might have crumbled to nothing, it was so small. And the answer came into my mind, ‘It lasts and ever shall because God loves it. And all things have being through the love of God.’”

This story has rumbled around in my head since I began to think about this text. When my mother was very ill, she asked my sister, who studied philosophy, for a small book of the kind of thing that you read while you’re dying. Freddie brought her readings from the Christian mystic Julian of Norwich. One evening, while she was having a foot massage, my mother fell asleep for a minute and dreamt she was rolling a hazelnut around in her hand. Later she opened the book for the first time and began to read, “He showed me …”

But how is it relevant? I’ve been sure that it is. It has taken time, scanning the field of my work while I’ve written this text, to see things in it that might matter.

I looked at it with my mind’s eye.

It is necessary to know what the mind’s eye is. Is it the visual imagination of the mind? I think it is something separate. If, before Julian of Norwich saw this hazelnut on her hand, someone had said to her, “Imagine a hazelnut on your hand,” it would have been the visual representation of “hazelnut.” The hazelnut in the story was, I imagine, a particular hazelnut, itself. The images of the mind’s eye have a different quality than sign images or memory images.

The mind’s eye sees things very steadily and clearly. It seems private from the busy imagining brain with which I think most of the time. Lots of fuzzy, casual possibilities of form pass when I’m working, waiting and seeing. But when I see something with my mind’s eye, I think it is worth following.

Eva Hesse saw her no-things in her mind’s eye, I am sure. You cannot engineer from nothing. Nor can we imagine something out of absolutely nothing. Everything we can imagine resembles things we’ve seen in real life, even if those resemblances are hidden and unnameable. Hesse must have begun with things whose resemblances she could not name. From there, then, making a no-thing is a process of steering away from flashes of recognition. What is it like to constantly steer away from what you can recognise or feel sure of? Hesse was always trying to steer away.

I marvelled that it could last for I thought it might have crumbled to nothing.

Why is it a bit exciting to look at a thing that keeps its sides and boundaries together despite looking like it could crumble to nothing? Is there a subconscious thrill of empathy borne of knowing that nothing lasts, not even our apparently world-constituting egos? It is partly that. It is also just pleasure: people like to make things balance. “Never trust someone who, left alone in a room with a teaspoon, does not try to hang it from the end of their nose.” To see something lasting creates a sense of thrill. The lasting thing has a sensation similar to the way that Hesse’s objects have a sensation of the “absurd.” What is the best word for this similarly nameless sensation? The “barely,” perhaps.

And the answer came into my mind.

Things that seemed sure prove false, and unthought ideas suddenly seem obvious. There is the time of not knowing, and a desperate giddy hanging on to what seemed right. Then you have to realise you don’t know, and wait. An odd answer might come into the mind. A memory of propping open the studio window to see the snow, using a metal line.

1 Edmund Carpenter, Eskimo (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1958).
2 The Aivilik speak a dialect of the Inuit language called Aivilik, Aivilingmiutut, Aivilimmiutut, or Aivillirmiut.
3 Carpenter, Eskimo, 26.
4 Carpenter, Eskimo, 21.
5 Carpenter, Eskimo, 26.
8 Ibn ‘Arabi, al-Futūhât al-makkiyya (Cairo, 1911), 2:313.12.

Reverberations, 2017. Oil bar, cycle oil, linseed oil, acrylic, turpentine, white spirit, newsprint. 116 x 138 cm. And Tool, 2017. Steel, wood, marker pen. 8 x 240 x 90 cm. Installation view, MFA Exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Georgina Sleap
Critical & Pedagogical Studies

MFA, Year 2

Francis Patrick Brady
Angel Nuñez Pombo
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Lucy Smalley
Elena Strempek
ieke Trinks
FOTRH (Feast of the Red Herring), 2017. Digitally altered collage. Francis Patrick Brady
NEVER COME TO A SECRET
SOCIETY DINNER
AND NOT SPEAK
WITH EVERYONE.

I cut tiny diary leaves
to cure myself from
eavy and other mean
eotions.

YOU WILL BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE
FOR WHAT YOU SAY. UNLESS YOU
ADMIT YOU SPOKE WRONG.

I keep poison, almost like
the poison of poison Ivy,
in a glass by my window
from where I look out to
observe. I grow poison Ivy
by my screen.
In this text I want to draw attention to the various pedagogical strategies of play as a method for traversing the differences “in between” subjectivities: between the engaged and the estranged, the included and the excluded, the immersive and the discursive, the transparent and the opaque. I will use these binaries to frame the conversation that arises around these methods within the theory and practice of art and pedagogy.

Introduction
This thesis is divided into nine chapters, which each describe a theoretical movement or oscillation between practices or theories. I start with a definition of “play,” drawing from the Dutch anthropologist Johan Huizinga and pre-Enlightenment writer Giambattista Vico in the section “Play as Movement: Between the Pointless Semblance and the Significant Resemblance.” I then go on to describe the playful movement within art as a pedagogical problem in “Paradoxical Pedagogy: Between Ignorance and Knowledge, the Colonising and Decolonising Interpretations.” Next, in “Secrecy and Transparency as Social Games: Between the Illusion of Transparency and the Collusion of Opacity,” I use the metaphors of opacity and transparency to discuss the strategies of inside and outside, the inclusive and exclusive identities used for the playing of social games, and the formation of hegemony. I go on to define these spaces of contestation and Chantal Mouffe’s term “agonism” and suggest that play has the potential to be a “counterhegemonic practice” as an oscillation between subjectivities. I then discuss the non-art-related practice of Larp in “Playing for Fun or Playing to Lose: Between the Immersive Illusion of Play and Its Opposite” in order to frame the potential critical urgency within natural communities of immersive and fantastical play practices. In “The Cheat, the Spoilsport, the Fool, the Trickster: Between the Magical and the Sensible Illusion,” I continue to explore the immersive side of play in the theatre of Augusto Boal as well as the definitions of the “cheat” and the “spoilsport.” I examine playful practices within the arts in “Playful Estrangement and Social (Dis)engaged Art: Between Reality and Play; Art into ‘Real-life,’” where I describe the twentieth-century desire for a co-mixing of art and life. Finally, I approach the more recent plethora of socially engaged art practices that are more directly pedagogical in nature in “Pedagogical Playgrounds of Art: Between the Bureaucratic and the Qualitative Community.” All of these topics, artists, and theories are inspected in relation to their playful and pedagogical properties, and the conclusion of this thesis briefly presents my own artistic project, The Feast of the Red Herring, in “FEAST OF THE RED HERRING ♛: Between the Redacted and the Enacted” and I sum up my argument in “Critique and Conclusion: Between Play and Pedagogy.”

Play as Movement
Between the Pointless Semblance and the Significant Resemblance

Play is a multitudinous set of observable practices or tendencies that are littered throughout cultural and social history. Play’s arrival within the language discourse of many different spheres of study and practice can be seen as indicative of its multipurpose nature and lack of strict definition. Within anthropology, authors such as Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois describe the totalising and fundamental world-building mechanisms of play within ritual and myth, law and order, art and craft, commerce and profit, and wisdom and science. Play is a part of the “primeval soil” from which civilised life sprang.

Play can be found at the origins of conflict resolution, from the potlatch, a feasting and gift-giving ceremony in the spirit of competition practised by Asian and...
FOTRH (Feast of the Red Herring), 2017. Digitally altered and redacted photo taken during dinner. Francis Patrick Brady
North American nomadic tribes, all the way to modern court justice, with court proceedings that enable an enacted personification of legal justice via the use of props like the wig and gavel. Before resorting to war, as the totalising search for a singular order, there are other playable methods for deciding upon the correct, righteous, or truthful outcome in a manner that Huizinga describes as “the ordeal,” which is a semi-feigned conflict that is the starting point for the contest or competitive game. Thus, “trying out your strength in a contest, or throwing dice, or consulting the oracle, or disputing by fierce words” can all be alternative methods to elicit a decision within a conflict that is socially ratified by the cultural and spiritual beliefs of a society.

Once we see these serious agonistic games of competition and conflict resolution as synonymous with the cultural and spiritual practices of divination, then we can see play influencing the narrativisation that encompasses many spheres of society and civilisation. Playful interpretation or play as divine judgment, through the ordeal, provides the narrative link between cause and effect, chaos and justice, abomination and righteousness, emptiness and providence—a causal system that was traversed through playful mythopoesis. The story, epic, or saga becomes a method that unifies the playful meaning making of mankind’s games, contests, and rituals with the seemingly unfathomable forces of nature. Through poetic myth-making, stories of gods and higher powers are significantly linked to the processes and occurrences within nature and the effects that mankind has upon its own destiny within that nature. As Huizinga states: “In play there is something ‘at play’ which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action.” Huizinga properly identifies and examines the all-encompassing necessity of play that lies in its mythopoesis: its meaning making that ornaments everyday life practices.

We can now come to a microcosmic example of play and scrutinise a game such as mancala, which is one of the oldest surviving games and is still played across large parts of the world today. Mancala is played with handfuls of rocks or counters, often called “seeds,” which are moved between two rows of pits or holes in the ground, a stone slab, or a wooden board. There are hundreds of different versions of mancala from East to West Africa, South Asia to the Middle East, and it is presumed to originate from Ethiopia or Eritrea. However, because of the simplicity of its design, there are theories that it could date back to the Ancient Egyptians or even to the beginnings of civilisation itself. The name “mancala” comes from the Arabic “naqala,” meaning “to move,” as the mechanism of the game involves a great deal of movement and redistribution of each player’s seeds between the holes. It is quite likely the game came from practices designed to count livestock and agricultural crops or to keep track of credit and debit, as the movement of stones represent an early physical and material way of dividing up and cataloguing the world.

In African cultures, the two rows of mancala holes are often laid out on the ground from east to west, with each row, round, and turn said to represent the different plots of land and seasons for sowing seeds. This intricate dance with the divine and the practical cycles of life allows humans the ergonomic scope to bridge the gap between play and work, divine nature and utility. Representation within rites both religious and secular own a playful quality that moves the world into a specific and peculiar order that is only graspable through this act of playing. As Huizinga explains, the English word “play” comes from the Anglo-Saxon “plega,” which means “to play” but also “rapid movement, a gesture, a grasp of the hands, clapping, playing on a musical instrument” and other bodily movements. Though the Latin root of play—“ludus” coming from “ludere”—can be used in relation to “the leaping of fishes, the fluttering of birds and the plashing of water,” it is more strongly seated in the meanings of “semblance,” “feigning,” and “mimicking.” Then play becomes an act of mystical representation, a human movement borrowed from nature, an immersive being together in play with objects and subjects that, like any liturgy, ritual, or rite, is “pointless but significant.”

Examining the compounds that share ludus as a suffix—alludo, colludo, and illudo—brings to light a greater link to the unreality of a world apart where play creates its own reality and inner logic or poetics. To “allude”: to hint or suggest something, to point “towards” (al-) play; an “illusion”: a deceptive sensory experience, literally something that is “in” (il-) play; and, finally, to “collude”: to secretly conspire, to be “together” (co-) in play.

Giambattista Vico’s theory of poetic wisdom (sapienza poetica), which he lays out in The New Science and which prefigures the rationality of the Enlightenment, suggests that the useful myth-making and grand narrative of poetic storytelling used by early primitive societies was a required wisdom that enabled humans to survive the dark unknowns of nature. Early man had to generate the illusion of a world full of divine order and judgment so that he might find agency within this illusion. To know that a hurricane, volcano eruption, drought, or storm is caused by divine judgment from those respective gods of a natural but higher realm is both a comfort and the beginning of a poetic and scientific logic: cause and effect.

The illusion of play on this grand scale can be seen in miniature within the game of mancala, as well as in
chess, Monopoly, blackjack, and the word games we play and the languages we use. Play can be a pedagogically framed “route in” to a new way of existing together, a temporary illusion that allows us the space to collude and plot against the rest of the world. In an interview by Stevphen Shukaitis with Stefano Harney and Fred Moten from their book The Undercommons, they talk about the power of language and the co-opting of theoretical terms as a method for playtesting another reality. In the following excerpt, Moten relates the functional “toybox”15 of theoretical words to a story of playing with his children:

“Dad, we have a box, and we’re going to let you open this box, and if you open the box, you can enter into our world.” That’s kind of what it feels like: there are these props, these toys, if you pick them up you can move into some new thinking and into a new set of relations, a new way of being together, thinking together.16

These authorised arenas of alternative wisdom allow space to play out a new set of relations to be laid on top of, or embedded inside, real life. The essence of play within games is in its natural ordering; as with poetic wisdom inside life, any ordering is the playful creation of a “magic circle.” Huizinga explains this idea as follows:

Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the “consecrated spot” cannot be formally distinguished from the playground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart.17

The spaces and acts that are created through and for play in some sense are arbitrary. They are performances and props that act as placeholders for the representation of greater or smaller narratives that connect together everyday life to another plane of ordering. The meaning making happens during the repetition and permutation of the “rules,” which has a cause and effect within both the playful scene and real life. As an example of a playful and comical object/prop that becomes a signifier between different planes of the real and the imaginary, Huizinga brings up the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century obsession with the wig! Something that begins life as “a substitute for unsatisfactory richness of locks, consequently an imitation of nature,”18 but quickly turns into playful hyperbole. It acts from that point forward as an element of style and an overspilling or mania of chic taste as it becomes more and more grand and extravagant in the portraiture and daily lives of the age of reason. Play here is seen in the permutation of the rules of nature as much as it is a social game to deploy the wig as prop and signifier that no longer references reality but elevates status through the act of playing with the form of hair: “Every pretence of imitating nature is abandoned; the wig has become the complete ornament.”19 This paradoxical role of play lies in it being both ornamental and useful at the same time, pointless and significant, unserious and serious, which as a mechanism can be seen in the arts: playing out permutations of the rules within signs and signifiers.

Paradoxical Pedagogy
Between Ignorance and Knowledge, the Colonising and Decolonising Interpretations

There is an ongoing call to arms of the pluralistic and inclusive approach that emancipates the spectator,20 kills the author,21 and engages with society to prevent the passive, disengaged, and stultified viewer; an easy, unengaged passage between real life and art is denied. The awareness of the distances between knowledges, or the gap between subject and object, art and society, is an awareness that seems to call for action, to bridge or repair the differences or reach a utopian middle ground where we can problematise a pluralistic consensus. This problem is something that artists like Allan Kaprow and Joseph Beuys were keenly aware of, but in the process of becoming aware of this distance, they fell into a classic pedagogical trap. As Jacques Rancière outlines in his influential text The Emancipated Spectator, the creation of pedagogical methods aimed towards “continuously reducing the gap between knowledge and ignorance” (or between art and life, inclusion and exclusion) ultimately ends up reinforcing this exact distance: “Unfortunately, in order to reduce the gap, [they] must reinstate it ceaselessly.”22

Robert C. Morgan in his book on Bruce Nauman relates a comparison that Nauman makes between his own artistic practice, of making and breaking rules, with an African game played by the Turkana people in which stones are moved around between holes in the ground but which “no player ever seems to win.”23 This book names this game as “Ngalisio,” but it is most likely a mancala derivative called ngikiles, which is often played by a council of elders called “the tree of men” (N'g'ekelok) among the Turkana people of north-west Kenya.24 Nauman understands the game as play for the sake of playing, as the players/actors silently build consensus through a loose and plural structure of shifting rule makers and breakers, but this interpretation misunderstands the inner logic of the game: much more is happening than the outsider can gain access to. The inner logic of the game does not bend to the will of blasé rule breakers and makers; the game
is a closed system with only way to be in play, even if the system of being in play has countless different arrangements and outcomes.

The complexity of this type of playful wisdom includes the community in a performative world building that provides a sacred narrativity to their communal decision-making. Nauman’s mistake is a ordered and colonised misunderstanding of the gap between different realms of knowledge, and it is on par with the failings of the pedagogical paradigm that the author and pedagogue Paulo Freire points to in his famous book Pedagogy of the Oppressed when he refutes the simplicity of knowledge exchange: “Dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person’s ‘depositing’ ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be ‘consumed’ by the discussants. ... Because dialogue is an encounter among women and men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some name on behalf of others. It is an act of creation.”

This naming of the world, much like Moten’s “toy-box” of words, becomes an act of serious but playful exchange, a way of being together in between the fixed and unfixed positions. Identities and spaces that are exchange, a way of being together in between the fixed box” of words, becomes an act of serious but playful This naming of the world, much like Moten’s “toy-box” of words, becomes an act of serious but playful

The distance or gap between binary subjectivities, as Rancière points out, is opened in the very act of seeking to bridge this distance; observing a perceived lack or absence in turn brings this absence into existence. To attempt to reverse the immersive state of ignorance is to perceive a difference between the haves and the have-nots, which then brings this division into being through the discourse of its observation and naming. This playful act of movement—a fluttering, or oscillation, between states of knowing and not, inclusion and exclusion, transparency and opacity—is an oscillation between states of ignorance and knowledge that is keenly aware of their dependency. It is necessary to move between both in order to create a pedagogical playground where a paradoxical language can be spoken, where you can be both ignorant and knowledgeable, worldly and worldless, at the same time. In play, the naming of the world can be swung around and altered through the movements between subjectivities and perceptions, empathies can be tilted to be together both immersively and discursively; in the realm of differences, another reality can be set into motion.

Secrecy and Transparency as Social Games
Between the Illusion of Transparency and the Collusion of Opacity

“Transparency” is a modern byword for the fluid organising principle of public and private institutions; it is the positive linguistic currency by which all organisations currently compare themselves as being more or less transparent. Transparency is a demand for clarity and traceable operations, accountability, and inclusion of the public within political or communal decision-making. It invokes a lightening of dark spaces through the transition from opaque surfaces to translucent ones—a procedure encouraged and fostered within the rationality of the Enlightenment. Michel Foucault likens this turn towards the light as an opportunity for “the full visibility of things, men and truths” and as a method to “eliminate the shadowy areas of society, demolish the unitl chambers where arbitrary political acts, monopolical caprice, religious superstitions, tyrannical and priestly plots, epidemics and the illusions of ignorance were fomented.”

The translucent and see-through qualities of transparency wield wealthy metaphors that are welcomed by those outside the walls of power so that they might catch a glimpse of the inner workings of the system. The connotations of Joseph Paxton’s Crystal Palace, built in 1851, played upon the clarity of glass to pitch a grand presentation and display of worldly knowledge, as collected by the British Empire in the Great Exhibition in a fashion that Clare Birchall calls an “educative transparency.”

But a gaze through such a lens is by no means unclouded or free from ulterior motives in its production of knowledge.

As well as a metaphorical turn towards transparency, as the champion for clarity and revealer of hidden truths, the eighteenth century saw the structural implementation of this doctrine within the political realm. The very first Freedom of Information Act was introduced to Sweden by Anders Chydenius in 1766, instigating offentlighetsprincipen (the principle of openness) into daily Swedish civilian life, as citizens, of a certain standing, were able to request to inspect all governmental documents. In the twentieth century, there were even greater calls for an institutionalised openness through governmental transparency; Woodrow Wilson stated in 1913, “Government ought to be all outside and no inside. I, for my part, believe there ought to be no place where anything can be done that everybody does not know about. ... Secrecy means impropriety.”

This statement suggests an inversion of the state, turning it inside out to reveal its innards, where the outsider becomes an insider through the visibility, and hence knowledge, of the inside. Though Wilson’s conception aspire to there being no hidden parts within the machinations of governance and to holding all people working inside accountable to their actions, this act
of making transparent can be seen in the same manner as the Crystal Palace: merely a metaphor for the exteriorised inside, a crystalline hoax.

The more transparent an organisation is, the more it is presumed to reject and disallow secrecy, which, as a mode of operating, is considered to be the moral antonym of transparency. Secrecy allows for the quiet and unchecked transformation of hierarchies towards either a re-establishment of a status quo or the erosion of a previous force. Such an organisation is unaccountable by any peer or public review and carries on work in a silence that is unknowable to those outside the singularity of the secret. Secrecy is the potent currency of the feudal lord, the oligarch, and the totalitarian, but also of the usurper, terrorist, revolutionary, and whistleblower; one side seeks to protect the singularity of power and another wishes to invert it. The relationship between these two poles is what always endemically co-creates them and at the same time what disallows and disables each other’s progress.

So, for the sake of argument, let us imagine both sides, secrecy and transparency, at their extremes. What happens when all governments, businesses, institutions, charities, and individuals of the social, political, or cultural realm become entirely transparent? The illusion will be complete and there will no longer be “them” and “us,” as there will be no boundaries that contain secrets or unknowns. There will be a pluralist consensus that collapses these lines between everyday social interactions and the interactions that decide government policy, educational curriculum, business mergers, trade deals, and artist dinner parties. Transparency is the enemy of difference, however we look at it, whether this is a positive negation of difference, in the removal of impropriety through accountability, or a negative reduction of difference, through total understanding and a consensus of identity that removes differences. When Édouard Glissant stated, “We demand the right to opacity,”30 he was enunciating and calling out the logic and “process of ‘understanding’ people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought,”31 as this rationale requires a transparent clarity of subjectivities and identities that is reductive. As Glissant expands: “In order to understand thus accept you, I have to reduce.”32

The call for opacity is then a subversive and transgressive act, as it denies the possibility of definition, or indeed solid identity—which could be an urgent requirement in the construction of an arena for politics that is based upon separate relational subjectivities, but it then also becomes one that foregoes any possibility of inclusion, understanding, or consensus making. Within the ancient Roman Empire, great emphasis was placed upon the necessary opacity of political rule for it to function properly and efficiently, what the Roman historian Tacitus calls “arcana imperii,” or “secrets of imperial policy.” So if modern liberal democracy is concerned with undoing the improper places of secrecy within government as a project towards a total inclusive, transparent, and pluralistic society, then this becomes a paradox that cannot possibly include all these voices in a coherent consensus. The necessity of opaque, private, and disputed places inside democracy, or other organisational bodies, lies in direct contradiction to the advocacy and promotion of a total transparency that these bodies imply. The rise of transparency advocacy,32 as Clare Birchall and Metahaven call it, in place of actual transparency can be seen as a PR stunt or smokescreen, a politics that still holds onto its necessary opacity while revealing its insides in the magical illusory act of becoming transparent.

Both total transparency and total opacity become vehicles for a fascist denial or removal of difference.

If we then examine Chantal Mouffe’s approach, as she understands both sides of this conundrum, that “every identity is relational”—that is, demarcated through “the perception of something ’other’ which constitutes its ’exterior’”—then the formation of this identity is exclusionary and creates an irreconcilable set of differences or identities.34 So the relational character of politics requires difference and “collective identity” to function while at the same time the formation of the “us/them” relation—be it religious, ethnic or economic—becomes the locus of an antagonism.35 Mouffe describes liberal politics’ desire for an inclusive and pluralistic democracy as essentially a reduction of difference that does not take into account the antagonisms between positions and that will only ever be a grasping towards an unreachable consensus. In her words:

The fundamental question is not how to arrive at a consensus reached without exclusion, because this would require the construction of an “us” that would not have a corresponding “them.” … The crucial issue then is how to establish this us/them distinction … in a way that is compatible with the recognition of pluralism.36

Mouffe sets forth a new metaphorical way of imagining the political struggle that would help us live within a constantly changing conflictual consensus, an us and them that is not essentialist or reductionist: being in favour of agonism (the struggle between adversaries) instead of antagonism (the struggle between enemies). Agonism, for her, becomes a way to think through an ideal politics that permits conflicts between opaque and diffuse identities but that is also an inclusive and transparent battleground “where the opponents are
not enemies but adversaries among whom exists a conflictual consensus."37 The space for which Mouffe advocates is paradoxical, but this does not prevent it being actualised in the same manner that the game of politics is brought into existence: through a series of fraught metaphors, poetics, and ideals that over time become sedimented down into a hegemony that appears like the natural order of things. That is to say, politics is an inclusive illusion (literally an “in play”).

If Mouffe’s ideal political community is made up of adversaries, then are they not playing out an alternative version of reality where antagonism is not eliminated but sublimated and thus propelled into the fantastical realm of conflictless conflict? This is a situation Mouffe describes as “a real confrontation, but one that is played out under conditions regulated by a set of democratic procedures accepted by the adversaries.”38 This essentially a description of gaming: playing under a set of rules and conditions accepted and regulated by the agreement of various players (adversaries) through which they act out confrontation inside the magic circle of the game. Mouffe’s agonism is a game that becomes so serious and real that people believe in the consequences and phenomena that occur inside it to such an extent that it can be taken (or mistaken) for reality; it is a real-fake conflict that sublates actual conflict. If the actual essentialist nature of this game is forgotten, then the political community plays in a manner that Mouffe warns against, as adversaries become simply competitors,39 winners or losers that shift and slide between seats of importance but do not change the dominant hegemony or relations of power. She states, “Liberal theorists envisage the field of politics as a neutral terrain in which different groups compete to occupy the positions of power, their objective being to dislodge others in order to occupy their place, without putting into question the dominant hegemony.” Politics is thus an immersive illusion, just like a game, that suspends natural impassioned conflict, but it is an illusion that is unbroken and total.40

To be able to function as a political model for change, or indeed a mode of being together that is radically different from all previous forms of politics, then agonism is firstly subversive and only later can it become transgressive. It plays by the rules until the rules have been radically altered to the point that one is no longer playing the same game one started. According to Mouffe, a “counterhegemonic practice”41 is one that encourages a critique of engagement-with rather than a critique of withdrawal-from.42 Criticality that proposes a withdrawal-from the subjectivities of a certain hegemony as a form of politics is found as the main ingredient of models of post-structuralists such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, or proposals like Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt’s “spontaneous communism.”43 To critique the dominant ideological framework through the deconstructive or negative act is to assume that there will be a hidden and new ready-made set of common subjectivities “ready to emerge when the weight of the dominant ideology has been lifted.”44 As Mouffe goes on to explain, she believes that artists can operate as what Antonio Gramsci calls “organic intellectuals,”45 aiding the reorganisation of a new political hegemony: “By constructing new practices and new subjectivities, they can help subvert the existing configuration of power.”46

Mouffe suggests art’s role might be to “disarticulate”47 the current hegemony through the subversive play-testing of different modes of inclusive public critique and engagement. A counterhegemonic practice can find itself inside the system working as a revolutionary-from-within, a type of radical reformist bent on continual revision. The political thought game Nomic, created by the political theorist Peter Suber, imitates this political game and paradox of self-amendment and shows how politics is always a game that is seemingly closed but constantly making and rearranging its own rules.48 Mouffe sees a possible unification of progressive or radical political practices with the positive transformation and affirmative realignment of agonism that is found within certain contemporary artistic activist and socially engaged art practices.

So if we see these “counterhegemonic practices” as sublimating and subverting, via an engagement with the institutional and constructed hegemonies, then they must first start by acting within the rules, taking up the roles and utilising the props of these aforementioned hegemonies. Critical artistic practices can still fall into the classic pedagogical trap, as mentioned earlier with Beuys and Kaprow, where in the defining of the gaps in the dominant ideology, via shock and provocation, the “us” and “them” become further entrenched and ignorance and knowledge cannot be consoled or reconciled. Play is something that is engaging and can be immersive, but that can also become the kind of excessive engagement that spills over into pure and total fantasy, a utopia that is ungrounded and playable only as a competitive (radically neutered) movement of stable and fixed pieces (opaque insiders).

The dangerous immersive fantasy of play, as interaction or spectacle, can be viewed as unconditional and therefore uncontrollable, which is why the avant-garde usually frames the route towards new social and political paradigms as having to be critical in the form of a break or withdrawal-from the previous system of ordered interaction. Mistrust and mockery of the current system is seen as a sensible process towards destabilising hegemony: as one of Friedrich Nietzsche’s aphorisms goes: “Objections, digressions, gay mistrust,
FOTRH (Feast of the Red Herring), 2017. Installation view, Moderna Museet, Malmö, 2017. Francis Patrick Brady
the delight in mockery are signs of health: everything unconditional belongs to pathology."40 Thus play is a form of pathology; it reaches conclusions and systems of order that run counter to rational or conditional practices, as Huizinga mentions: “Play only becomes possible, thinkable and understandable when an influx of mind breaks down the absolute determinism of the cosmos.”41 So can play be trusted, in any form, to assist in the countering or détournement50 of a system?

As Marc James Léger brought up in his keynote address at the 2013 Gothenburg International Biennale, play is “something like fantasy inasmuch as it resists mediation and masks the inconsistencies of the symbolic order.”52 It creates a world that seamlessly knits together the gaps in the paralogical logic of existing symbolic and actual hegemonies, swapping the antagonisms of our order for the antagonisms of a simulated order. Léger compares Slavoj Žižek’s “unbearable excess of jouissance” with play’s impossible set of relations: a presymbolic otherness, which is where play resides, like fantasy, as inherent transgression and a spilling over of subjectivities. This transgression, Léger points out, is feared by radical groups for its tendency towards uncritical and “trans-ideological” bonding or bringing together individuals in common without being able to define how this spilling over is characterised or channelled.

Guy Debord and the Situationist International saw the spectacle of play’s lack of mediation within late capitalism as being something that prevented engagement through the immersion of the public in the giant “exciting game”53 (this is the symbolic order of late capitalism). Whereas Debord’s “détournement” settles scores with the society of the spectacle through creation of “ludic ambiances” that he hoped would reverse the effects of the smooth functioning of capitalist hegemony in real life, Bertolt Brecht’s technique of “estrangement”54 seeks to bring about a defamiliarisation of the cultural subject within art. Both Debord and Brecht sought to challenge the dominant order through a break or estrangement with that order, but as Mouffe has suggested and I have mentioned earlier, this break or withdrawal requires a new ordering to be able to replace the old. Brecht and Debord too are wary of an immersive politics that becomes pathologically unrestricted, as the public is “hypnotised”55 by the playable spectacle that removes them from any critical distance to the subject. I would argue that Léger mistakenly compares play to fantasy, a type of mania which is total, a foolhardy utopian dream, that has no clear path to actualisation in politics without becoming purely pathological and unconditional. Play can be, and is, channelled transgression that can be achieved through switching between the conditional and the unconditional, using this spilling over as a simulation technique for focused sublimation and illusion that then helps inform a rearrangement of dominant hegemony through fantastical world building.

What other practices can be examined in relation to this engagement-with without supplanting a common sense, or natural order, that reinforces hegemony? What other forms of organic intellectuals can we find if we look outside of the communities of art and theatre?

Playing for Fun or Playing to Lose
Between the Immersive Illusion of Play and Its Opposite

If we look at practices outside of art that can be considered to harbour the natural engagement-with a subject vis-à-vis Gramsci’s organic intellectuals, then we can examine the practice of Larp56 (Live action role play). After graduating from my BFA at Chelsea College of Arts in London, I began research into Scandinavian Larp in 2011, and although originally it was an activity that interested me and influenced my art practice from a distance, I slowly became more involved. Since moving to Sweden in 2014, I have attended several Larps and specifically Nordic Larp conferences that serve to keep the community tied together; so though I am a foreigner and relative newcomer, I am not altogether a total outsider. Larp is an activity that is complex to understand or explain, even within a community of experienced players, let alone to an uninitiated audience (though full “initiation” and understanding of Larp is something that appears to escape even the most “experienced” Larpers), but I will attempt to outline some intriguing concepts that have influenced my thinking in regard to my own art practice as well as my thinking surrounding the activities that contemporary Larp resembles, borrows from, or invents.

I will at this point make a very rough, and very large distinction, between Larp as a general term that is used globally to describe a huge variety of different role-playing activities and the Nordic Larp scene and community, which often considers itself to be more experimental and self-critical in form and more psychologically or politically intense in content (though these attributes can also be found within non–Nordic Larp). When I refer to Larp within this text, generally I am referring to the styles and attributes of Nordic Larp, as far as I can see it.

A loose definition of Larp, which is all I can provide, would be: a game wherein all the players are participants that co-create the realm of interaction while being provided with a structure or setting that guides this co-creation. This guiding can take many different forms, but the most common is a workshop that allows players to first imagine how they are to play and interact during play and then immerse themselves inside this realm of action and participation. Once immersed inside play, they accede the rules of normal
society to the new transmuted rules of the magic circle; it is a sanctioned and agreed upon transgression. Jaakko Stenros, in a 2013 talk about Nordic-style Larp, attempted to summarise it this way: “It typically values thematic coherence, continuous illusion, action and immersion, while keeping the larp co-creative and its production uncommercial. Workshops and debriefs are common.”

Every Larper will tell you there is no strict definition of Larp, and most won’t be able to agree on any specific historical source(s) from which it sprang. There are a litany of practices and historical movements that, in some way, Larp can be associated with or seen to be borrowing from, such as: Choose Your Own Adventure books, role-playing games (RPG) and tabletop games (e.g., *Dungeons & Dragons*), early computer-situated text-based adventure games and MUDs (multi-user dungeons), historical re-enactment, experimental theatre, participatory art (social practice and socially engaged art), interactive design, the experience economy, pervasive gaming, performance art, political activism, anarchist collectivism, the self-help movement, psychotherapy, corporate training, radical pedagogy workshops, and so on.

Much like the focused fabulation of scenario building originally proposed by Herman Kahn in his book *Thinking about the Unthinkable*, which considers the possible different outcomes in the event of a nuclear war,58 Larp too can be a fictional but rational and constructed set of possible scenarios. But instead of thinking through these different scenarios, Larp can physically act through them by walking through an actual physical embodied playtesting. To imagine being in the middle of a nuclear holocaust is very different from actually being in one, so what kind of insight can actually be provided from this type of speculative fictioning? “Playing to Lose” is one of the mechanisms that allows a temporary space of potential—between uncertainty and certainty, the unconditional and conditional—to arise. This is where we find an interesting mixture of reality and unreality, where the utopian (or dystopian) fantasies of play can be integrated with the useful prognoses of present certainties. Speculative play can be a way of radically occupying the form of the scenario as a way towards a mythopoetic building of new identities, relations, and worlds.
The phrase and game mechanic I referred to earlier, Playing to Lose, is often used within the Nordic Larp community and can mean to play in a direction different to your own desires, to actively handicap your character, or to play out the approach to insurmountable obstacles so as to be faced with a game where there is no possible way to win. This approach is evident in the Larp Will, by Mads Jøns Frausig and Karete Jacobsen Meland,60 which “is a non-verbal larp about going through different phases after ending a romantic relationship.”61 You are playing out an experience that cannot be “won”; the determinism of the game’s structure means you are faced with problems and emotions that have no finite end or solution. Though your player might wish there to be an ideal outcome and search towards a peaceful conclusion, there is only the experience of moving through loss and heartbreak. That is what is played out: to know that, just as in real life, you cannot win every time. Losing is more than something to be avoided at all costs; it’s a state that can be explored as something familiar and common to all human relations within society. Loss, compromise, and sacrifice are part of our daily antagonisms whether individual or collective, public or private, personal or political. The struggle for political identities and recognition is an ongoing tug of war. Playing to Lose allows the possibility for the actualisation of Mouffe’s conflictual consensus to arise in the immersive illusion of play’s magic circle. Even though these are fictional antagonisms that are sublimated, they can encourage an oscillation between the immersive fictioning and the relatable realities of these playful scenarios. Playing to Lose is a concept that neatly captures my interest with Larp as a pedagogical tool that becomes a playable counterhegemonic practice and that is often debriefed through discursive and critical reflection.

In the Finnish-Palestinian Larp Halat hisar,62 the writers and organisers “created an alternative reality where Finland lived under an apartheid regime and occupation similar to real world Palestine.”63 The organisers faced the problem of the impossibility of any simulated experience of being in a war zone or playing the role of someone from a marginalised group identity being in any way comparable to actually having that identity or being in that place. Though not to suggest that such an experience can be simulated, there is, however, a possible ulterior function to feigned experience. Play then can be a purely pedagogical oscillation, a reflex seeking to keep open and complex the relations between the experience of knowledge and the lack of it, between the certainties of the present and the fatalistic allusions of the future. Larp sees this lack not as a fixed knowable identity but one that is able to be renegotiated through playful feigned antagonisms; therefore Larp, while not always sufficiently radical in content, is always a facilitated illusory agonism.

The participants of Halat hisar played with the knowledge of the impossibility of their position and relations as players and organisers, their real and feigned relationships to the world, and the knowledge that they could not possibly bring the two vastly different political identities of Finland and Palestine into a consensual understanding of each other’s positions. As one of the organisers writes in her text “Playing the Stories of Others,” “the stories we live in larp are filtered through our real-life selves. In the end, our unconscious reactions and interpretations of events are based on real-life experience. We have been socialised to certain roles and positions of which we are not even fully aware. Therefore it’s difficult to consciously set them aside.”64 Larp can facilitate an arena where the antagonisms of different identities are not eradicated under the desire for a liberal multiculturalism but rather aired in the spirit of neighbourly adversaries. Halat hisar crudely reversed the roles of the Palestinian and Finnish players and then allowed for a real-life sharing of experiences afterwards in the debriefing process, thus bringing the transgressive experience back into conflict with the stark contrasts between both the Northern Europeans’ and the Palestinians’ naturalised hegemonic understandings of normality and “common sense.” As one of the Palestinian participants explains:

> Sometimes when you’re living in a unique situation, you stop perceiving things that are happening around you and to you as abnormal, you become part of a social blend that is neither natural nor normal. But when you step outside and watch your life as a third party, that is when you’re shocked by the reality that you have been part of most of your life.65

Pedagogy within Larp, I would argue, can be viewed as a fundamental base by which its form, function, and, in many cases, its content are grounded and influenced; you cannot separate the impulses of pedagogy from the communities that surround the Nordic Larp community. In the same way that Larps often resemble training seminars, consciousness raising symposia, or educational workshops, Larp too can find its way back into those places as influencer or replacement. Larp already has a history within the Scandinavian schooling system, working with mostly children and young adults, and it is still actively encouraged and funded through these institutions today. Most Scandinavians I have met have experienced some kind of Rolspil (role play) at school or as a hobby, even those unaware of the term Larp, and they are surprised to find that it is not common in the schools of other countries. This is because it is quite easy to describe the pedagogical effects of Larp as an embodied empathy or played-out historical knowledge and thus attach it to the curriculum. It is a gamified pedagogy that replaces phrases like
teaching “techniques” with Larp “game mechanisms,” as such placing the emphasis on the construction of a navigable space where the participant/player (here replacing “student”) carves their own path through a structured set of resistances or obstacles. This set of resistances, or in other words “the rules,” are not a layer placed on top of society’s normal rules but are a short-lived substitution of those rules. However, this process of embodied learning is not usually continued into adult life alongside other higher education structures like the workshop, seminar, symposium, lecture, etc.

One of the potential reasons for Larp being excluded from an adult-facing pedagogical method is that the rules and mechanisms of Larp are excuses that indicate transgressive behaviour, a mode often referred to in the Larp community as one’s “alibi.” For example, if you make a rule that says: your character can cure cancer through covering their body with flour, then the fact that you yourself do not believe this doesn’t matter, but in choosing for your character to believe this means you can play out the sublimate freedom that this particular belief affords you. If we consider the famous assertion within the 1968 text “Sentences on Conceptual Art” by Sol LeWitt that “conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists,” then the speculative play of Larp provides the framework to allow everyone participating in a Larp to become conceptual artists themselves and to “leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.” I would argue that this ulterior freedom (that of the artist or Larper) that is rationally constructed from outside and then played out inside the game of Larp is a form of player agency that oscillates between the immersive and a discursive plane. This oscillation is a reflexive practice that in no way solely belongs to Larp and that can be traced to many other cultural practices. What is, perhaps, unique and interesting about Nordic Larp is that it has grown up through the manner that Brecht describes as a public desire for “sport,” whereas the spoilsport puts a firm chosen or predetermined, to break or bend the rules. Who have an ulterior agency within all games, whether very interesting in this respect. These are the players description of the “spoilsport” and the “cheat” becomes the cheat, as the cheat did not necessarily agree to be part of. So Huizinga’s insight into these two immersive states. The pluralism of Boal’s spect-actors participates in a transgression inside a form that is sanctioned and transparent, with some opacities, but is an un-antagonistic and neutered narrative experience; no one can choose to re-steer the ship and change the rules midway, unlike Peter Suber’s game of Nomic. Like the playing of any game or choosing to take part in any cultural or social activity, there are already agreed upon norms and rules that configure how to play along.

If we look at the alternative contract of playing a game, then we realise there is already an agreement to be a player in that game, be at that dinner party, go to that church, go to see that band play, join in that riot, whereas in a lot of situations in life we are playing a game we did not necessarily agree to be part of. So Huizinga’s description of the “spoilsport” and the “cheat” becomes very interesting in this respect. These are the players who have an ulterior agency within all games, whether chosen or predetermined, to break or bend the rules. The spoilsport is different from the cheat, as the cheat keeps the game going even if contradicting the ordered rules of the game, whereas the spoilsport puts a firm
FOTRH (Feast of the Red Herring), 2017. Installation view, Moderna Museet, Malmö, 2017. Francis Patrick Brady

FOTRH (Feast of the Red Herring), 2017. Redacted planning documents. Francis Patrick Brady

{Most names have been Redacted from the following sections}

List of Artists to create certain elements of the Dinner:

- The Table and Chairs
- Table Cloth
- Pots
- Cutlery
- Candles Scent
- Drinks
- Masks
- The Invitations
- Publication
- Music Playlist
- Sound making devices / listening devices
end to their involvement in this order. One can draw a parallel here to the modern whistleblower (e.g., Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning) as spoilsport, for they refuse to play the game from within the system and publicly call out the inconsistencies of the symbolic order of the legal, political, or institutional hegemony, therefore ending their involvement in the game. The public and political outcry and hatred shown towards these figures is symptomatic of the polarisation of positions when a critique as a withdrawal-from a system is employed: “In the world of high seriousness, too, the cheat and the hypocrite have always had an easier time of it than the spoil-sports, here called apostates, heretics, innovators, prophets, conscientious objectors, etc.” The cheats, hypocrites, and players who abide by the rules are the insiders who are politicians, citizens, and police officers, but they also include pseudo-sanctioned playgrounds and roles for the cheat, like the priest, politician, religious cult leader, judge, artist, comedian, writer, etc. These sanctioned roles allow an engagement-with society where the rules, structure, and hegemonic order can be bent and reshaped. But does it nullify the efficacy of these playful creative encounters as counterhegemonic practices to sanction and ratify their transgression?

Some artistic practices can, and do, fully embrace this position of the cheat within society, as with the comedian or the trickster, as they can act as the archetypal fool in their actions and words. This goes too for language. For example, the anarchist Hakim Bey describes the Taoist writer Zhuangzi’s type of speech as “spillover saying,” which uses the metaphor of words as vessels that carry meaning that is liquid. Every instance of usage fills the word with meaning that can be overfilled and spontaneously overflow, altering or even reversing the meaning as “the vessel fills up and empties again and again—same vessel, but potentially a new meaning each day.” Playing with this pathology or “influx of mind” causes a spilling over of meaning; the role of the artist, anarchist poet, satirist, etc., fits into the chaotic mania of sanctioned carnivalesque spaces that remain inside and outside real life, which are liminal playgrounds filled with the potential for subversion and transgression. The anthropologist Klaus-Peter Koepping describes this peculiar role of the trickster or fool in relation to medieval culture: “Such social figures of antistructure, which surpass the boundaries of the controlled, irreversible, perfect delineation of the world we find in the clown and the transvestite and in customs like the backward acting and reversing of speech at festive occasions.”

Active and useful utilisation of the festival and carnivalesque “topsy turvydom” can be seen in the “process of queer worldmaking” that took place in 1950s San Francisco in the form of playful singing, dancing, dressing up, storytelling, and playing cat and mouse with the police state. A prominent figure discussed by Benjamin Shepard in his book _Queer Political Performance and Protest_ is José Sarria, who operated as entertainer and provocateur at the Black Cat club. Shepard describes the goal of these very elaborate social practices as ultimately “participating in a different kind of citizenship.” This role play is another world that rejects the current one in a process similar to what social movement scholar James Jasper describes as “the playful potential of art, which creates another reality for us to ‘try on’. … This other world often feels more real than our everyday life, for we can try on our ‘real’ selves, penetrate to deeper truths and identities normally blocked by our everyday routines.”

Playful countercultural moments, similar to Larp, hold their own séance within demarcated spaces of temporary sanctioned transgression as a playtesting of a different order, but not every player or act within the scene is eager to extend the boundaries of that immersive space, thus pushing the fantasy into the real world. The appetite of those who play the game for the sake of playing the game can also be used by those who do play with countercultural motives, as the potential for this play to spill out onto the streets as semblant action is always possible. This is embodied by the fool or the trickster and can be borrowed in satire or ritual; as Koepping puts it: “though we know about the futility of successful revolution, we do not cease playing at ritual rebellion.”

**Playful Estrangement and Social (Dis)engaged Art Between Reality and Play; Art into “Real Life”**

Play is often used as a metaphorical adjective or verb in regard to artistic practices. An artist can be seen to be playfully shaping a work, or playing out an idea, or even being playful with their medium, but it is rare to find the use of play proper. To play without a cynical or critical distancing of the subject and material, or even to literally play a game, would be to wander off into the hinterland of the craftsperson or game designer, which is beholden to the whims of the public or, worse, the market. The artist is not meant to play as the work, but to play with the work.

In 1968 at Stockholm’s Moderna Museet, Danish artist Palle Nielsen turned the inside of the gallery into a playground for children, titling his work _The Model—A Model for a Qualitative Society_. Nielsen in this case used play directly, as play proper, play in itself, without any other interpretation. Play is just play to a child; it is a democratic equality of parallel realities—all interpretations within play are valid, to a certain extent. The qualities of play from an adult, or non-player, perspective become a series of confusing
The recent usage, and perhaps overuse, of the term of Mouffe’s agonism. It is a rejection of the modernist principle of “art for not currently exist but can be coaxed into existence. To make art for a particular type of audience that does not change the fact that it exists purely because of the alibi of art. A happening is “a game, an adventure, a number of activities engaged in by participants for the sake of playing,” justified in its strange and foolhardy existence through the credibility of art. Kaprow’s works created a sublime banality that took the shape of a new outside to “real life” and to “art,” a third space that can be confused for both and can oscillate between these two states as a subversive playground. In the words of the artist:

Now, as art becomes less art, it takes on philosophy’s early role as critique of life. Even if its beauty can be refuted, it remains astonishingly thoughtful.
Precisely because art can be confused with life, it forces attention upon the aims of its ambiguities, to “reveal” experience.96

Pedagogical Playgrounds of Art
Between the Bureaucratic and the Qualitative Community

Art has a credence and an alibi to cross disciplines, reach different social strata, and spill over into different areas of cognitive behaviour where we can find play proper, even if it is not described using such an unserious word as “play.” Even if we side step the faux interaction of interactive art and the glossy gallery-and-art-collector-friendly relational aesthetics, then we still find the twenty-first-century contemporary art scene in the depths of some kind of mania for all things social and participatory. The recent rise in socially engaged art practices that have both influenced and followed the “pedagogical turn”98 give rise to the question: What exactly is happening in this work and what role is the artist playing?

In The School of Panamerican Unrest (La Escuela Panamericana del Desasosiego) (2006) by the artist and pedagogue Pablo Helguera, who is one of the main protagonists and promoters of socially engaged art,97 a ramshackle mobile schoolhouse travelled between Alaska and the southern tip of Chile. Along the way there were discussions, performances, and screenings around different topics that tried to relate to the utopian dream of a pan-American cultural identity. Helguera played the role of social agitator, educator, and spectator and who performed all of these roles during the process of the work. The art is present in all the multiple banalities of this type of social project, as it refuses to separate itself into a singular mediatised image or series of documented media such as photography, written descriptions, and anecdotes. It is, like Kaprow’s happenings, an art that cannot be easily distinguished between real-life acts, such as discussing, teaching, travelling, building, and storytelling, and the symbolic order that is representational art. As Helguera puts it: “Art is a space, which we have created, where we can cease to subscribe to the demands and the rules of society; it is a space where we can pretend. We can play, we can rethink things, we can think about them backwards.”98 This description of art is reminiscent of the medieval and carnivalesque role of the fool who is able to speak backwards and reverse roles in society,99 a cheat who is able to instigate a critical engagement-with social and cultural hegemony rather than a detached withdrawal-from.

There are many more practitioners and collectives who, like Helguera, are involved in this crossover between art and life, pedagogy and playground, the institution and the grassroots. The Copenhagen Free University, School of Arts are all artist-run initiatives that seek to subvert spaces of institutional education. Along with these, there are collective and individual artist practices that collapse all boundaries between artwork and real life entirely via simply producing, assembling, and organising workable and, importantly, economically and ethically viable community-based projects. They appear civic-minded and inclusive through their treatment of topics and approaches to material, which are far from merely using people as props or requiring the artist to transmute material as with Kaprow and Beuys. These practices are sometimes indistinguishable from the activities of real life, but are accepted as art to the extent that they are able to win the Turner Prize, as did the art and architecture collective Assemble.100

This can sometimes be problematic, such as when artists find themselves fulfilling the roles of actual social workers, which, beyond being a charitable and commendable civic-minded act, holds questionable artistic merit. For example, the North American social practice artist (which the Americans have turned into the frankenword of “SoPra”101) Sean Starowitz, for his work Fresh Bread, created pop-up bakeries that “utilized abandoned, unused urban spaces and/or vacant lots around the Kansas City metro area” to put “high-quality bread directly into people’s hands.”102 These SoPra practices become diluted forms of grassroots community-based entrepreneurship filling in for the failings of late capitalist Western governments on a local level. The artist in this case takes on the civil role of a cultural facilitator that fits neatly within the neoliberal envisioning of a decentralised and private public commons curated and run by artists, enabled via the free flow of capital and lack of alternative solutions to local problems. As such, these projects are now even documented in the same statistical manner as governments and businesses to prove their effectiveness: “1,300 people came to 17 events and programs. … To date, over 400 loaves have been distributed through Fresh Bread.”103

On the flip side to this type of uncritical socially engaged work, we find an artist like Thomas Hirschhorn, who is unapologetic in the aims and reasons for his work within a “community.” He has a series of works that are temporary public monuments that occupy space within very public and communal areas, often in poor communities of Western capital cities, where discussion, lectures, exhibits, food, and various other activities co-exist inside roughly built structures that house the work for a few months. The most recent of these was Gramsci Monument (2013), which was set up in a housing authority development in the Bronx, New York, and revolved around Hirschhorn’s “love for Antonio Gramsci [as] the love of philosophy, the love of the infinitude of thought,” which he identifies as driving his projects towards “sharing this, affirming
it, defending it, and giving it form.” He creates these social spaces not as careless community-driven planes of free-form interpretation that promote simplistic multiculturalism and frictionless liberal participation, but as structures that are complex and require critical engagement. He explains: “I do not want to invite or oblige viewers to become interactive with what I do; I do not want to activate the public. I want to give of myself to such a degree that viewers confronted with the work can take part and become involved, but not as actors.”

So, to begin to examine my own artistic practice in relation to these other types of practice that I have discussed throughout this thesis, I will compare where the lines between art and “real life” are drawn and where the switching between immersive and discursive elements might take place. My work is composed to take on the metaphorical and symbolic form of a social game, which is presented to participants as a method for them to engage-with the playtesting of a different semblance of order or to adopt an alternative role. The structure is a presentation of new and old rules that teases and provokes the participant to take up a new position against the work: this can be inviting a person to talk from a different role or simply asking a passing person a single question in second-person, so that to answer they must own an alternate role and thus take up an agonistic position. I create scenarios that have multiple departures but which have a singular origin; like a crafted question, riddle, or maze, they invite the possibility of speculative play but also a type of friction that interrupts the total immersion of play. These are artistic games that are both conditional and unconditional. That is, they rely on the conditions of the world/scenario/game/installation/society they are presented within, but can overspill into the uncondition- pathological of pure folly/absurdity/satire/fun/ inebriation—behind the artist’s and society’s back, inside the magic circle, and within the alibi of art and play. My work colludes with people in many different guises: an art conference that is temporarily hijacked to talk about the future problems and solutions for an alternate reality, an invitation to talk about peace in a casino of questions, the formation of a nomadic group that invents their own language to be able to communicate through a world of noise. The work is an invitation to co-create a space within a new set of rules. This invitation may or may not be taken up, and there is always the possibility for the cheat or the spoilsport to work their magic upon these artistic games.

**FEAST OF THE RED HERRING ✨**

*Between the Redacted and the Enacted*

*See Appendix I for lists of artists and those who attended dinner*

My recent artistic project Feast of the Red Herring (FOTRH) (2017) was an attempt to play a social game with the definitions of “public invitations” and “private invitations” and to playtest a physical occupation of space in three ways: with a secret dinner, a public symposium, and a re-Larp of the secret dinner (an oscillation).

The secret dinner, a space of opacity, was an invitation to a fictional inaugural secret society dinner that took place at Moderna Museet afterhours. Fourteen people were invited to attend the secret society dinner and to help form a temporary secret society. There were also fifteen artists whom I invited to create all the props for all the practical and aesthetic needs of the imagined secret society, including the table, plates, cutlery, pots, placemats, cups, menu, decorations, masks, food, attire, sounds, and smells. From the start of planning this project, the artists and everyone who was invited were kept in the dark and unaware of each other’s activities; even Moderna Museet (where the FOTRH events were to take place) and Malmö Art Academy (where as a student I was required to submit all my plans for this particular project) were not given any information about who would be included. Documents were provided with redacted names, dates, and locations, all hidden from curators, tutors, and artists.

Imitating the concept of a secret society dinner, occult club, or medieval feast, FOTRH staged a secret dinner where the fourteen invitees could explore topics surrounding secrecy and transparency. Here is an extract from the first invitation sent out:

*We will hide behind closed doors and have an open conversation. We will play-out alternative systems for reaching consensus. We will play-test an opposite to open governance; what the Romans would call arcana imperii (secret governance). We will drink and eat to give us energy and make us merry.*

The idea was to manifest a physical location that could act as the playground, or magic circle, from where the roles of ordinary society may be reversed or temporarily lifted through the invitation to play a game. By accepting the invitation to the dinner, there was an agreement to participate within the rules of a game whose mechanism held the possibility to act and work counter to the social norms and rules ordinarily laid down at dinner parties (inside and outside an art institutional context). This dinner was a type of space
for playful subversion that provided an opportunity for an ulterior mode of being together.

The public symposium, a space of transparency, was formed through a deal made with those invited to the dinner, as they also agreed to attend a second meeting that would take place “in public” one week later. This symposium was also a form of playtesting, but instead of testing out the parameters of secrecy, it tested out the type of transparency to be gained from a public conversation, in the formal tone of a symposium and in a well-known public art institution such as Moderna Museet. It was an invitation for critique, a discussion that sought to eliminate the opacities and hidden impropriety from my decision-making and thus open up my processes to scrutiny and debate. This was done using the logic of democratic discussion, with those invited given equal time to give verbal statements, feedback, and questions directed towards myself or others at the dinner table. There was time for the audience to ask questions and participate, in some ways, in the discussion. It played by all the rules usually laid out at such gatherings of art or academia, with a predetermined structure designed to provide equal opportunity for all those present to participate. As may be obvious, I approached this structure with a similar amount of scepticism to that of the secret dinner, as both the private and public presentation and representation of ideas have their own flaws, inequalities, and functional constraints that should be explored and understood relative to each other.

The re-Larp of the dinner, as a space of semi-transparency (as an oscillation between the private dinner and the public space of the symposium), was an artist-led workshop around the table setting of the Feast of the Red Herring that used the framework of Larp to generate a gamespace that could be consciously entered into and then discursively and rationally left behind. The three parts of Larp technique that allowed this to work were: the pregame workshop, which situated the rules of play and agreements that differ from real life in order to create a safe space of understanding; the period of play, which allowed freeform play and required a suspension of belief supported by the framework of previously established rules; and the post-game debrief, which made room for a rationalising and cognitive break from the flow of play.

Critique and Conclusion
Between Play and Pedagogy

There were many different levels to FOTRH, to the point that I could no longer hold a conception of, or describe and name on behalf of those involved, what certain types of experience were created or what interactions between myself and all the actors, spectators, participants, invited artists, and players were taking place. For instance, I invited the artists on the premise that they could make whatever they imagined a secret society would use for a table, decoration, music, or food and left however they decided to carry this out up to them. I stated that during the dinner the artworks would be “in use” and afterwards they would be returned to the artists. There were a lot of unknowns for me as an organiser, even down to the fact that my phobia of mushrooms had to be faced when I realised the two artists whom I had invited to create the food, Petter and Felix, had made three courses based solely upon different types of edible fungus, lichen, and mushrooms!

The framework of not knowing what else would be at the table provided the artists with a freedom to design according to the blueprints of a world building all of their own, yet somewhat prefurred by the provocations of my brief and their understanding of my expectations but also of the expectations of their own imagined secret society dinner guest and how that imagined guest would come to use their plate or cup, cutlery or table. One of the reasons an artist would usually agree to be part of a show or someone would attend a symposium is because of the credibility of the other artists’ work or because they know who will be speaking, but these transparencies were removed in FOTRH. All the artists were told that their participation within the show was to be kept secret and that they could not reveal the information to others. Many of the artists managed to contact each other and figure out a great many things about the project without any intervention from me; due to my mostly inviting locally based artists, it was easy for some of them to figure out nearly half of the other artists invited. It was a secret for the sake of a secret, as nothing was at stake, nothing would be ruined by revealing this information, apart from the game of secrecy would cease to be played.

What was essentially on the table in the project, so to speak, was the problematising of the lines between secrecy/opacity and openness/transparency, the redacted and the enacted, which are the categories with which I have defined the differences between inclusionary/engaged projects and those that seek an exclusionary/disengaged withdrawal-from or break with a subject. It was an engagement with the possibilities of new identities that could operate in the shadow of the open and inclusionary policies that make up the hidden curriculum of contemporary art. It sought to find temporary fixed identities or exclusionary spaces that allowed for different playful faux antagonisms before opening those positions up again to the critique of contemporary art and the infinitude of interpretations.
The actual night of the dinner was an attempt to sanction and agree upon a temporary space where people were allowed to be someone slightly different from themselves and occupy a temporarily fixed alternative. The final invitation to attend the dinner explained: “There is no requirement to be anyone except yourself but there is a possibility that whilst at the table you will play a different role than that which you normally play. To be at the table is to be in-play and this means there is an alibi, or an excuse, that allows you to lie, deceive, joke, pretend, and play away from everyday reality.”

In this type of work, the art does not solely reside within the symbolic order of representation, instead happening through the development and nurturing of the “space of action,” a term coined by the Swedish group Interacting Arts in their book Deltagarkultur (Participation Culture). To move from looking to acting, from estranged to engaged, to be immersed in a different set of rules than usual creates an inherent transgression that is usually met with a sensible amount of mistrust. In order to build trust one requires there to be accountability (which I as the artist and instigator of the situation took on) and also openness or transparency (which under the conditions of FOTRH ran counter to the game of secrecy, for, as we know, “secrecy means impropriety”). Several people I invited turned down the offer as they did not know enough about the project, which was a completely understandable reaction to something that claims to be secret and opaque. My request for opacity laid out a pre-existing reason for mistrust that was openly closed, an imperfect set of terms and agreements. As I was not laying out my own politics plainly from the start and presenting it as a frame or explanation, there was a fear from those involved that they would be exploited, turned into props or actors within my art to be looked at rather than participate in the space of action.

At the very beginning, once everyone had arrived, people began finding their places around the rather ornate table created by the artists, and I left the room for five minutes. When I came back, everyone was standing in silence in front of their seats staring at each other, but another described it as a positive serene silence of expectancy and a gentle encountering of each other, but another described it as a place where their power had been reduced and they just wished that someone would break the spell. The difficulty with creating a participatory space of action is that it can find itself to be very “engaging” or immersive, like Debord’s description of the “exciting game,” but at the same time requiring no critical reflexivity from the participants within that experience. Kaprow describes this type of involvement, which also happens when audience participation occurs on TV (in reference to an early version of reality TV): “they thus pass (for a time) from watching to doing [but] in their thoughts they never leave their seats.” FOTRH was not distinctly immersive; in this sense, as the spell of role playing was broken from the beginning, it never became a total game. While some people used their real names and others made comments out of character, because they were all (mostly) strangers to each other, upon arrival they sought to reinstate the normal social rules and boundaries that pervade a dinner party at night in an art gallery, whatever they might be. The participating dinner guests were given unclear motives and told from the start they could deceive, lie, and deviate from the normal rules of society, but then again this break was not total and even, as there was no replacement order waiting to surface, no deviations that demanded representation immediately.

FOTRH did not use play proper; it was a temporary fantastical space created through the alibi of art and lifted into use by those who accepted the invitation to play this game. It could remain as satire, immersive drunken mania, awkward social niceties, intriguing art installation, or a fun night at the museum, but there was, at least by design, the possibility of transgression and impropriety. FOTRH is a project that is still ongoing in my own reflections and those of the others involved, who are writing their own account of what took place for a forthcoming publication on the FOTRH project that will be printed in the summer of 2017. To invite adults to play will always be a difficult and tense proposition; even if it is an offer that is refused, by the spoilsport, or usurped, by the cheat, the game is played out as a building up and releasing of tensions. For the game to continue there has to be an overspilling, “jouissance,” or an “influx of mind” that distracts from reality and engages us within the temporary wandering immersion of play. Debord saw play and the nature of games as a way of reconnecting the proletariat to the terrain that had been lost through the alienation of the spectacle-commodity economy. Debord created a board game called The Game of War, which, he insisted, in his 1989 biography and as the writer Richard Barbrook recounts, “was his most important legacy to the future generations: a ludic meditation … which would soon join Chess, Draughts and Bridge as a game played in the cafes, clubs and homes of the more proletarian and bohemian neighbourhoods.” Though its ludic subversion was based in a fantasy, The Game of War was seen as training for the coming revolution. It was a game that could be played by anyone and, like Larp, allowed the creation of multiple tricksters playtesting their tricks and cheats for later use in real-life politics.
In contrast, we find that Kaprow talks about play as an end in itself: “Play, however, offers satisfaction, not in some stated practical outcome, some immediate accomplishment, but rather in continuous participation as its own end. Taking sides, victory, and defeat, all irrelevant in play.” However, the medium of play as a "space of action" is an arena where action is also neutered and reduced to mimicry or agonism but can be reflected upon during or after an immersive moment. This switching from the immersive “fun” or “mania” of play into the realisation of what the logic of a game required you to hold to be true is also part of play; knowing that the game will end and that the rules will no longer apply to real life is a reflexive activity that is tied to play. The encounters that occurred between the “real” lives and the “unreal” lives that were played out during the FOTRH dinner table and symposium were undivided, and therefore formed some blended new identity. It is comparable to the children who would play next to each other inside Palle Nielsen’s The Model, who could, at some points, imagine the work to be whatever structure they wanted, be it pirate ship, outer space, dark forest, or mother’s dining room, but are then forced to play the same game together. They had to communicate and relate their ideas about the rules and logic of their own illusion and reach some playable consensus to be able to be together in play, with co-mixed realities constantly forming and breaking. This is like the encounter that took place between the participants in FOTRH, who wanted to play, to get lost, but all arrived in their own spaceships, wagons, motorcars, and hovercraft and were unable to relate these experiences to each other without reflection upon their own world building and critical comparison between each other’s actions: the adult world building subdued the playful child.

Perhaps reflection is another way of saying oscillation, as we, as players, in whatever type of game, keep on feeding back upon the experience and relating our own lives to the different roles and hegemonic structures we encounter. This mixture of reflection and encounter is essential to the paradoxical pedagogy that art can access. Art does not need to apologise for its subversions and transgressions, though it can be judged on them; it is a seeking, a playtesting of different materialities and subjectivities. Reflection, or oscillation, is an activity that is full of potential antagonisms that are allowed to surface as participatory agonisms within the milieu of different states, as with Larp role playing, Kaprow’s happenings, Debord’s Game of War, and Hirschhorn’s artistic social monuments. The reflection on the encounter, the retelling of the event, is a way in which we remEDIATE an unknowable immersive mania such as play; though this reflection and critique can only be a mediated one, this mediation co-narrates the encounter and once more can also be part of, or during, play. Hirschhorn talks about his work as an invitation for others to be involved in something that he is doing, because he is furiously creating a world of his own that people can join and be a part of, but also reflect upon. As he says, “What counts for me is that my work provides material to reflect upon. Reflection is an activity.”

My argument in this thesis has been that there are possible routes towards counterhegemonic practices that require movement in between subjectivities—a “third way,” as Rancière terms it—and that reflection and oscillation are possible methods towards such practices. There is no winning hand in a game that must constantly restart, alternate, and edit its own rules, and we must begin to play serious games that embody this speculative rearrangement; in mancala’s symbolic world building or Nomic’s self-amendment, Larp’s playing to lose or Kaprow’s poetic banality, there is an ordered disorder. The temporary subversion of play can allow an oscillation between the immersive and discursive states and help us recreate new realities and relations. Within my own work, I seek to create a vessel that uses the modus operandi of play within speculations, questions, scenarios, experiences, stories, and props to encourage the movement of thought and action closer together. A playful and paradoxical pedagogy that is both ignorant and knowledgeable at the same time, it is full in the immersive act and empty in the discursive definition of a subject; it is a vessel that will overspill over and over and over again.
**FOTRH List of Artists**

Kah Bee Chow  
*Blue*  
Table Decoration

Desmond Church  
*Masks* (pigmented beeswax, animal hair, dried thistles)

Sam Conran  
*Secure Key*  
An algorithm that encrypts secret or private conversations in a method that uses deterministic chaos inputs, Euclidean rhythm necklaces, and random seeds to act as the encryption keys

Ingrid Furre  
*Sandsnails*  
Plates

Martha Hviid  
*Allihopa*  
Candles

Maria Norrman  
*Ceremonial Cordons*  
Garb

Olof Nimar  
*Bouquet*  
Placemats

Petter Dahlström Persson  
and Felix Dahlström Persson  
*Rundad vanliga helt underjordisk bildning* (Rounded, Usually Subterranean Formation)  
Protein, Fat, Carbs

Tine Maria Damgaard  
*Mid-table Conversation Pieces*  
Table Decoration

John B. McKenna  
*Djinn Dave*  
Live Coding

Max Ockborn  
*Table for Communication*  
Table

Lucia Quevedo  
*I pretended to be good at it so i could talk to you*  
Cutlery

Wilfred Wagner  
*Thing/name: Bill Book*  
Bill Books

Albin Werle  
*The Conspiracy of Flowers*  
Bottles, Elixirs, Coins, Game Board, Mythology

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**List of FOTRH dinner guests**

Sarah Jury  
Kotada Ab Yonus  
Nina Runa Essendrop  
Kristoffer Ørum  
Keenan Allen  
Ana Maria Bermeo Ujueta  
Kevin Malcolm  
Moa Alskog  
Anna Berg  
Nils Svensk  
Julia Rutt  
Elena Tzotzi  
Francis Patrick Brady  
Henning Lundkvist

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12. Romano Guardini, *The Church and the Catholic: And the Spirit of the Liturgy* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1953) (Ecclesia Orans I, Freiburg, Herder 1922), 39. Described in this translation as “purposeless, but still full of meaning.” The original German “zwecklos aber doch sinnvoll” can be translated, as Huizinga does, to “pointless but significant.”


Sascha Meinert, Larp is an acronym that has become a noun within the community that created it. Rather than “LARP,” I will use “Larp.”


“Wilt,” Stockholm Scenario Festival (website).


Kagas, “Playing the Stories of Others,” 152.


Bertolt Brecht and John Willett, “Emphasis on Sport,” in Brecht on Theatre.


Augusto Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed (London: Pluto, 2008), 144.

Augusto Boal, Games for Actors and Non-actors (New York: Routledge, 2002), 17.


Huizinga, Homo Ludens, 12.
Referred to by Hakim Bey as Chuang-Tzu.


Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest*, 27.

Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest*, 27.


Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, p 76.


Koepping, “Absurdity and Hidden Truth.”


“Fresh Bread,” Starowitz’s personal website.


“Dia Art Foundation Presents Thomas Hirschhorn’s Gramsci Monument.”

*Futurological Congress*, 2014, “Pixelocracy.” For more information, see my personal website at http://francis-patrick-brady.co.uk/Futurological-Congress.

Universal Scenarios for Peace, 2016, “Pixelocracy.” For more information, see my personal website at http://francis-patrick-brady.co.uk/Universal-Scenarios-for-Peace.

*PHONOMADIC*, 2015, “Pixelocracy.” For more information, see my personal website at http://francis-patrick-brady.co.uk/PHONOMADIC.


Woodrow Wilson, quoted in Birchall, *Secrecy and Transparency*.


Allan Kaprow, “Education of the Un-artist II,” 82.


Koepping, “Absurdity and Hidden Truth.”


“Fresh Bread,” Starowitz’s personal website.


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*PHONOMADIC*, 2015, “Pixelocracy.” For more information, see my personal website at http://francis-patrick-brady.co.uk/PHONOMADIC.

Introduction
This text attempts to analyse the fundamental ideas and motivations behind the final project I produced in partial fulfilment of the Master of Fine Arts in Critical & Pedagogical Studies at Malmö Art Academy and presented at Inter Arts Center in Malmö in May 2017.

One of the main concerns of visual artists and cultural producers is understanding the capacity of an artwork to affect and really reach an audience. How do I, as an artist, facilitate and activate a communication process? Who is my potential audience? How do I reach it? Which strategies should I use? And which ethical, political, and social implications could be distilled from any cultural proposal? It is also important to understand the gap that always exists between the work and the viewer. How can I work to reduce it? And how can an artist position themselves in relation to that gap? It is probably true that in every human endeavour, the person undertaking it has asked themselves if their actions have any significance, and when you work with projects that deal with communication, if that communication is not effectively produced, there is an unavoidable sense of failure.

The idea of “audience” is therefore central to any type of cultural production, and around that idea is where my project was intended to be built. My objective was to investigate more active ways in which the audience could be included in the artistic process, with a goal to explore and intensify participation and involvement. I conceived my project, Study for a Quartet, as a work constituted by two parts: a pedagogical, discursive element and an interactive installation.

Study for a Quartet

The pedagogical part was a participative proposal conducted with a specific group of students, and the interactive installation proposed another type of participation directed towards an anonymous spectator.

My decision to include these two elements in my project was influenced by Claire Bishop’s critical analysis of participatory art in her book Artificial Hells, which I will return to in more detail later on. My two-part strategy was also influenced by an analysis of art proposals and strategies developed in the last two decades that are specifically concerned with the idea of the spectator and their activation as participant and co-creator of the artwork.

In the 1990s, theorist Nicolas Bourriaud introduced his concept of relational aesthetics as a way to describe artworks in which the role of the audience was radically different from its previous roles, reflecting on the work of artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, Pierre Huyghe, and Carsten Höller, among others, who shift focus onto the relations between the participants themselves. As a ramification of the relational aesthetics movement, participatory art projects have become common strategies in the art world in the last few decades, along with an important increase in the number of pedagogical art projects that could be framed as a subtype of participatory art.

There’s likewise been an explosion and interest in installation art that, through certain different strategies, claims to radically activate the role of the spectator and completely transform that relationship. Interactive art could be considered a subtype of installation art, the most important quality of which is its capacity to
exponentially multiply the importance of the role of the spectator, their participation, and their conditions as a co-creator.

My project attempts to explore two formats of presentation, chosen for their potential to affect the participation and the involvement of the audience.

Project

*Study for a Quartet* is an interactive video installation made in collaboration with students from the Conservatorio Superior de Música in A Coruña, Spain, and students from the University of Applied Arts Vienna, Austria. In this collaboration, my role was as a facilitator with each group of students, working with them to produce a single self-contained art piece, a sensorial and spatial experience for the spectator. This goal was the driver behind the workshops, but the final installation was meant from the beginning to be understood as fully integrated with the pedagogical work as well as its documentation, with all of these elements together composing the artwork itself. That interactive piece, *Study for a Quartet*, together with documentation generated in the workshops, was what I exhibited at Inter Arts Center in March 2017 for my final project.

The workshops were carried out in February 2017, the first with music students at the Superior School of Music, and the second at the University of Applied Arts with architecture students who are familiar with programming and interactive installations. Through this collaboration with the students from both institutions, an interactive installation was developed. *Study for a Quartet* begins by showing video of a classical music quartet and, through the use of interactive technology and computer software, the work detects the number of viewers in the space and uses this number to activate a video projection that shows the same number of musicians as spectators (up to four).

The coordinator I worked with in A Coruña was Matéo Balboa Doldan, who also plays the clarinet, and the participating musicians were Lucía Quinteiro Socías (cello), Nicolas Fraga González (violin), Enrique Rodríguez Yebra (double bass), and Laura Viana Fernández (second cello). The composition they performed for the project, “Bystander Effect,” was composed by another participating student, Luis Álvarez Cabado, and was chosen from among several different compositions the group had practised and recorded. “Bystander Effect” is an original song and had never previously been performed.

The musicians made an effort to play their parts in a way that was problematic for them. They are used to playing with their peers, but on this occasion they needed to play alone but still in sync with the other musicians. For this task, they designed different creative approaches and conducted several trials and video recordings.

The coordinator I worked with in Vienna was Galo Moncayo Asan, and the participating students were Dennis Schiaroli, Afshin Koupaei, Angelica Lorenzi, and Viki Sándor. During the workshop, the students came up with several conceptual ideas and proposals for producing the piece and developing the software, including working with everything from Arduino to Maya to Processing to Max/MSP. The final software landed upon a complex programming system made in Max/MSP, which behaves in the following way: When the motion detection system detects one spectator, the viewer sees and hears the projection of only one musician; when it detects two spectators, the projection shows two musicians and so on. It is not until the work detects four spectators that viewers can experience the complete performance of the quartet.

Special care was taken during the programming development to add an element of chance by creating an effect that ensures the piece never repeats itself: with each new activation, the order and position of appearance of the musicians is determined by chance. The reason for this is to add a certain degree of surprise. The effect is so that if a person enters the space and sees and hears, for example, the clarinet in one position, when that person leaves and enters again, they will see and hear another musician who will appear in another position. This creates multiple aleatory combinations, but always respecting the syncing of the different instruments and the structure of the musical composition.

Pedagogy

An analysis of the increasing interest in pedagogy from actors in the field of contemporary art reveals that the most plausible reason for this growing engagement is that contemporary art is becoming increasingly feeble in its capacity to act upon the social.

My project proposes that the inclusion of pedagogical elements as structuring parts of the work could be a strategy to influence the social. The work has been proposed as an excuse to allow a pedagogical event take place, striving for two fundamental goals: 1) moving art and the artistic away from an elitist posture and 2) proposing a recuperation of the artistic from other spheres more connected with the social.

The methodology of the project involved two workshops understood as temporary schools in which two differentiated elements of a single artwork were produced, requiring a discursive process between the participants, with its corresponding documentation and the production of an art installation. This plan was articulated around the premise of the workshops being relational spaces, that is, spaces for encounter, exchange, and interaction. The overarching goal was to generate a creative disruption in the everyday life of the workshop participants, a suspension of their “daily rituals,” and through this process create a heterotopic space that would allow for the juxtaposition of the students’ unrelated worlds: music versus architecture,
Austria versus Spain. Here we could refer to what education theorist Gert Biesta calls the “pedagogy of interruption,”² the main interest of which is keeping open the possibility of creating interruptions in what is understood as the “normal” order. Pedagogy, according to Biesta, has to be devoted to allowing this possibility and also be what generates the interruption.

My intention is to understand education as, in the words of the artist and academic Luis Camnitzer, an “alternative” practice rather than one of “training.”³ For Camnitzer, it is precisely the realm of art in pedagogy that allows for the inclusion of elements such as fantasy and poetry, which is currently missing from educational processes and as such is capable of opposing the rational training that is the current foundation of the educational system. The inclusion of art in pedagogy is the inclusion of a space where it is possible to speculate about conditions considered unacceptable, illegal, or inconceivable in other knowledge methodologies. He proposes the term “tabula art”—a wordplay on “tabula rasa”—to exemplify a way of questioning established systems and setting up alternative orders, with this questioning of power ultimately helping to conquer that same power.⁴

The pedagogical proposal consists of providing time and space to the participants and encouraging them to analyse, rethink, and discuss their artistic practices. This is a situation that generates a collaborative attitude based on an experimental and multidisciplinary approach. Such a situation has an aleatory and open nature that allows everyone to act as co-participants and creates space for the communication of ideas. This pedagogical approach is tied to the intention to combine hybrid and experimental ways of making, setting up a kind of informal laboratory that produces a transdisciplinary interchange, or a kind of collective contamination. Through such a process, we can look for new strategies of representation.

*Study for a Quartet* could be considered a “transpedagogical” project, a concept proposed by Pablo Helguera in his book *Education for Socially Engaged Art.*⁵ For him, projects that fall under this definition are enterprises that attempt to create a situation in which the students approach learning processes in a creative way and which allows for collaboration between the students through having a common goal that must be resolved as a collective endeavour. Transpedagogical projects result in the collective construction of knowledge while erasing the borders between disciplines and focusing on social processes of exchange.

In conceiving my project, I paid careful attention to three factors that I understood as essential: questioning the idea of the workshop, working within an independent framework, and positioning myself within the process.

During a presentation on his forthcoming book *Letting Art Teach: Art Education after Joseph Beuys* that he gave in September 2016,⁶ Biesta reflected on the relationship between art and education, discussing his preoccupation with the fact that there exists the risk of approaching that relationship without rigour in regard to either art or education.

Workshops in the education departments at museums have become commonplace, and what we most often encounter here are kids playing in a space. These workshops seek to entertain, not to teach, and they approach art education as a two- or three-hour process in which the final result is creating something that can be hung on the wall. This implicitly sentences art to the perception that it is something that is produced in two hours, pushing it away from any complex and deep analysis. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is not only being produced in the pedagogical departments of museums, but this workshop structure is also becoming more and more common in art schools; even if three hours becomes six and the content is adapted to an adult audience, these workshops nevertheless share a lack of fruitful exchange and rigorous analysis. In either case, the underlying problem with these practices is the same: moving us away from the fundamental aim of every educational process, which is “to endow the individual with a tool of critical analysis that will help him or her understand, criticise, and improve his or her society” and “to form conscious individuals that could affect the sociocultural body to generate more conscious individuals.”⁷

Probably the single most important element in art and in education is time—the time needed to come up with new ideas, to develop new projects, to make mistakes, and to cultivate a reflexive and critical attitude. The time to cultivate a long-term dialogue with peers and, most important of all, the time to lose time. This type of time is precisely what you do not have in a two- or three-day workshop.

Taking into account these reflections and the time limitation encountered with workshops, I determined the most ethical way to proceed was to conceive the pedagogical approach as a short “interruption” to the participants’ fields of expertise and their daily schooling. The idea was clear from the beginning: to find two groups that had a specific technical knowledge, ask them to teach the rest of the participants what they were able to do, and together speculate about how to use their knowledge and capabilities from another angle, creating a collaboration. I wanted to insert an element that would short-circuit their natural ways of producing and to introduce the question “What if …?” to encourage them to reflect on new open possibilities and variations.

I determined the ideal space for carrying out the project was a space independent from any school curricula and any other type of institutional control, thus allowing the participants the greatest amount of freedom and removing the stress of needing to achieve some sort of outcome. The search for participants was carried out at two different schools. The workshops
Study for a Quartet, 2017. Interactive installation, algorithmic programming, video projection and computer motion detection. Inter Arts Center, Malmö, 2017. Angel Nuñez Pombo
took place within the physical space of the schools and used media regularly available to the students, but the sessions were executed outside regular curricular activities. Thus, the project took place using the schools’ spaces, tools, and students, but remained autonomous from its bureaucracy. The idea was to create a speculative project where the result could not be known beforehand and that arose out of a playful situation through which the participants tried to discover new outcomes. This parameter is significant because it raises a question about whether institutions are appropriate sites to carry out innovative transdisciplinary projects or whether it is precisely that institutional condition that makes such locations unsuitable places to carry out such speculative proposals. The necessity of quantifiable and measurable results can sometimes make it problematic to work under institutionalised structures, and so in my project it was important to consciously avoiding a rigid, bureaucratic, institutionalised space in order to permit a space for failure to open up—a space where the participants were allowed to approach the project with a playful attitude.

As far as my role as “artist” and my position as “author,” I tried to disappear, to erase as much as I could of my own subjectivity from the final outcome. In regard to the issue of the positioning of the author, Jacques Rancière’s notion of the “anonymous,” which he develops in his book *Sobre políticas estéticas* (On aesthetic policies), is an interesting posture. Rancière explains that although Gustave Flaubert is considered in the history of literature to be the paradigm of the modern author, he, as author, paradoxically achieves total disappearance within his work—that is, the total annulment of his voice and style, his writing indiscernible from the silent and anonymous lives of his characters—achieving an empathy with the “real” anonymous people who would read his work and who could appropriate the text in order to aestheticise their lives. Flaubert as author disappears, and his prose becomes indistinguishable from the prose of the world. For Rancière, “this complex dialectic between the becoming-anonymous of art, the life of the anonymous people, and the multiplicity of the aesthetic experiences not cultivated is what we should look for behind simplistic ideas about the link between the autonomy of art and the promotion of the author.”10 He criticises and considers superficial the “subversive value that normally is attributed to the militant forms of author denunciation, postmodern pastiche, and claims of the dissolution of the intellectual property in the age of the computerised reproduction.”11 Further, for Rancière, “the aesthetic regime of art does not begin with the consecration of the author, it begins with the identification of the force of the individual creation with the expression of the anonymous life.”12

Rancière also extrapolates this idea of the work-becoming-anonymous as an element of resistance to the idea of the art space, explaining that the art space offers the possibility of granting the anonymous subject an aesthetic experience. This anonymous subject exemplifies the individual who “does not know exactly what they are looking for in the art space and who finds something that the administrators of that art space would never be able to exactly know.”13 Rancière explains that the moment the institution tries to put a face to that anonymous individual, it is trying to place everybody in their corresponding place, and in this way repeats the distribution of roles. To try and make “the neighbourhood youngster … feel at home and encourage him to participative action”14 in those spaces is, for Rancière, to continue a simplistic sociopolitical scheme in terms of high and low, inside and outside. According to him, “the question is not to bring art spaces closer to non-art.” Rather, “the question is to understand the extraterritoriality of art spaces to discover new dissent, new ways of fighting against the consensual distribution of competences, spaces, and functions.”15

My role in the project was as facilitator, which meant creating the conditions for the project, disappearing as much as possible, and allowing the students to design the proposal and their own participation in it. During the presentation of the project at Inter Arts Center, an artist and a colleague asked me: How did you manage to achieve the participation and collaboration of the people involved? At first I thought that the question implied issues surrounding identity (lately I have a tendency to analyse everything from the framework of identity) and cultural differences, and as such I thought what was underlying that question was the differences in subjectivisation and socialisation between different cultures as well as the concepts of professionalisation and economic remuneration. Although this is an analysis that I do not wholly discard, I do believe that the answer to her question is actually more simple, and it is the key idea that runs throughout the project and that sustains it. That is, the project is based specifically in asking the participants what they desire to be asked. The music students were asked to play and speculate about different ways of producing and presenting their work, and were given an opportunity to transgress the rigid limits imposed daily upon them by their school. The architecture students were asked to fantasise with total freedom, without judgment and power structures, about playing with and transforming a given space. Both groups were asked to narrate their experiences, their motivations, their tastes, and their desires, and all of this was carried out in a space open to improvisation and to spontaneous contribution, a space where a symbolic collaboration between different cultural realities was staged.

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Audience
As I previously mentioned, my project is structured in two differentiated parts, the first having a discursive nature—the workshops, understood as temporary schools—and the second being the production of a work of art that took the form of an interactive installation. Both parts could be considered catalysts of experiences from a pedagogical point of view, and both are equally important constituent elements of the project. The exercise of producing an interactive installation acted as starting point and reflective framework for generating the discursive and creative activity in the workshops.

To present the workshop activity in the exhibition space, I chose to use video as a documentation method. The workshop participants responded to a series of questions, and these questions together with the recorded answers were exhibited at Inter Arts Center. This documentation was meant to emphasize the experiences of the participants and was conceived as an information device for the audience.

The idea to present documentation of the participation through specific questions was inspired by pedagogical strategies carried out during the last decade at the Mercosul Biennial in Porto Alegre, Brazil, and also by the teacher’s guide published by the education department of the Guggenheim Museum as part of the 2014 exhibition Bajo el Mismo sol: Arte de América Latina hoy (Under the Same Sun: Art from Latin America Today), which later travelled in 2016 to Museo Jumex in Mexico City. In both cases, a series of questions addressed to both artists and audience operates as a starting point to encourage the audience to develop thinking processes similar to the ones that the artists could hypothetically have used in the process of conceiving their works, establishing in this manner a highly pedagogical dialogue between artists and audience.

For the project I presented at Inter Arts Center, a different set of questions was selected for each workshop, tailored to the two different areas of knowledge of the participants. The questions posed during the workshop were about space, architecture, and interaction, and the ones for the workshop in A Coruña focused on music and sound.

In my initial conceptualisation of the project, the criticisms of “participatory art” offered by Claire Bishop in her book Artificial Hells were fundamental, especially her concept of the “two audiences.” My decision to create a work with two clearly differentiated elements, as well as the conception and design of its presentation in the exhibition space, was influenced by Bishop’s analysis. Bishop based her critique of a selection of participatory art proposals on what could be called the issue of the primary and secondary audience.

Most of the participatory art projects produced in recent years have been conceived for what Bishop calls a “primary audience,” that is, a present audience that has specific experiences and that assists and participates in a concrete event. The vast majority of these projects convey these specific events to a larger, general public by means of documentation and the archive, which is presented in a museum, gallery, or other institution and which fails in most cases to convert a particular experience into a broad and universal one.

To develop her line of thought, Bishop turns to Félix Guattari and his book Chaosmosis: An Ethico-Aesthetic Paradigm, in which he argues for a transversality of art and suggests that every artwork has to have a “double finality”: inserting itself in a social network while simultaneously celebrating the universality of art. Bishop equates this double ontology with her concept of the two audiences, outlining how every artwork must face this double horizon and be successful in both realms, the space of art and the space of the social field.

In the chapter ‘Pedagogic Projects: How do you bring a classroom to life as if it were a work of art?’, she describes various pedagogical participatory projects created under different premises and intentions. For my purposes, I am going to focus on Paul Chan’s project Waiting for Godot in New Orleans (2007), which I consider to be an important example within Bishop’s analysis because it could be considered an unusual project within the category of participatory art.

Briefly described, Waiting for Godot in New Orleans is Chan’s response to the Hurricane Katrina disaster of August 2005. As a part of the project, he moved to New Orleans to work as a teacher, where over the course of several months he organized a series of workshops with local people, which culminated in a theatre production of Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot in the streets of the city. In Chan’s own words:

To imagine that the play was the thing is to miss the thing. We didn’t simply want to stage a site-specific performance of Godot. We wanted to create, in the process of staging the play, an image of art as a form of reason. What I mean is that we wanted to use the idea of doing the play as the departure point for inaugurating a series of causes and effects that would bind the artists, the people in New Orleans, and the city together in a relationship that would make each responsible for the other. The project, in other words, was an experiment in using art to organize a new image of life in the city two years after the storm.

Chan clearly conceptualised three parts to his project: a residency during which he organised workshops and taught for eight months at the University of New Orleans; several stagings of Beckett’s play in the streets of different areas of the city; and a foundation that gave money to local organisations involved in the rebuilding of the city.

Bishop explains that Chan utilised activist strategies to produce a work of art, using his pedagogical
Study for a Quartet, 2017. Interactive installation, algorythmic programming, video projection and computer motion detection. Inter Arts Center, Malmö, 2017. Angel Nuñez Pombo
activity to integrate into the city, meet people, and develop his project. The production of the play and the theatre workshops were commissioned by the Classical Theater of Harlem, and Chan distributed the tasks related to the play to achieve maximum efficiency. According to Bishop, “Chan is an eloquent artist who has frequently defended an Ardonian understanding of art as a language that cannot be subject to instrumented rationality, and whose political potency lies in this very exceptionalism. This is important to bear in mind when considering his Waiting for Godot in New Orleans (2007), a project premised on a clear division between process and outcome.”

Chan differentiates at every moment between the political and social part of the project and the part where an autonomous work of art was being produced. In his awareness of this separation, Chan consciously addressed his two hypothetical audiences, respecting both of them.

My own project obviously has multiple differences to Chan’s work, not least of all because Chan’s was a complex social work, with numerous participants and a myriad of ramifications, and was developed in a large temporal framework. However, his project is useful to illustrate Bishop’s analysis and criticism of the idea of the “two audiences,” which was crucial to the conception of my project. My decision to constitute the work in two clearly differentiated parts—the discursive workshops and the interactive installation—was a conscious attempt to consider the project’s two different and separate potential audiences across two different realms.

Interaction

During the workshops and through the collaboration process, the participants and I decided to produce an interactive art piece. Considering the possibilities of a collaboration between a group of musicians and a group of architects who had experience with interaction led us to the decision that a transdisciplinary interactive project that would allow the spectator the opportunity to play with the sensuous quality of sound would be the most interesting proposal.

In the introduction to New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art, the book’s editor, Christiane Paul, explains that in new media art, the artist often becomes a mediator and a facilitator—for collaboration with other artists and for the audiences that interact with and contribute to the artwork. In new media art, the traditional roles of curators and artists are being redefined and shifted to new collaborative models of production and presentation. The public and audience often participate in the artwork—a role that runs counter to our idea of the museum as a shrine for contemplating sacred objects. She also explains that “new media art has shifted the focus from object to process: as an inherently time-based, dynamic, interactive, collaborative, customisable, and variable art form, new media art resists ‘objectification’ and challenges traditional notions of the art object.”

Related to the definitions outlined above, the installation created through the workshops attempted to create a perceptive experience for the viewer, placing them inside an immersive phenomenological experience and inducing them to perform a reflexive act, that is, perceiving themself in the context of a spatial and temporal activity.

In the experience of Study for a Quartet, the spectator’s relationship with the other spectators becomes a crucial aspect, producing a subjective experience through the interaction with others. The works invites an experience of the space in architectural terms as an instrumental reality constructed through human interaction. The transformation of the space could be understood as experiential architecture, where a physical and cognitive perception is produced together with a reflexive perception of one’s own body. It is certainly a dispositif that amplifies attention and perception, intensifying it and providing evidence of the relationship of the body with the space and with the other spectators’ bodies. Also, as an aesthetic choice, a special emphasis was placed on making the mechanical and technological aspects disappear.

Study for a Quartet is an exercise in conceptual and material minimalism. The spectator encounters an empty and silent space, and as such the piece could be understood as an immaterial sculptural presence, which is constituted by the radius of action determined by the motion detection system. The spectator explores the “sensitive” area and begins to understand their movements as a negotiation with the space and the rest of the spectators. What the spectator perceives is in reality their own presence in the space.

In every interactive project, the underlying illusion of transforming the spectator into co-creator is always there. When one is involved in one way or another in the construction of what one is experiencing, there is always a performatory quality and an interest for the body that is usually directed towards situations of self-awareness. In Study for a Quartet, the device is triggered by the most basic action on the part of the spectator—their presence. This was one of the strategies that historically was used by the first works of art that included spectator participation as an important element.

Historical references for Study for a Quartet include some of the installations produced in the 1970s and ‘80s by artists like Rebecca Horn, Richard Serra, Vito Acconci, and Bruce Nauman, works conceived as configurations that activate and control experiences and situations. These works represent a historical moment in which, for the first time, the triangle of
artist-work-spectator introduced the elements of activity and performativity into art.

A classical quartet is an example of a relational and interactive creative process, where only through the relation of the actions of the component parts is it possible to build a predetermined whole. The interactive dispositif is used to translate the relational logic that exists among the musicians to the spectators and include it in the aesthetic experience. The installation created as part of my project attempts to enquire whether the aesthetic experience in front of a work of art is always a solitary individual act and tries to subvert this status quo, forcing the spectator to be aware and in need of the presence of other spectators in order to experience the piece in its totality.

The decision to use music for the piece has a lot to do with music’s sensorial qualities and its capacity for seduction and immersion. The spatial values inherent to sound fill any space and transform it into a totally different place. When this sound is perceived in an empty space, it takes on an architectural dimension, and the sound reverberation in the space provokes an emotional response, converting itself into immaterial architecture, creating a space with an important evocative richness, and provoking an emotional bond between the space and the spectator.

Despite the fact that Study for a Quartet includes elements of sound, music, and interaction, it has no similarities with projects that also use those elements and are generally called “sound art.” Usually those projects present what could be understood as a structure of aleatory narrative, in which the sounds are played and ordered through the design of the interactive system and that create a sensorial immersion produced by the intrinsic sensual and spatial qualities of sound. Instead the most direct influences on my project came from two artists who, although they create works with sound, are far from being labelled sound artists and are rather considered to be visual artists working with sound. These artists are Susan Philipsz, and specifically her piece Study for Strings (2012) presented at dOCUMENTA (13), and Janet Cardiff and her work The Forty Part Motet (2001). In both of these pieces, the artists use sound as architecture, working with its intrinsic physicality and spatial nature. The study and analysis of these two pieces was a central component
in the workshop run with the musicians; and in the interviews conducted with the students afterwards, their analyses of these works from the perspective of musicians was probably the most interesting part of that documentation.

When analysing digital art and interactive media, an element that is significant and deserves attention is the fact that in the last few decades, their use by artists who are based on the periphery has grown substantially. This becomes obvious when one thinks of Latin American artists and also artists based in countries with weak economies. One of the reasons for this is that the tools of digital and media art allow artists, even with low budgets, to have access and control of the production and distribution of the work, to transform gigantic museum spaces, and to generate any type of hybrid immersive, interactive project completely self-sufficiently.

These artists reflect a do-it-yourself attitude that allows them to maintain a critical and independent posture in opposition to the hegemonic centres and institutional financing policies. These proposals from the periphery question concepts such as professionalism that are managed by the power structures of contemporary art, and which, in the majority of cases, simply mean better access to information and bigger economic investments. The term “periphery,” as Luis Camnitzer explains, is not necessarily a geographical concept; instead, it is a description of the type of relation that is maintained with the hegemonic culture. One could be peripheral in the middle of New York or Paris ... and one could be peripheral in relation to the media of production. If the owner of a television channel or a newspaper symbolises hegemonic power, the artist definitely represents the periphery, no matter where he or she is.24

The use of digital tools in certain situations could be understood as a strategy for production and resistance similar to what happened in another historical moment in Latin America, which Camnitzer explains in his analysis of Latin American conceptualism: “Dematerialization was a form of ‘applied economics’ insofar that it allowed a non-expensive way of

*Study for a Quartet, 2017. Production workshops, University of Applied Arts, Vienna, 2017. Angel Nuñez Pombo*
producing art. … The elimination of the material in this case was not a goal in itself, but was instead a strategy.”

**Spectator**

The idea of the public and the individual spectator underlies the conception of my project and every section of this text, from the pedagogical preoccupation, to the role of the author, to the participatory proposals, to the definition of installation and interaction. My concern with the figure of the spectator and how to affect and activate this figure is an attempt to analyse realities and strategies that allow for an artistic position- ing that could influence the political and the social.

In her essay “Ver a distancia” (To see from a distance) in the book *Los lugares del espectador* (The places of the spectator), Aurora Fernández Polanco explains:

> [The] first historical moment in which the figure of the spectator is authoritatively defined is Pythagoras’s classification of the public that attends the Olympic Games: the ones who participate in order to find glory, the ones who take advantage of the event to sell their products, and the ones who go only to look. It is true that for Pythagoras looking was synonymous with theorising, that is to say, a conception peculiar to the philosophers.

In *Deconstructing Installation Art*, Graham Coulter-Smith analyses the relational aesthetics movement of the 1990s as well as the historical study that Claire Bishop pursues in her book *Installation Art*. For Coulter-Smith, relational aesthetics and installation art are inheritors of a historical current that critic Peter Bürger identifies in his 1974 book *Theory of the Avant-Garde* as being initiated by Marcel Duchamp and the Dada and surrealist movements. Coulter-Smith explains:

> These can be condensed into three features: Firstly, the deconstruction of the traditional concept of the precious work of art via the use of poor materials and found objects. Secondly, a desire to integrate art with everyday life that entails a critical stance towards the elitism of institutionalised art. Thirdly, the creation of fragmented (“nonorganic”) texts via strategies such as montage and chance that encourage the reader to engage in the creative process. Essentially, Bürger’s analysis suggests that significant aspects evident in Bishop’s detailed history of installation art can be traced back beyond the 1960s into the early twentieth century.

For Coulter-Smith, both relational aesthetics and installation art are based in a transgression that “has become a civilised activity to be protected and preserved by the art museum and framed as the product of extremely remarkable individuals.”

The spectator is central to the ideas of both Bourriaud and Bishop. For Bourriaud, relational aesthetics represents a revolutionary implication of the spectator, and Bishop explains that the spectator activation of installation art has social consequences. She states, “This activation is, moreover, regarded as emancipatory, since it is analogous to the viewer’s engagement in the world. A transitive relationship comes to be implied between ‘activated spectatorship’ and active engagement in the social-political arena.”

But for Coulter-Smith, these two affirmations are clearly too optimistic and rhetorical; that is, he contends the implications for the spectator, in both relational aesthetics and in installation art, are insufficient to take the spectator out of the passive consumer regime. In his view, digital and interactive art are the true heirs to the deconstructive art tradition defined by Bürger and are the only proposals that could really activate the spectator and transform them into a co-creator.

Coulter-Smith continues: “the term ‘avant-gardist’ possesses the connotation of total artistic freedom, in the sense of total freedom from any concern for the viewer. That definition of avant-gardism is radically introspective as opposed to a socially oriented extrospection.” For him, the convention of the *dispositif* that we encounter in many artistic practices—that is, the concept of “writeable text” with a non-linear narrative that offers the spectator an intellectual puzzle—could be understood as an elitist posture towards the spectator.

One of the most radical recent analyses of the figure of the spectator is Jacques Rancière’s concept of the “emancipated spectator.” In his book of that title, Rancière rescues the figure of the spectator—his not-active character, his being idle—and opposes the division between vision and action. For Rancière, what is important is not to emancipate the spectator but rather to recognise the spectator’s capacity for active interpretation. Sonia Fernandez Pan, in her article “En busca del Espectador Emancipado” (In search of the emancipated spectator) explains that, in Rancière’s view,

> the vast majority of artists make the mistake of anticipating the reception of the message that they emit to the spectator; but the emancipated spectator is one who is able to translate what an artist/narrator tells him, and in the translation process occur multiple personal idiosyncrasies, too many to be counted by the artist. … For Rancière, art is an excuse to be able to talk about the issues that are not being talked in the places where they should be talked about. … art is the “possibility of dissent.”
Pan goes on to describe that “so much one and the other (art and politics) shape a discourse that pretends to ‘reconfigure the common experience of the sensible.’ So much one and the other look for shelter in fiction as a laboratory where other realities and other discourses can be tested. So much one and the other ask themselves continuously: What if instead of . . . ?”

Rancière, in an interview in Reflexiones Marginales conducted by Amador Fernandez-Savater, contends that

art participates in politics in a lot of ways: in the manner that builds forms of visibility and forms of dialogue, in the way it shapes the practice of artists, in the way it proposes means of expression and action to the ones who were deprived of them, etc. What is relevant politically are not the works, but rather the extension of the capacities offered to everybody to build their own sensible world in another way.

He further clarifies that “producing a work is not producing its effect; the weakness of a lot of installations with political will is being separate from the effect being produced. Emancipation starts assuming the risk of separation. The separation between the will realised in the work and its effect over the spectators is filtered by the conditions of distribution and exhibition.”

Rancière goes on to outline two clear positions in the process of image making:

Some decide to lean towards the incapacity of the spectator through the reproduction of existent stereotypes or through the reproduction of the critiques of those stereotypes, and others choose to believe in the spectator’s capacity to perceive the complexity of the dispositif that they propose and to leave them free to build the mode of vision and intelligibility that the mutism of the image supposes. Emancipation allows for a gaze of the spectator that is not programmed.

Conclusion
This text attempts to navigate certain concepts and complexities related to the idea of the public and the audience, and investigates the implication of these concerns in relation to certain works of visual art from the last few decades.

The overarching interest of my project is to understand the potentialities of affecting the audience and how to activate the spectator. It is important to be conscious of the fact that the role of the public is a multidimensional concern, and this leads to other relevant questions about the position of the author and the ethical, social, and political implications of the proposals of cultural producers such as myself. The institutionalisation of certain radical propositions from the 1960s, now emptied of that radicalness, have led to the dissemination of elitist positions in art as a result of certain “avant garde” strategies. In this text I have attempted to reflect upon ideas of what is radical today, what can have an emancipatory power, what has been institutionalised, what we can call academicism, and how all these concepts could be understood as having been radically transformed since the 1960s.

My entire project is conceived as an excuse to experiment with ways of presenting and formulating an artistic experience in which two fundamentally participatory elements have been introduced as a way to analyse the effectiveness of those elements and their potential to produce other types of relationships and experiences. Those two participatory elements are a pedagogical one, taking the discursive format of two workshops along with documentation of the workshops, and an interactive one, taking the form of an interactive installation that targeted two differentiated audiences: the first, two groups of students, and the second, an anonymous public.

In this text, I introduced certain thinkers whose work influenced my project. Luis Camnitzer is someone who has analysed the relationship between art and pedagogy in depth, and I also introduced other theorists who found inconsistencies within certain hegemonic practices from the last few decades. Gert Biesta questions what he calls the “learnification of education,” which has been produced by structural pedagogy. Claire Bishop, in her influential book Artificial Hells, finds important flaws in much participatory art, precisely because it lacks a rigorous understanding of the idea of the public. Graham Coulter-Smith criticises the simplistic optimism that both Nicolas Bourriaud and Bishop use in their assessments of relational aesthetics and installation art, which they posit radically changed the relationship between art and the public. Jacques Rancière questions the recent obsession with participation and the activation of the spectator, which has grown exponentially since the 1960s. Rancière reminds us that the potential of the “emancipated spectator” resides precisely in the fact that it is impossible for artists to presuppose the condition and interest of the anonymous public, and that any attempt to instrumentalise that gap between work and public in any direction is always directed to maintain the status quo. I agree with Rancière that the emancipatory power of art is precisely that it is not measurable or quantifiable and is impossible to define beforehand, and that art is a radical endeavour in a society that demands everything be measurable to determine its efficacy and efficiency.

My interest in the pedagogical lies not only in the potential to add a participatory factor to artistic
proposals, but also in the understanding that art and pedagogy are the only fields of knowledge whose aim is to create an “interruption” in the order of things. As such, their emancipatory potential resides in the fact they both include the possibility of starting again, that is, the capacity of imagining other relations and other orders. Both propose that there is no real necessity for any given order of things, and the repercussion of that understanding is that we have the capacity to transcend our given roles and our destinies.

6 Gert Biesta gave this lecture at Malmö Art Academy on September 2, 2016.
8 Camnitzer, Arte y Enseñanza. Camnitzer explains that the communicative process includes every kind of distance: between generations, cultural groups, classes, ethnicities, and power positions.
9 Jacques Rancière, Sobre políticas estéticas [On aesthetic policies] (Barcelona: Universitat Autónoma de Barcelona Servei de Publicacions, 2005). This book is composed of texts based on a seminar Ranciére led at MACBA, Barcelona, called “Estética y política, un vínculo para replantear” (Aesthetic and politic, a link to rethink). It has never been translated into English; all translations from this text are mine.
10 Ranciére, Sobre políticas estéticas, 86.
11 Ranciére, Sobre políticas estéticas, 84.
12 Ranciére, Sobre políticas estéticas, 84.
13 Ranciére, Sobre políticas estéticas, 87.
14 Ranciére, Sobre políticas estéticas, 76.
15 Ranciére, Sobre políticas estéticas, 76.
16 The 6th Mercosul Biennial, “the pedagogical biennial,” was the first to present the figure of an education curator.
18 Bishop, Artificial Hells, 245.
19 Unfortunately I don’t have the space to describe or analyse Chan’s work in depth here. See Bishop, Artificial Hells, 250 and Paul Chan, Waiting for Godot in New Orleans: A Field Guide for more information.
20 Paul Chan, quoted in Bishop, Artificial Hells, 251.
21 Bishop, Artificial Hells, 250.
23 Paul, introduction to New Media in the White Cube and Beyond, 1.
31 Coulter-Smith, “Conclusion,” in Deconstructing Installation Art.
32 Coulter-Smith, “Conclusion,” in Deconstructing Installation Art.
37 Ranciére, interview by Fernández-Savater. My translation.
Further References
Schwerbelastungskörper, Berlin, 2011. Wikimedia Commons, the free media repository
Someone laid one stone on top of another stone, but they are not our stones, they are the stones’ stones and things that are material have a lifespan in that they are dissolved into smaller constituent parts at some point in time, and are transformed into something else.

Regarding how one can help to change negative thought patterns by making proposals in artistic work: an aspect of how art can function as a force for atonement in society. About what are known as the “Hitler Stones” and about how we in Sweden traded with the Nazis during the Second World War, and the importance of bringing up uncomfortable events from our history in the present day, of seeing history as alive and as having different viewpoints instead of being over and done with.

I look for support from spatial images of rooms, as in the artwork *In hopes of support from the rooms we use* (2012), which I submitted for my previous degree at Malmö Art Academy. The title can easily appear bureaucratic at first glance, but then I believe people will make a leap and think: Wait a second, surely the room in itself cannot provide support? But rooms, our friends, are not just our own projection, they are also themselves; perhaps they do not exist without our conceptual apparatus, but what if they can be partly seen as doing just that? Rooms otherwise function as repositories of memory, both indoors and out. The same applies to artworks in them, which are not to be presented solely in themselves; they are not alone, they strive for the social. They are there and look at something in the rooms other than themselves. Transformations of that which is material and the disposition of our thoughts have an important place in this. I want so very much to negotiate with my surroundings through art.

Take for example an installation that shows a negotiation, an everyday scene, in working in and being in the exhibition venues, a social situation for several people, as an exhibition. Sculptures are made in sizes that are like those of human forms. If one walks into a dark room and they are standing there, then one can easily mistake them for a person or a ghostly presence. In our uncertainty we momentarily treat the sculptures as people, until we understand that they are not breathing and that they look different, they are too stiff. It perhaps does not even take a second to discover this, but the uncertainty is there for an instant. The further from the full use of one’s senses is, the longer this experience can be. Many people have peered at someone following them on their way home at night, only to be greeted by a road sign or something else in marginally human form in the morning. In the story of Pinocchio by Carlo Collodi there is nothing special about the way Geppetto works that causes Pinocchio to come to life. Rather, the block of wood Pinocchio is carved from had already talked to the carpenter whom Geppetto got it off, and frightened him half to death. The carpenter had intended to make a table leg out of the piece of wood. In the pause before recognition there are these mixed feelings and they are fleeting in time, very short-lived. Seen out of the corner of your eye, sculptures are quite human, but once they are in focus they are not so much so. This could equally well be true of a stone formation that is assembled in a place where you suddenly come across it. Or in a memory of your family in the form of small stones placed on a gravestone.

In memory, sculptures are a person that you have seen before, until they are quite simply there themselves, suddenly, looking at you. From your mental impression to physical material in the same guise, in the same moment. A constant negotiation with the viewer; what is it you are adding to the artwork? This experience can
occur on more than one occasion—we forget so easily. In the dark, all images are subject to negotiation. I did a test in which I arranged the sculptures in the wood workshop as if they were working or just standing in the middle of the room watching, then turned off the light and went home. They frightened a number of people who came in and turned on the light. There was an uncertainty before they turned it on. I want to get away from the material through the installation, but through the physical we can perhaps reach something else in the form, as a basis for conversation, through memory and so on. Not because we are claiming that we have control over the materials, but because we are trying to work together with them in mutual respect as far as we are capable, through presenting a context via the materials in the installation, but, at the same time, in trying to leave them largely in peace. Intuitively we abandon most things sooner or later, but something continues to stay with us in memory.

Sculptures as people can be interpreted as being any human being at all, but as sculptures they exist in their own right. The boundary between artworks and the rest is a fluid one; it leaves the place and goes on towards the social. It is an advantage if it is partly unclear what the artwork consists of in this way, if it succeeds in hiding itself in itself in this manner. The whole thing is in constant transformation, as well as being diffuse, and surely it should not be anything else? Investigations are directed inwards towards changes in negative patterns, but through projection into the physical. Through the way that sculptures turn the gaze to something else, they partly detract from their own importance as artworks. They hopefully do not become as self-centred in doing this. As if to show that the important thing about them will never be themselves, but what they can give in the communication to which they give rise.

**Hitler Stones, Public Art, and Working in a Group: An overview**

What is a Hitler stone? I want to understand something about stone, as a tool rather than as an object, like when Jimmie Durham talks about them, or perhaps as a partner in collaboration. As materials or as something totally their own that we should understand in their own right. Durham made an artwork about these Hitler stones for Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art 2011, which was curated by Gertrud Sandqvist, Sarat Maharaj, and others. The biennial was titled *Pandemonium—Art in a Time of Creativity Fever*, "pandemonium" as when Lucifer was cast out of heaven and, together with his assembled demons, built a palace that could withstand the forces of heaven; an opposite pole in chaos. One of the things that Maharaj takes up from the exhibition in his catalogue text is how the models for the car industry have been designed and served as a template for the rest of industry, along with the way that industry can now be said to live within us. Sandqvist takes up, for instance, the way that the role of the artist can serve as that of a voluntary or involuntary writer of history. Durham’s ideas about materiality and Europe’s obsession with architecture and monumentality displays examples of how one can work with art publicly in an anti-monumental way, and I have tried to appropriate this, together with ideas from, for instance, Paulo Freire, Fred Moten and Stefano Harney about how one can collaborate with others in a group, when designing a series of three workshops I ran in Lund, Malmö, and Hunnebostrand.

The first workshop took place in collaboration with Lunds Konsthall and coincided with an exhibition of works by Staffan Nihlén, whose public sculpture Pienza (1993) in Raoul Wallenberg’s Park in Malmö served as the basis for the group’s work in the workshop. We made an installation in the park that partly imitated Nihlén’s artwork, but which also contained a system that in theory could mean that as a public artwork it could continue for an indefinite period with the aid of the viewer. Together we created a model for how one can set about making several “temporary monuments,” a form of anti-monument. This model was reused and built upon in the two subsequent workshops. In the group we talked about how art can try to help society and about how that can occur. We talked about places and installations as repositories of memory and about what that can mean, about how a sculpture, object, installation, artwork, can abandon interest in itself in order to want to do something other than be isolated in itself. To participate in a context instead of trying to be one. About what responsibility one has to the viewer when one works publicly, and about how we all negotiate our public space in using it.

The Hitler stones were sold by the Swedish stone industry to Nazi Germany from 1940 and right up to the end of the Second World War. The quarries were situated along the coast, all the way from the Norwegian border right round to the other side, approximately where Oskarshamn is. The second workshop took place in collaboration with the Stenhuggerimuseet (Stonemason Museum) in Hunnebostrand on the west coast, where many of the quarries were. We tried to get to know the village in whatever ways we could in the time we had available, and talked with the village’s House of Culture about coming back, and hope the work will continue and can be developed for an extended period. The template from the first group was rewritten here as a model for what we called a “moment in time and space,” once again a format for making public artworks as a group. We talked, among other things, about what an internal negotiation within the group, as opposed to an external negotiation with those we met in the village, might look like. At the end of the workshop, we made a temporary installation next to some of the Hitler stones...
that lie beside the approach to the village. Remnants and also active quarries continue to be a part of the region where Hunnebostrand is situated, with many people having relatives who worked on the Nazis’ commissions in the quarries in question; this is a loaded topic to talk about in this place.

During the difficult years for the stone industry during the Great Depression, which began with the New York Stock Market Crash of 1929, the Swedish state stepped in with subvention orders, primarily of paving stones, and thus saved virtually the entire stone industry from bankruptcy. A similar situation arose with sales to Nazi Germany, the choice often being your family starving or working for the Nazis. Many people, however, on the contrary would not have done this if the state had not guaranteed the deliveries and overseen the sales. It was normal for people to spit on the stones before they were delivered. The stones were ordered through Albert Speer’s office within the GBI (Generalbauinspektor), which was a large, bureaucratic element of Nazism that, for instance, deported thousands of Jews from Berlin to concentration camps so as to prepare Berlin’s ground for the construction of the planned world capital city, Germanyia (which Adolf Hitler had dreamed about since his youth). The stones were mainly intended to be used in buildings and victory monuments in the megolomaniac plans that Hitler and Speer had drawn up for Berlin and a few other cities that were intended to be expanded. Around a fifth of the stones from Sweden were delivered, and the rest were left on quays along the coast when the fortunes of war turned against the Nazis. In order to get an idea of how much stone is involved here, we can say that the total amount of stone paid for is equivalent to the weight of about a million people each weighing eleven “stones” in UK units. Not much of Germanyia was built, but in Berlin’s Kaiserdamm today we can still see a distinctive type of street light that was designed by Speer. We can also see an extremely grandiose guardhouse that today is used as a public toilet, and also detect the preparations for an enormously wide boulevard through the Tiergarten park.

In contrast, probably the most remarkable remnant is what is known as the Schwerbelastungskörper. This is an enormous concrete block that was intended to test the bearing capacity of the ground, and to see if enormous buildings could be built at all (the tests showed that this would have been impossible, since the ground in Berlin is too marshy). Since it was too hard to blow up this block in the densely built-up area, it was decided to leave it intact and, for some time now, it has been a museum instead of a large, anonymous lump. It stands a few hundred metres from the entrance to the disused Tempelhof Airport (which was also a planned part of Germanyia). Because in the workshops we were working with places as repositories of memory, it might be interesting to know that Albert Speer had a total mental block, and that, for a long time, he could not admit what he had done during the war, even to himself. For a long time, he denied his involvement in Hitler’s “Final Solution”—the extermination of the Jews—until the evidence against him was so extremely convincing that not even in his repressed mind could he deny it any longer. But this was after he had served his twenty-year sentence in Spandau Prison. In his case, I find myself thinking of what Paulo Freire says about how the roles of oppressor and oppressed function: as oppressor we do not just do violence to the oppressed, but also to ourselves. There is thus no scenario in which we come out of events unscathed in the role of oppressor. Speer was alone at the Nuremberg trials in asking for forgiveness for his actions, but I am not sure what this means when combined with his repressed memory; one alternative is that he was lying the whole time. What does an apology mean, then?

What the Nazis did and what they planned to do was particularly grotesque; it has a special place in history. A history that cannot be allowed to remain stuck solely in the time when it was enacted. It has to be possible to take up everything that has happened once again, and to go through, re-evaluate and discuss it, in the present moment and in all the times to come. During the winter of 2016–17, I took part in the work of reconstructing the classroom in Durban, South Africa—the “Art History Room”—where Sarat Maharaj was taught about art and art history in 1968–71. The reconstruction was assembled in one of the project rooms at Malmö Art Academy. Maharaj attended the university for “Blacks of Indian Origin,” who were considered by the apartheid regime to be capable of coping with these subjects, while other “races” could not. There was a scale setting out how the different “races” could cope with reading certain subjects, while being incapable of reading others. Such theories have existed for a long time. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze raises the issue of how unpleasant Emmanuel Kant’s theories about things, animals, and races are:

The fact that man is aware of an ego-concept raises him infinitely above all other creatures living on earth. Because of this, he is a person: and by virtue of this oneness of consciousness, he remains one and the same person despite all the vicissitudes which may befall him. He is a being who, by reason of his pre-eminence and dignity, is wholly different from things, such as the irrational animals whom he can master and rule at will.

Animals are, according to Kant, ours to rule over as we will, but he does not stop there, making this partition of humankind:

From the geographic standpoint, just as other biological phenomena such as animals are divided into domestic and wild, land, air, and water species, and
so forth, different human races are also conceived of as manifesting biologically original and distinct classes, geographically distributed. Taking skin colour as evidence of a “racial” class, Kant classified humans into: white (Europeans), yellow (Asians), black (Africans) and red (American Indians).

“Moral” geography (which might as well be called “cultural” geography) studies the customs and the mores held collectively by each of these races, classes, or groups. For example, some elements in the “moral geography” taught by Kant included expositions on culture, such as the “knowledge” that it is customary to permit theft in Africa, or to desert children in China, or to bury them alive in Brazil, or for Eskimos to strangle them. Finally, it is the domain of moral philosophy to show, for example, that such actions, based upon unreflective mores and customs, natural impulses (or “the inclination to evil”), and/or the “commands of authority,” lack “ethical principles” and are therefore not properly (i.e., essentially) human.17

The apartheid period was in many ways a continuation of Nazism’s experiment, and there are those who think that the age of apartheid is not yet over today. There is widespread application of the idea that history has to be constantly updated, brought into the present and re-evaluated in South Africa. Maharaj’s course was called “The World Turned Upside Down: Art and Ethics in the Rise of the ‘Stone Age South’” and spanned an extensive programme with many interesting talks. The course acts as part of the renegotiation, deconstruction, and decolonisation of South Africa, but what it stands for as a basis for thinking can be applied in many other contexts. It has been interesting to try to put myself into the time period of atrocities, comparing what the Nazis did with what happened during the colonisation of various countries in Africa and the accompanying oppression. It is not easy to put oneself into these events without having been there, and I cannot imagine what it was like on the spot (in contrast to Kant’s idea of research). Genetically or biologically conditioned fear, terror, is very different from socially induced fear; this has been exploited by many evil people throughout the ages, in torture and the abuse of power. In working on the Anti-Apartheid Room, we got a chance to be with and to write about the history of what happened during the apartheid period in South Africa, to be with and renegotiate history. Here is an excerpt from the teaching materials for the course:

The thrust of today’s migrations seems largely “Northward”—even in the Antipodes, where they are clearly headed towards the opposite pole. The “South” has tended to signal underdevelopment and crisis. It has also flagged up notions of other possibilities, alternative perspectives, other designs for living. The exodus from the South to the North is at odds with the idea of the Global South as a privileged vantage point from which to critique the world system. We rather have anomalies and crossovers that affirm and straddle, unpick and unravel in one go the received N/S dividing lines. How to map this topsy-turvy global space, how to take its sound?

The starting point for our project at Malmö Art Academy was a “reconstruction” of the Art History Room (Durban, South Africa) of the apartheid years. The AH Room was at the University of South Africa, University College in Durban for Blacks of Indian Origin. This is in the province of Natal with the great Drakensberg mountain range—Ukahlamba—which includes one of the world’s most extensive sites of prehistoric rock art and cave paintings. The reconstruction or recreation in Malmö, Sweden, could have been in any mode—art installation, film, diagrammatic or performative statement, walks, discursive picnics, critical rambles, etc.18

The third workshop was held partly in the reconstructed classroom and partly outside the Academy on the large gravel area at its back. This workshop was open to the public, and we as a group made an artwork outdoors, which was later shown in the Academy’s Annual Exhibition. The models developed in previous workshops were discussed, but the group agreed to create a title and a materials list for the artwork, instead of creating a new template. Educational theory was pretty much to the fore in the preparations for the collaboration, and in the way I worked on creating the arrangements for the participants. In the workshop we focused on various aspects of stones and, for instance, made a brief excursion to the cemetery next to the Academy, where there is a gravestone that killed the stoneworker who is buried beneath it.19 We talked about stones as material (the artwork we made mainly consisted of gravel and pebbles that were already there on the spot) and about what can be counted as material. What can be adopted into art? What can art’s aims or sphere of work be, as well as its potential for working around these Hitler stones as a contribution to a debate? And what can that contribution say? Who do we want to reach with it and who responds?

I found a lot of information about the stones in Kjell Andersson’s 2011 documentary Hitlerstenen—en märklig affär i krigets skugga, which is the third and last part of a series about the Swedish stone industry.20 At the time that the stones were being sold, Nazism had widespread support in Swedish society. Swedish connections to Nazism should be raised and discussed again, as many people are unaware of stories like this one about the stones. The way people talk about our so-called neutrality reflects a false image of Sweden.21
The documentary informs us that the stones were also sold for a second time after the end of the war; the “residues” of Nazi Germany in Sweden were sold at auction via the Foreign Capital Control Office. The stone companies thus made a double profit on the stones that had already been sold but mostly not delivered. After the second sale, they ended up in such diverse places as New York, Berlin, Warsaw, and Moscow, and besides these they are also scattered in little batches all over Sweden. What gave us the right to give these stones such a wretched history as casting this Nazi veil over them? Even if there can perhaps be no atonement that the Nazis might obtain for the crimes they committed against humanity, there might perhaps be some for the material things that are associated with them. What is needed in order to lift this veil of extremism from the stones?

Workshop in Collaboration with Lunds Konsthall:
About spatiality, as in our shared places, about working on sculpture, the social and material, as well as what we use to communicate our ideas and why

“The last monument was a sand box or a model desert. About spatiality, as in our shared places, about What are you to do during the time it takes me to understand and to work on your reasoning? I hope it is the converse, and hopefully our understanding of each other can occur before we go our separate ways; it may be some time before we see each other again. There is work to do in any case. In these spaces for reflection or catching up with one’s information processing a lot of education may go on. Educational theorist Gert Biesta explains:

Education has indeed a relational character, that it doesn’t exist in any other sense than as a relation and “in relation.” But this relation is not one where there is a direct input from the teacher into the mind of the student. The relation is only possible because of the existence of an unrepresentable, transformative gap, a space of enunciation that cannot be controlled by any of the partners in interaction, but at the very same time makes communication possible. This helps us to see that there is no relation in education without the separation brought about by the gap.

Leaving our own sphere in order to be able to talk properly, leaving our own mechanism, our state of separateness, in favour of what happens in the space between us. We are in this moment in time, on our way out of routine and on our way towards something perhaps more interesting in learning. How can one work to create good preconditions for such a situation? If we take this to an extreme, we need a great many routines in order for our mental well-being not to leave us entirely, in order to cope with preserving the way we live. Otherwise we might perhaps more often find ourselves in a communication that only takes us forwards, without anchoring us in what happened before. But this involves an extremely dangerous, unfamiliar territory, I guess. Our social perspective demands that we constantly say no to our impulses. In this way the ritual stands for repetition of routines. In the time in the present in which we cannot recognise ourselves, as well as our greatest opportunity to be able to understand together how our interests can lead to solutions for problems that seem insuperable to us as individuals; we need to come up with forms of speaking with each other and of listening to each other, and we need to act as safety nets for each other if it goes wrong. But things should be able to go wrong; that has to be allowed. In order to do this we have various languages to choose between in the communication, so as not to forget those who do not use words or the implicit language that is hidden in gestures and minor indications. As when waiting for the cogwheels to mesh together in our heads, even if we are not really aware of what is happening, we have just started the process through information acquisition and dialogue with other parties, living and dead, material and immaterial.

“The bus passed over the first monument. I pulled the buzzer-cord and got off at the corner of Union Avenue and River Drive. The monument was a bridge over the Passaic River. … Noonday sunshine cinematized the site, turning the bridge and the river into an over-exposed picture. … The sun became a monstrous light bulb that projected a detached series of ‘stills’ through my Instamatic into my eye. When I walked on the bridge, it was as though I was walking on an enormous photograph that was made of wood and steel, and underneath the river existed as an enormous movie film that showed nothing but a continuous blank.”
(Smithson, 1967, 52–53)
Joachim Koester points out that it is his own mind that Smithson is walking onto the form of the bridge and the other “monuments” in the entropy that is his birthplace:

One of the photographs—one of the few that actually contains text—a concrete wall with the graffiti “PASSAIC BOYS ARE HELL!!”—is amongst the first works I saw by Smithson. … Apart from the intriguing undertone of small-town desperation in the statement with the carefully inscribed “HELL!!”, and the fact that the sentence seems appropriate, written on the wall of a highway construction project, it strikes me that Smithson himself was once a “Passaic boy” and that the inner circle of Hell, according to Dante, consists not of fire but of ice, and thus stands for heat loss, uniformity or entropy.26

If several people in a group could come together in conversation, then the start would presumably be getting to know each other’s positions and acting according to them. Listening and all that this involves is often more important than saying something, but if nobody says anything at all, then there may perhaps be nothing to talk about: we have to try to say a bit at a time. I set up a framework for conversation that pondered how public art acts towards the rest of society, the viewer, what potential these functions have, and how we as artists negotiate with our surroundings through artworks. Understanding something involves an ongoing negotiation with other people about a number of questions simultaneously, of which we cannot get an overview (we use intermediate targets as platforms, so as not to despair too much, several mechanisms so that the brain will not shut down due to overloading). Hopefully we can find support in the various languages when we want to talk with each other; just think how wonderful it would be if languages themselves had an agenda outside of us. But it may seem unreasonable that languages as such might want something themselves? Layer upon layer of our personalities will be fused together and a form of conversation will be worked out before the content is experienced as being acceptable. There are means for finding a common basis in thinking for the conversation. Freire’s ideas about each person’s expertise works well here for lowering thresholds that can be an obstacle in and for conversation, so that we can come closer together, regardless of whether we can identify a person’s position or expertise, it is there, and together we have to come up with a way of expressing this knowledge to each other.

"Freire directly acknowledged the differences in knowledge and experience between himself and the farmers: he created a game in which he asked them a question about something they probably wouldn’t know about, and vice versa. He first asked them if they knew, for example, who Plato was (they did not). Then the farmers asked him a question about agriculture, of which Freire knew nothing. In this way, Freire brought home the point that the differences in knowledge between the parties did not denote superior intelligence on either side but instead was connected to the difference in their environments, interests, and access to various opportunities.” (Helguera, 2011, 51–52)

If you tell me about what you can do, that gives you a position in the group for expressing other things that were previously harder for you to say; a gateway to further conversation. The position that you start from is a fixed point, even if you do not know it. The description of that point can falter. The point is there regardless of whether you know it or not. It is thus not possible to disregard the position one occupies, even if one does not know perfectly precisely what it is. In the same way, each person’s expertise should be able to be a fixed point, regardless of whether it is hidden or in the light. With the public artwork that we worked with in Raoul Wallenberg’s Park, it was as if the artwork almost vanished by fitting so well into the setting in its rounded form. The artwork is a part of its surroundings; it presents itself together with a context in public space, instead of looking at itself.

An aspect of the relationship between student and teacher that I want to take up is one that occurs before the relationship even exists: the preparations made prior to educationally oriented meetings. Trying to make things pleasant for other people by influencing the spatial images of the room, so that those people can work better on whatever they do, for example. Coming up with a pedagogical approach by adapting the spaces we use, trying to understand them for potentially educational encounters. Exchanging and altering the associations that can arise in the form of memories. I put together a group of artists for some continued education, like a workgroup in which we could help each other within various areas of interest. A kind of support group, common to everyone’s own work, but also to what they do together. We worked out a model together for how anyone can repeat what we did in the park with other public artworks, to make “temporary” monuments on these sites with material from the sites, regardless of where they are.27 My preparations were largely about finding the connections and seeing how this could be applied in a workshop, as well as seeing what else could be combined with the workshop. I designed material for discussion in which I left room for what the participants wanted to talk about apart from the topics that I raised.

“That zero panorama seemed to contain ruins in reverse, that is—all the new construction that would eventually be built. This is the opposite of the ‘romantic ruin’ because the buildings don’t fall into ruin after they are built but rather rise into ruin before they are built.” (Smithson, 1967, 54)

What I felt was important in the work on the workshop was to try to provide all the participants in the
One stone on top of one other stone, 2016. Image for invitations to workshops. Max Ockborn
From the workshop in Raoul Wallenberg’s park, 2016. Sculptural installation. Dimensions variable. Max Ockborn
group with opportunities for thinking very much together with others within the area that we wanted to think about. The framework I set up was shifted around when we began working; this is part of the internal negotiation in the group. The first day began with a guided tour of Nihlén’s exhibition at Lunds Konsthall. It soon turned into being both a tour and an open discussion. We talked about the properties of the materials and about how work on sculptures has changed during the years Nihlén has been active.

After the tour, we had access to a conference room at the museum and I had refurbished it before the participants arrived in the hopes it would not be too austere. I moved a lot of objects in the room, which seemed to be looking restlessly outwards, so that they could calm the atmosphere a bit more. I repositioned bean bags and armchairs to make them more inviting, and so that the access routes to the windows were not blocked. I arranged for us to have water, coffee, and so on. We all bring different heritages with us, and situations in turn mirror other heritages.

“But, it’s kind of like that thing where you walk into class, you’re the teacher and you get there a couple minutes early and there are people milling around and there’s a conversation already going on, and some of them might be talking about stuff you might be talking about in class and some of them might be talking about something completely different. … My position, at that moment, what I am supposed to do is at a certain point become an instrument of governance … to call that class to order, which presupposes that there is no actual, already existing organization happening, that there’s no study happening before I got there. … I’m calling it to order, and then something can happen—then knowledge can be produced. That’s the presumption.” (Moten and Harney, 2013, 125–26)

From the beginning of the first day and continuing throughout the workshop, I tried to delay the call to order as long as I could. I believe that, rather than having a situation in which I acted as teacher, we gradually found ourselves creating a working group in which discussion reigned as the decision-making body. I had a presentation as a basis for discussion and leafed through it while we were talking when it seemed like we needed more information, but I never swapped positions to simply pushing information on the group. Instead, I let the discussion dictate the rhythm. Often we already arrived at things that came up in the presentation later on, albeit perhaps with an extra little fragment that we could talk about.

“There are no particular pedagogical performances to expect from an emancipated gardener or from the ignorant master in general. Essentially, what an emancipated person can do is be an emancipator: to give, not the key to knowledge, but the consciousness of what an intelligence can do when it considers itself equal to any other and considers any other equal to itself.” (Rancière, 1991, 39)

Combining this with the delay in the call to order, perhaps I didn’t even need to be a teacher. I wanted to see if the role of teacher could self-destruct, so there were only colleagues, or pupils, left. Which then also means that, at the same time, everyone is a teacher. Everyone in the group talked about their interests and motivations before the presentation and before we began the presentation of the working process, so I explained that I was not interested in running a workshop where I simply tell them things and everyone then simply has to try to take in what I say. Instead, they could see the workshop as an open discussion.

Before working in Raoul Wallenberg’s Park, we discussed questions such as: How can a place try to remember something and shed light on it? How might this be overlooked since many people perhaps do not know what the site was created for? Is the art enough to represent the past so that it gets a place in the present? What type of supplementary information might be needed? How can one choose what will get a place of commemoration, and what can one shed light on with this choice? We cleaned and raked large sections of the park in order to see what it was possible to use as material. There were mostly leaves, twigs, and a great many cement slabs, which we found hidden away behind the hamburger stand. We set up a base by the monument where we had several gatherings, and our bikes, tools, and bags gave it a bit more of a feeling of permanence. After the raking and cleaning, we had got a very physical insight into how the site functioned. We went round in relays in smaller groups and inspected the park in order to see what we could do with it, and this naturally meant that we collected the leaves in the middle of the large lawn. We talked about what we could do as an interpretation or imitation of the work of art that was already there in the park. Here we had an opportunity to talk about what the place was intended to do, and what it might also mean beyond that for those who spend time there.

Raoul Wallenberg made a major contribution during the Second World War when, as special Swedish envoy, he was able to help save thousands of Jews from persecution in Hungary. On many occasions, he did this by issuing documents that let the persecuted person evade capture or to get out of captivity. The monument and the park were made in his honour, for his work, but they also serve as a memorial to the terrible things that happened at that time. The structure of the pink marble makes it look like a flickering flame. A symbol resembling a flame that never goes out, since it is made in stone. A flame that can be a guide for those who have had and are having a hard time. A flame that waits for you and keeps you warm; you can get a place beside it here (until the stone has been worn down and vanished). In the workshop we talked about how an artwork can function in a public setting and hopefully help in the construction of society, and
in this case also be a part of a process of healing, of atonement. The place—assuming one has access to the information—has an enormous impact on what it is to commemorate, but the sculpture itself, without that information, gives a relatively humble impression that is mainly linked to the area. But perhaps we cannot separate form from content like that?

We decided to do something more anti-monumental, and yet lasting, if that were possible. We had the pile of leaves and some bamboo sticks, stones, and a few diverse small items that we found during the cleaning that had found their way into the park's waste bins. We decided that, in order to imitate the setup of the existing monument, which has a collection of tall lanterns in a circle around it, we would build a kind of displaced copy of the monument, a separate monument of displaced directions, like what Smithson talks about in his text “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey,” which we read closely. We set out eight sticks in a large circle the same size as the one around the stone, but around the pile of leaves. The pile represented the large stone. We tied the leaves tightly to the sticks, which then looked like small pillars, and we planned to have them burn at the top like the other lanterns.

“In other words, how hard it would be, on a consistent basis, not to issue the call to order—but also to recognize how important it would be, how interesting it might be, what new kinds of things might emerge out of the capacity to refuse to issue the call to order. In recognizing all kinds of other things that could happen, see what happens when you refuse at that moment to become an instrument of governance, seeing how a certain kind of discomfort will occur.” (Moten and Harney, 2013, 126)

We made a manual with the signs that we set out around our temporary monument. One contained a flame, another a rake, and a third the shape formed by the sticks and the pile of leaves seen from above. The idea was that these signs could together describe how the monument could carry on for an indefinite period with the aid of the viewer’s involvement, which in the longer term could turn into a ritual: they rake the leaves together and tie them to the sticks, collect those that are left into the pile until they can be used, ignite the pillars, and then start again. Eventually the signs would presumably not even be needed, if several people know how the ritual goes and can tell other people how to do it. The burning of the leaf pillars was a reference to the flame inside the monument, even if here it is potentially timeless as a system instead. Nobody who walked past while we were performing the burning ritual wondered whether we should be there. We saw this as meaning that it appeared to be sanctioned and official, and we even got help with the burning from young passers-by. After the reading of Smithson’s text, we discussed what we could have as a title for our artwork, and agreed upon Monument of eternal raking and occasional fire. We went through the documentation from the week to get an overview, and then jointly wrote down a template so as to be able to carry out similar projects alongside other public artworks.

On Memory, Time, and the Way History Seems to Be Written

Memory ties us to what previously happened in the present moment that has now passed. It picks out glimpses of what has made us what we happen to be in the present that is happening in this moment. Without memory to tie us to our history, we are free to not refer to what has happened before, to live solely in an immediate experience of the present moment, without history, but with instincts; but that should not now be possible if the mind is still sound. One can influence the way that one’s memory will function later on, by taking away or adding physical objects, moving matter around. Influencing things by deleting connections that certain objects might make in one’s field of vision by working on the objects, giving them a new meaning, or quite simply by destroying them, getting rid of them. As Walter Benjamin puts it:

The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again. “The truth will not run away from us”: in the historical outlook of historicism these words of Gottfried Keller mark the exact point where historical materialism cuts through historicism. For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irrevocably. (The good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth.)

For all of us, the present moment is too big to be comprehended in its entirety, so we have to see it again later on in an edited version, as a memory from someone else in the places where we were not ourselves present just then. Even our own version of what we have experienced will be replayed later on in edited form, and constantly changed. There is no single truth when there are other people. Memory can be edited and changed in retrospect, but what happened is still nothing other than what happened, albeit from various angles. There is nothing that says we can know this so-called truth in any complete sense. What we have is constant negotiation between ourselves; some people call it communication and others society. The stones we are in contact with have been listening to us since we came into existence, and before that they listened to something else. They may have given us the ideas we have in a chain of events, just like everything that existed before we became what we think we are now. The basis for our ideas does not come from ourselves, but from what was here
before us in this way. When we were new as an animal species, we presumably got all our ideas from what was around us, even if, in our time, we seem to be doing our best to separate ourselves from the rest of nature.

"Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it 'the way it really was.' It means appropriating a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger." (Benjamin, 2003, 391)

In the negotiations between us, different people set out what they think is reasonable and, soon enough, these proposals have become what is known as history. Edited just as much as memories are for an individual person, but here defined in groups. I have numerous memories of truths that various people have tried to give me, and the more they want people to go along with what they want to give, the more they refuse to see anything else, and all the more their arguments seem to be a memory of some so-called truth that cannot be found in the way that it is described in the story. Communication has other plans, and it does not need us, even if we need it. But can we then say that there is a totally unique inner voice?

"Historical materialism wishes to hold fast that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger. The danger threatens both the content of the tradition and those who inherit it. For both, it is one and the same thing: the danger of becoming a tool of the ruling classes. Every age must strive anew to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it. ... The only historian capable of fanning the spark of hope in the past is the one who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he is victorious. And this enemy has never ceased to be victorious." (Benjamin, 2003, 391)

What those who want to give away the truth are talking about does not include the present moment, except that they find themselves there purely physically. Through memories of the past we condemn others before the events have played themselves out, which becomes ridiculous when we can only experience the present moment and nothing else in the wakening state. In the dream state or in the unconscious it is less clear what is happening, as Sigmund Freud posited upon discovering that we are not "master in our own house." The map within us is full of blank patches; in the dream it is possible that memories can be shared; we do not know how it works.

"Addressing himself to the historian who wishes to relive an era, Fustel de Coulanges recommends that he blot out everything he knows about the later course of history. There is no better way of characterizing the method which historical materialism has broken with. It is a process of empathy. Its origin is indolence of the heart, that acedia [apathy] which despairs of appropriating the genuine historical image as it briefly flashes up. Among medieval theologians, acedia was regarded as the root cause of sadness. ... The nature of this sadness becomes clearer if we ask: With whom does historicism actually sympathize? The answer is inevitable: with the victor. And all rulers are the heirs of prior conquerors. Hence, empathizing with the victor invariably benefits the current rulers. The historical materialist knows what this means." (Benjamin, 2003, 391)

If the truth is accessible as much as it is not, then we are left to resort to what exists outside it in what we call our reality. What exists is thus no more than what we talk about among ourselves, since we do not understand anything else. We give nothing or no one else the chance to say anything. But everything that exists is not there to suit us, and we as a community have forgotten that, along with creating a common conceptual apparatus to uphold what seems stronger than other alternatives. So how are we to be able to collaborate together and help to change this view of our collective memory, of historiography, and how we contend with other animals and nature?

"Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal nexus among various moments in history. But no state of affairs having causal significance is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years. The historian who proceeds from this consideration ceases to tell the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. He grasps the constellation into which his own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one. Thus, he establishes a conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time." (Benjamin, 2003, 391)

We use objects and physical entities other than ourselves as repositories of memory, and they should not be locked up or locked in time, either. I wish I could understand these stones that we have used as tools, decorations, and building materials, instead of all these so-called memorable people from our history. Take as an example those mountains in the Black Hills National Forest in South Dakota into which someone has carved some old men.

"Of course Jimmie [Durham] has a long-standing love-hate affair with stone as with his amazement at how in the middle of the American continent, in a place sacred to all Plains Indians called the Paha Sapa, the heads of four Indian-killers have been carved into a mountain of stone now called Mount Rushmore. Jimmie wants to free stone from the burden of history, as with the massive white marble slabs prepared by Hitler and his architect Speer for the future Berlin, most of it now lying in quarries in Sweden and Norway. His plan is to take the remaining slabs by barge across the Baltic toward Germany and tip them into the sea." (Taussig, 2004, 250)

Why would the mountain want to look like some old men who killed those who once lived there and who worshipped the area for what it was in itself? Prior to this, it was absolutely beautiful, something that is now
regrettably no more than a memory or that found in a photograph. What can we now do with everything that was there in the present moment, instead of writing them down as a single trajectory? How can we change the winner’s story in retrospect, something that should happen in any case, in an evaluation and a comparison with other events? In the earlier Benjamin quote I shared, he quotes Gottfried Keller, who thinks that the truth never leaves us and that we should not view what happened previously as something that is frozen to the spot in time. Benjamin states:

History is the subject of a construction whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled full by now-time [Jetztzeit]. Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with now-time, a past which he blasted out of the continuum of history. … it is the tiger’s leap into the past. Such a leap, however, takes place in an arena where the ruling class gives the commands. The same leap in the open air of history is the dialectical leap.\(^3^4\)

As in some half-awake sleepwalk, places are sometimes played back more quickly than they usually are. The places are there in your body and, if you are sufficiently exhausted, you do not need to look where you are going—you will still get there without your waking knowledge of it. You translate one place to the next, into the next. Travelling is a translation in the sense that our spectrum, or our internally defined spatial image of that space, is constantly being constructed and reworked. Thus, we travel in our minds to the Second World War. A lot has been said about the evil done by the Nazis, and I am unable to give any broader overview than that; what follows is some information to look at in our present moment. Fatigue can rewrite history as much as anything else. We can only try to make our own contribution or whatever we can. Right after the war, many people wanted to just forget, instead of to talk about it.\(^3^5\)
Examples of Nazism’s Atrocities before and during the Second World War, and Some Suggestions for How We Might Think about Atonement Work

“Hello, Alfred Papillon;
I want to read your file.
I wish to study your case.

The air in Breitenau
Is sweet - - are you part of that?

‘Eiskalt,’ I read by torch.

Vous êtes français, m. Papillon? Juif? Were you a Jew
The Nazis carried out grotesque experiments on Jews
and others they considered worthless before and during
the Second World War. In the preliminary experiments
to develop more effective methods of execution with
gas, the victims were led into a building. It was dark,
down into a cellar, then gradually up a ramp, where
they were locked into a room that was very small for
the number of people inside. What the victims did
don’t fall into ruin after they are built
rather rise into ruin before they are built.”

Later on, carbon-monoxide poisoning was partly aban-
donned for more efficient toxins for use in executions.

These buildings turned out to be what Hitler left behind
in the form of ruins, not the magnificent ruins that
he wanted to leave after him. The Nazis tried to sweep
away any traces of what they had done, but failed.

“As logic, to be sound, depends on the presence of the self,
so judgment, to be valid, depends on the presence of others.
Hence judgment is endowed with a certain specific validity
but is never universally valid. Its claims to validity can never
extend further than the others in whose place the judging
person has put himself for his considerations. Judgment,
Kant says, is valid ‘for every single judging person,’ but
the emphasis in the sentence is on ‘judging’; it is not valid
for those who do not judge or for those who are not members
of the public realm where the objects of judgment appear.”
(Arendt, 1968, 220–21)

The role of the collective or the group has shifted
with time. But as Hannah Arendt points out in The Life
of the Mind, Kant thinks that only through the collective,
through judgment or critique, in communication,
can art find its place:

The “enlargement of the mind” plays a crucial
role in the Critique of Judgment. It is accomplished
by “comparing our judgment with the possible
rather than the actual judgment of others, and by
putting ourselves in the place of any other man.”
The faculty which makes this possible is called
imagination. … Critical thinking is possible only
where the standpoint of all others are open to
inspection. Hence, critical thinking while still a
solitary business has not cut itself off from “all
others.” … [By] force of imagination it makes
the others present and thus moves potentially in
a space which is public, open to all sides.”

This potential reconciliation should not be seen
as occurring solely between people. It can also be
about, for example, objects, stones, and other animals
besides ourselves. A stone can need to be reconciled
with, to be freed of our human projections, and to get
to be precisely what it is, independent of our opinions
and the mental baggage we charge them with, the
load of meaning we impose on them. We leave many
stones in peace, and we give some of them a human
history. We charge what we call objects with both
positive and negative energy, but none of them can
be seen as always giving what they intended. There
has never been a time when reconciliation was not
needed, if we look at life as a process of development
and not as a heroic act. In this way the invention
of the winner was a major setback for the work of
atonement.
“To think, according to Kant’s understanding of enlightenment, means Selbstdenken, to think for oneself, ‘which is the maxim of a never passive reason. To be given to such passivity is called prejudice,’ and enlightenment is first of all liberation from prejudice. To accept what goes on in the minds of those whose ‘standpoint’ (actually, the place where they stand, the conditions they are subject to, always different from one individual to the next, one class or group as compared to another) is not my own would mean no more than to accept passively their thought, that is, to exchange their prejudices for the prejudices proper to my own station. ‘Enlarged thought’ is the result of first abstracting from the limitations which contingently attach to our own judgment,’ of ‘disregarding its private subjective conditions.’” (Arendt, 1978, 257)

Are we to seek atonement or to wait to be sought out by a desire for atonement? Atonement is presumably a single utterance in a longer discussion; friction generates problems, which generate events, which require atonement and perhaps a regression. Or do we hurry away from there? Atonement does not exist in itself; it is a mirror, it is nothing without something to mirror itself in. Can we come up with something useful in our automatic thoughts, or something like the dream as in psychoanalysis, in an internal reconciliation in which we accept our thoughts instead of blocking them? There is a great difference between the thought and the deed in the intensity of the suggestion or the proposal. Surely we do not need to be content with or put up with things in the cultivation of ideas, in anticipation, and, at times, in the reaping of an outcome? How can one change a negative charge in objects, situations, places, and contexts, in things one experiences that may previously have been negatively charged? How can one change this by various means? By trying to abandon oneself in favour of a community? How can a place be a force for atonement, and how can we construct such places in and through art? How can objects be similarly charged? How do objects and places intertwine and generate each other? How do we get an art that is not solely interested in itself in this way, but is always also a means of being able to do something else that contributes to a society’s welfare and development?

“Kant was very early aware that there was something non-subjective in what seems to be the most private and subjective sense; this awareness is expressed as follows: There is the fact that matters of taste, ‘the beautiful, interests only in society. … A man abandoned by himself on a desert island would adorn neither his hut nor his person. … [Man] is not contented with an object if he cannot feel satisfaction in it in common with others,’ whereas we despise ourselves when we cheat at play, but are ashamed only when we get caught. Or: ‘In matters of taste we must renounce ourselves in favor of others’ or in order to please others.” (Arendt, 1978, 265)

Working for decolonisation, as in the case of South Africa, does not perhaps need to involve any atonement work, but it can have an important place if we let it, I would hope. If what Arendt thinks holds true—that culture’s most important purpose is to act as a force for reconciliation—then each culture, each sphere of art, at some point contains such aspects. The topic is a broad one. It is almost as if time is not able to accommodate what is needed: the events that are proposed will find it hard to get a place in the room and in the time where they should exist. Like the way that dOCUMENTA (13) (2012) exhibition programme is so extensive that it is not physically possible to experience everything going on in it; one has to make a choice. It is impossible to be in two places in the present moment oneself (but it is possible as a group).

“Whoever has emerged victorious participates to this day in the triumphal procession in which current rulers step over those who are lying prostrate. According to traditional practice, the spoils are carried in the procession. They are called ‘cultural treasures,’ and a historical materialist views them with cautious detachment. For in every case these treasures have a lineage which he cannot contemplate without horror. They owe their existence not only to the efforts of the great geniuses who created them, but also to the anonymous toil of others who lived in the same period. There is no document of culture which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is never free of barbarism, so barbarism taints the manner in which it was transmitted from one hand to another.” (Benjamin, 2003, 391–92)

But what was barbarism and what was the opposite in the case of Sweden during the war? When can one manage to speak out against things, and how does that come about? Is there an exact point at which one puts one’s foot down? During the Second World War, the borders were closed in a different way and for different people than today. Who is allowed to leave the country and who is allowed to come in? What can we rely on when it seems to be enough to base one’s actions on one’s private feelings, and not on what we have agreed upon together? If the subjective can be seen as being non-existent, why have we created this situation entirely together? The extreme right is once again out and on the move.

What Collaborating with Places Could Give Us

Back to what I see as the present moment, so that I have something to relate to, the work I do exists very much in situ. The four places mentioned in this text are helpful: the quarry in Hunnebostrand, the Art History Room, the gravel field, and Raoul Wallenberg’s Park. I can inspect, work my way in, and situate them in relation to other things. Look for signs and traces. I use the places physically, so as to be able to think through things. The ideas do not move properly if I do not think with the places. I send out ideas and let them bounce against the place and see what comes back. It is a constant gathering of information, like an echo sounder,
but also an invitation to those and to what I come in contact with. If I have a place to relate to, via observation of the place I can see how ideas can go further. I can construct a context in collaboration with the place, the participants, and the rest of the planning.

Places, spatial images of rooms, can be separate or integrated. How do we make such distinctions? It requires so little; they are thought embryos. Seen collectively, these invisible lines can easily be erased. How can places be used for the purpose of reconciliation? How can one as an artist help by working with places and through what one puts into them? We can see this in two stages—work with the place and the positioning of information—or we can see it as being an artwork in general. The places in themselves are important, perhaps even more than the object or the artworks. What can the places mean for those who are there and who use them? Perhaps you have a particular place in mind when I mention the word “place.” Your place—can you come to a halt there? Is it a place that you do not want to come up as a picture? Is it a nice place? Is it even a picture? This place is yours. You have it in mind. If you want you can give a translation of it to others.

“The most surprising aspect of this business is that common sense, the faculty of judgment and of discriminating between right and wrong, should be based on the sense of taste. Of our five senses, three give us clearly objects of the external world and therefore are easily communicable. Sight, hearing, touching deal directly and, as it were, objectively, with objects; smell and taste give inner sensations which are entirely private and incommunicable; what I taste and what I smell cannot be expressed in words at all. They seem to be the private senses by definition. Moreover, the three objective senses have in common that they are capable of representation—to have something present which is absent; I can recall a building, a melody, the touch of velvet. This faculty is called in Kant: Imagination—of which neither taste nor smell are capable. On the other hand, they are quite clearly the discriminatory senses: You can withhold judgment from what you see and, though less easily, you can withhold judgment from what you hear or touch. But in the matters of taste or smell, the it-pleases-or-displeases-me is immediate and overwhelming. And pleasure or displeasure again are entirely private.” (Arendt, 1978, 263–64)

When I am working with a place, I like to go there with footsteps that sense how nervously one has to curl ones toes, depending on what seems to be required in that respect; not barging forwards, but creeping. Treading heavily around can only be done if there is mutual respect and recognition between you and the place. Some people have enormous, heavy shoes on so as to stand stably on the spot. It is very difficult for them to walk quickly and quietly in a zigzag across the place without getting tired far too quickly. The heavy shoes mean that one does not come into contact with the place needlessly, one does not feel it. One will fall over and preferably swing one’s arms at one’s sides, and flail them around in order to take up more space than usual when one walks. Over the years very many people have been forced to wear heavy shoes like this, even though they did not want to, in various wars in which very few people have had the power to decide the course of events. When art is a negotiation zone whose modes of expression only exist when they are built from the public’s taste or judgment, its critique, then the politicians’ role is perhaps a different one, on the contrary. The artist is nothing other than a channel that generates proposals for change. The politician perhaps does not have this role, since another, perhaps more direct responsibility, exists for them? The artist’s responsibility, or at any rate their potential effect on society, perhaps does not appear measurable in the same direct way; it is probably more a matter of a delayed effect? Arendt says this:

Culture and politics, then, belong together because it is not knowledge or truth which is at stake, but rather judgment and decision, the judicious exchange of opinion about the sphere of public life and the common world, and the decision what manner of action is to be taken in it, as well as to how it is to look henceforth, what kind of things are to appear in it.44

Is the artist’s responsibility thus, among other things, to assume the right to be vague so that the public can discuss what it is that is being presented, and then agree on something? The discussion does not need the artist after their input; the discussion exists as an entity in itself. After the proposal, the artwork, the artist is only a part of the culturally united mass of critics, who together talk about and decide what art can mean. The artist thus has no special right over others to interpretation of their artwork, even if, like absolutely any member of society, they have the right to their own judgment. The artwork, in contrast, just like the discussion, has the potential to a life that is much longer than our own. What one has a right to is perhaps in a way the story of the genesis of the artwork, but here it is unclear what generates what: everyone has their own domain to some extent. Arendt describes this private sphere as follows:

This means, on the one hand, that such judgment must liberate itself from the “subjective private conditions,” that is, from the idiosyncrasies which naturally determine the outlook of each individual in his privacy and are legitimate as long as they are only privately held opinions, but which are not fit to enter the market place, and lack a validity in the public realm. And this enlarged way of thinking, which as judgment knows how to transcend its own individual limitations, on the other hand, cannot function in strict isolation or solitude; it needs the
A glance at Durham’s most recently published collection of essays . . . reveals the extent to which his observations of Eurasian places he has visited include conversations with the local flora and fauna (alongside stones). It is here that Durham deviates from Freire’s Pedagogy, which makes conventional anthropocentric assertions about animals based on their assumed lack of self-consciousness and agency; in Freire’s reflections, animals do not figure amongst the ranks of the oppressed.” (Fisher, 2005, 10)

Understanding the oppressor’s side of what has occurred can provide greater understanding, even if this simply involves direct confirmation; it may mean that one can eliminate other possibilities. But one of the problems with this is that, when someone is lying, in the worst case a new spiral of evil opens up. Letting everyone speak and listening to them means that we are not left in such great uncertainty, or at least that is that hope. At times, it can feel like one perhaps no longer remembers what the original problem was, but that one is rock solid in one’s knowledge that there must be some antagonism, that things have gone so far that the lack of a timely atonement has now created problems that go beyond the original ones. Unfortunately, many conflicts do function in this way. Sometimes, even the very basis or laws, or the like, have been changed, but that does not always change the conflict, since it has by then taken on a life of its own. One then has two or more things to atone for, instead of just one. By drawing up a map of the broader conflicts, of how they have functioned and function, one can perhaps contribute to changing some part of them. We make proposals for change through art; the map of events in need of atonement that we are working on contains many areas that have caused a lot of grief. This is built up in certain parts, so as to be taken down in others.

“What a mean, stupid and destructive little concept is Truth. I am sure that beauty has no connection to truth. Truth is simply a nasty invention of the state: first to make us ‘confess’ and then to make us believe.’ Durham’s point parallels Deleuze’s complaint against the ‘tyranny of the signifier,’ which insists on the question, ‘What does it mean?’ when, as he says, ‘the only question is how anything works, with its intensities, flows, processes, partial objects. None of which mean anything.’ Durham thus frees us to appreciate flows and processes that refuse closure: the conversation among differing materials, or the grapheneness of the graphite in its dialogue with paper. Humans are not the only entities that ‘speak’ if we are minded to listen.” (Fisher, 2005, 10)

Blocking, ignoring, and erasing events from memory can mean that one no longer needs to suffer, but it has disadvantages. In addition to the ramifications of the aforementioned map, I am trying to say something about our everyday lives today and previously, through what it might mean that the Nazi’s victory monument and new capital city were to be built of Swedish stone. Something about what our so-called neutrality meant and about what it means today. Are similar choices being made in Sweden today as that of selling the stones? What can be atoned for along with these stones?

Workshop Two, in Collaboration with the Stenhuggerimuseet in Hunnebostrand

The second workshop continued to build on the ideas from the first one. It was again more of a continuing education or support group than anything else. This time, there were three of us in the group, all artists. Throughout the workshop we collected material to use
in the installation that we were to make, so as to be able to think about and around the materials. We watched the documentary about the Hitler stones at the location where some of it was shot, and Carl-Johan Starck at the Stenhuggerimuseet gave us and a group of students from a nearby art school a talk about stone cutting and types of rock. We walked in the forest around the quarry and climbed up to the highest viewing point above the village, where there is a cairn, and left a birch trunk up there from the forest below. We had a workshop in the museum, where we sat and discussed and read; we talked about how memorials as points of reference, instead of assiduous planning minute by minute, can lead to a context that more readily conforms to the participants’ interests: like a careful type of presence, perhaps. We tried to achieve an even more carefully precise presence through meditating and listening to Joachim Koester and Stefan A. Pedersen’s recording Department of Abandoned Futures (2015), to see if we could focus and further develop our work in that way. The recording begins with relaxation exercises, then switches to a narrative in which one ultimately ends up in an archive where one can explore all our abandoned futures. We talked about what we thought about the Hitler stones before we came face to face with them, and then about what it might be like after we had worked in close proximity to them, with them, experienced them in a different way, in which they are physically in focus. I told the group about the previous workshop and showed them pictures of it.

Some general questions we worked on in the installation or action: How can one use an exhibition or a public artwork to get the viewer to understand what happened under the Nazi regime? How is it possible to get people to understand Sweden’s involvement? How can I understand it myself? Is it important for the atonement work, and what can be atoned for? For educational purposes I thought of keeping track of times, of helping everyone, of going round and cleaning, of fetching things, and of working actively on the preconditions for what everyone wanted to do. To think of all the possible ways I could help the people in the workshop, but also to see the work as happening in groups, which means being able to be prepared to accept help too, which is at least as difficult. An educational approach in which people learn and develop together, in which one can get to find one’s own place in the work and find motivation in collaboration. This is not always a matter of content, of material, but of what one does in the group: the content can come later, or not at all. Regardless of what one does, what one does in the group is a form of content in itself, like making up a fire as a part of the work of thinking or writing. Working physically as a part of the writing process. Go and make a fire and talk about what this can generate in the form of ideas about your work, do it now. The writing can consist equally of the experience one is writing about as of the writing down itself. When you throw a stone into the water, you are writing at the same time as you are throwing the stone. There is a delayed effect: the text is already written, all it needs is to find something to stick to or to stay in.

Many of the stones that Hitler bought from Sweden long ago migrated and found new homes. Some have stayed where they were, and we came across three of them in a carpark. Starck, from Stenhuggerimuseet, thought that the stones would be hard to track down today, since great volumes of stone are involved. How can one know which stone is a Hitler stone today? During the workshop in Hunnebostrand, I was unable to come up with any way of determining which stones are at issue, apart from taking as fact the villagers’ agreement that certain stones in the village are indeed some of them. But Starck also suggested that, if I liked, he could point out some other potential stones (which were closer to our worksite). They have been mingled with so many other stones that were cut later on, as well as being sold on, that there is now just a great mass of stones all together in the village, and you can’t tell one from the other anymore. None of the companies that sold to the Nazis seem to be particularly interested in divulging where the stones went in the second sale, after the company bought them back cheaply from the Foreign Capital Control Office. One aspect of Starck’s approach is that the stones are, in a way, atoning by being forgotten, in the concealment of the information, and in the mingling with other stones: all the stones are in fact a chip off the same block, so to speak. The disadvantage of not knowing which stones are at issue is that one suspects even more stones of being from the source paid for by the Nazis than is likely. A problem that can be translated into the xenophobia in today’s society. Durham took up this issue of the stones’ common origin in his artwork for documenta IX in 1992, which was later also shown in documenta (13) in 2012. Dirk Snaauwaert writes in “The Great Stoneface”:

In his installation at last year’s Documenta 13 in Kassel, THE HISTORY OF EUROPE (2012), Durham continued to train his sights on the stories cultures tell themselves. On a didactic label such as one might find in an ethnographic museum, the artist sketches a dizzyingly accelerated survey of the development of European civilization. Reference is made to Europeans’ “unsanitary living habits” and “trade with other more advanced peoples.” An adjacent display case exhibits two items of material evidence: a thirty-thousand-year-old stone cutting tool and a rifle bullet made in 1941; the latter “was never used because someone spilled car-battery acid on it, which ate into the copper-alloy casing.” In this ironic presentation, the narrative of cultural and technological progress—and the basis on which civilizations are classified as sophisticated and advanced or crude and primitive—is mocked, as is the exhibitionist inclination to instrumentalize inert “material evidence” (i.e.
From the workshop in Hunnebostrand, 2017. The quarry at Stenhuggerimuseet (Stonemason Museum). Max Ockborn

From the workshop in Hunnebostrand, 2017. Walking in the forest above the quarry at Stenhuggerimuseet (Stonemason Museum). Max Ockborn
artwork) to satisfy the desire for spectacle and grand, overarching theses. The inclusion of the World War II bullet and two stones from a bombed-out palace on the Friedrichsplatz further point to the modern barbarity to which Documenta historically sought to respond, a strategy the Allies baptized the “recivilization” of post-Nazi Europe.⁴⁸

In the artwork, Durham presented two sandstones side by side, which one can clearly see used to be the same stone. On each stone there is now a plaque. One says, “This stone is from the mountain,” and the other says, “This stone is from the red palace.” It is our social considerations that distinguish them. The stones themselves are perhaps not even in need of atonement; we simply have to try to remove what we have imposed on them for our own sake in such cases. What we have forced them to bear against their will. We worked a bit more on the model from the first workshop, and altered it to produce a new version.⁴⁹ The quarry was full of broken stone; there were cranes and a smithy for sharpening tools; there were outdoor studios for cutting stone, where courses were held. There is an auditorium where Starck gives lectures about the stone industry and its advance along the west coast, but also about the geography of stone and its innate nature or disposition. There he also displays various tools and the ways they have been used. Down in the harbour, in contrast, one finds the remains of fishing boats, drifts of old mussels, seaweed, and other stuff. There are small bunkers and other things left after the war. In one of these we found a crossed-out swastika. In the forests we could see interesting rock formations, like lumps of dough lying on top of one another. From the cairn where we left the birch we looked out over the whole village; we could see the public park (where we were living), the fishing village, the churchyard, and out towards the archipelago. When the time came for us to carry out our moment in time, we lay the sheets from our beds on the stones like tablecloths, and displayed on them what were to become portraits of us, and simultaneously of the village, using the objects we had collected. We performed a ritual burning and were very uncertain about what it meant, but it was very effective. A passing villager in a car wound down the window and gave us two thumbs up accompanied by a cheerful shout. We laid a piece of granite that we had with us on one of the stones as a demonstration of the title of the workshop (from which this essay takes its name). Before we left, we cleaned everything from the spot, apart from the little piece of granite.

How What Is There Within Us Can Physically Find a Place in Something Else: A bit about what we came up with as people, and what the Nazis did

How can I make a proposal for how to look for things? Maybe through proposals on how one can achieve reconciliation between different things externally, by seeking within oneself. Maybe searching is so universal or such a shared activity that it is possible to view it like this? Taking what goes on within oneself and moving it outside of oneself. How can or will one thus perceive the individual in the time we are living in. What have we agreed upon? Where and how is this negotiation conducted? What is your view of the individual in that case? How should we set about it when we are observing our common society, and how are we to negotiate change?

“It resembles more an unconscious search for oneself in the expectation that the self will be found where one last left it. With time, you find you do not fully recognize yourself. Like when, during an examination, you make a doctor cry simply through eye contact, what did he actually see with his eyes? … There is no subsequent erosion of the self in the distinction between different readings between the lines, since it is written on the newspaper placards for you, and solely for you at that moment, as well as later on, when there are what can be counted as relevant interconnections as you read between the lines then, too. So why should one need to be ashamed of it? I do not recognize you, but I know you, come back.” (Ockborn, 2012, 79–80)

Durham wanted to dump the stones in the Baltic en route to Berlin. So, was that for the stones’ sake? He explains:

I want to make a film, and I want to free some stones. For the past couple of years in Europe I have been investigating this dictatorial power of architecture, and the investigations have led to further research into the concepts which support and weigh upon stone. Some materials, innocent in themselves, have been scripted—given roles that are too dense. … Stone suffers from architectural weight, the weight of metaphor, and the weight of history. … Last year in Sweden I came across nine pieces of granite that are the perfect illustration of the problems of stone. They were intended to be part of Hitler’s over-sized “Arch of Peace” (see, he didn’t say “Triumph”; he was already using “newspeak”) in Berlin. Hitler himself made the original plans and drawings, and Speer polished it up and located quarries and carvers in Sweden and Norway. Speer had commissioned the work on the granite stones that I saw. They are beautifully carved, and absolutely massive, quietly waiting for history. I want to free them; make them light. …

The film will not be a documentary, although it will kind of “document” itself. … We’ll get one of those barges that have no engine, and after taking the stones by truck through the forests to the harbor, load the stones onto the barge and tow them across the Baltic in the direction of Ruegen Island and Berlin. Then we’ll sink them, barge and all, in the Baltic Sea. (forming a useful artificial deep-water
From the workshop in Hunnebostrand, 2017. Sculptural installation. Dimensions variable. Max Ockborn
After successes with the blitzkrieg, the Nazis were so sure of winning against the Soviet Union that they sent out invitations to a victory party at the Hotel Metropol near Red Square in Moscow, even before they had won. Instead, the winds of war turned to what would ultimately be the Nazis’ downfall.52 There were plans to build a victory monument of stone on Red Square very soon after the anticipated victory. The stones for this came from, among other places, Sweden and were transported together with provisions and other things when advances were being made during Operation Barbarossa. When they Nazis retreated, the stones were left there, with many of them finding their place in buildings in what has for a long time now been Russia. For instance, two large buildings on Gorky Street in Moscow contain some of the stones. Hitler simply wanted to build with material that would last a thousand years, as he had seen in the ruins of the Roman Empire and in Greece—no brick or wood.53 Hitler reckoned on altering the economic plans for the construction of Germania once the war had been won. It was known that the budget would not be enough, and everyone working on the project was strictly forbidden to calculate what it would actually cost. It seems that the real plan was to build everything with the aid of millions of slaves once the war was over.54

Albert Speer’s organisation, the GBI, was meant to ensure that Germania could be built, but it also had many other tasks, among them negotiating the purchase of stone in Norway and Sweden. In Kjell Andersson’s documentary, Hjalmar Höij, who conducted the negotiations for a conglomerate of small stone firms on the west coast, says: “We paid no attention to any of Nazism’s downsides in this context.” An exceedingly odd assertion, which in the best case reveals naivety, an extreme lack of information, or an absence of interest in the prevailing situation. Tens of thousands of buildings in Berlin were planned to be demolished in order to make room for Germania. The GBI was responsible for the relocation of Jews from Berlin, which meant taking over or pulling down their homes and sending them to concentration camps. The Nazi Germans paid more than was usual for the stones so that the Swedish stone industry could be modernised; they wanted to help build up Sweden. Stone from Norway was also sold, but the quarries there were chiefly owned by Swedish companies. Police and military surveillance was made available when the ships were being loaded, since the state was guaranteeing the sale. Crewmates on the Nazi German vessels painted shipping-company markings and symbols on the rock faces along the coast, and some of the swastikas were still there in the 1970s, primarily perhaps because they were so high up and hard to get to.55 Possibly a fitting metaphor for right-wing politicians and the royal family?

The Nazis paid extra by the year for both storage and delays, once the stones could no longer be delivered after the fortunes of war had turned against them. Nazi Germany finally capitulated on May 7, 1945, and Hitler committed suicide on April 30. In April, the stone companies also received their last payment; all the stones were thus paid for, this being prioritised over other things. Four years later, a victory monument was erected by the Soviet Union in East Berlin, on the site of a burial ground for thousands of fallen Soviet soldiers. The stones in the monument came, for instance, from Hitler’s grandiose Reichskanzlei (designed by Speer), which partly lay in ruins, and from the Swedish stones. After the end of the war, enormous amounts of paid-for stone lay along the coasts of Sweden. The question was raised as to who owned the stone and, immediately after the end of the war, the Foreign Capital Control Office was set up with the task of dismantling Nazi German assets. The stones, which had already been sold once, were repurchased by the stone companies for a small sum. They had got together and decided that they would not bid for each other’s stones. After that, it was legal to resell the stones.56

The stones then ended up in various places, such as Warsaw, which at the beginning of the war, had the biggest Jewish population in Europe. In 1943, there were only a few thousand Jews left in the city, a resistance movement having fought against the Germans...
when they arrived to take the last of them to concentration camps. The Nazis were initially forced to retreat, since the resistance fighters were very effective in their guerrilla warfare. But the Nazis later returned with heavily armed soldiers, who were too much for the resistance. To honour the memory of the Jewish resistance movement and of those who lived and died in Warsaw, a monument was built consisting of Hitler stones from Norway that had been stockpiled in Sweden; the stones presumably having been intended for the triumphal arch in Germany. Other stones ended up, among other places, in the facades of the cinemas of the Film Town at Sergel’s Square in Stockholm, as floors in shops in Gothenburg, facade cladding in New York, bench bases in Lysekil, a large block stand beside an oak tree, in Karlskrona, and in Hunnebostrand, as mentioned earlier, they are by a car park. Some of them are still in warehouses, but many people are presumably ignorant of their history. There are no information plaques about what they were involved in. If the Nazis had won the war, then many people would, as we said before, have had to work as slaves in the Nazis’ megalomaniac building projects, with a few specific nationalities, including the Swedes, intended to be incorporated into the planned Reich. In his time, Kant had theories such as the one below about races (here it can help to try to think beyond what happened after his lifetime):

In the Physische Geographie, Kant states that at birth the skin colour of every baby of every race is white, but gradually, over a few weeks, the white baby’s body turns black (or, one presumes, red or yellow): “The Negroes are born white, apart from their genitals and a ring around the navel, which are black. During the first month blackness spread across the whole body from these parts.” … Neugebauer, following V.Y. Mudimbe, accurately points out that a century and a half earlier, a missionary named F. Romano wrote the same opinion as the one held by Kant on the origin of the “black” skin.

The construction, or rather the planning, of this Reich had so many shortcomings and obvious holes in it. It was borrowed whole from all directions and all sides to create the Nazis’ ideology. Cultural theorist Boris Groys states:

Hitler never spoke of eternity in the sense of the immortality of the individual soul. The eternity of which Hitler spoke was a post-Christian one, a thoroughly modern one in that it was a purely material, corporeal eternity—an eternity of ruins, of the relics left behind by any civilization once it has gone under. These material remains that outlast every civilization could produce in later observers either fascination, astonishment, at the recognition of the traces of a heroic, artistic, creative act, or simply tired disinterest. Thus Hitler understood the eternal value of art as the impression that art makes on a future observer.

The Nazis moved further away from morality than anyone thought possible. There was a certain amount of surprise internally in their ranks about what they did in their more bizarre experiments, I would imagine. But the necessity for the bizarre was explained by a very real need, such as that the country needed more employment, as many people were unemployed following the First World War. The reconstruction of the army after the First World War and before the Second generated a great many jobs and kick-started the economy, with one leading to the other. How it was possible to build up an army that was forbidden to build up is another story. Suddenly, many people had jobs in the military sector, and wanted to spend their new income. Many were pleased simply because the country appeared to be finally moving forwards again, and they perhaps thought it was worth following Hitler despite everything. The Nazis would not, however, have been able to come to power without the support (or neglect) of the conservative right. The Nazis won votes because the old regime was seen as being part of what had produced the Great Depression and the previous war. Hitler was seen as an alternative, perhaps not necessarily in himself, but as someone who was not one of the others. Dissidents who spoke out against Hitler or the Nazi party were effectively purged, and often received the same treatment as others did in the concentration camps. This internal elimination of their own people has understandably not been talked about as much as the other victims in the camps. Those few who, for various reasons, attempted to rise up against what was happening under Nazism (or were not satisfied with their allotted role).

Of course, once someone arrived at a concentration camp, their chances of revolt had gone. Everything, from the journey there to the architecture, was created to deprive you of your will, and to kill you, albeit avoiding involving the perpetrators too directly. Their system dehumanised prisoners so that they no longer had to see them as human beings; they became something else. The barracks built in Auschwitz-Birkenau are a horrifying example of how architecture, the buildings themselves, were planned to function as murder weapons. They were built with so little space per person that this, together with being broken down, the constant need for energy (food that would never come), being trapped in forced labour, separated from their families, and at every instant in contact with and trying to cope with death, meant that they had no chance of ever recovering. Knowing what was going on in the camp, and not just in the part where they were themselves, and on top of all this having to sleep so tightly packed together in bunkbeds that they could barely move, meant that diseases spread very easily, and then went untreated. The builders knew precisely how many
people they had put in a barrack, and also how quickly this overcrowding would kill anyone forced to live in this way. They used the buildings themselves as murder weapons so as to avoid facing their role as executioners.53

The Nazis carried out a lot of experiments before they streamlined the method of leading the victims into the large shower rooms, where they folded their own clothes, after which, poison was thrown down through a vent in the ceiling, which was then shut. When everyone had stopped screaming—women, men, children, the old, the sick—they were carried to mass graves or burned in large ovens. When the Nazis were losing the war, they realised they did not want to leave any traces of the camps for the outside world to find, and so the mass graves were dug up and the interred victims burned. They frequently used prisoners to do this job, putting them into special workgroups to carry out this appalling task. They also had to sort the victims’ belongings, frequently seeing their own family’s possessions pass by in the sorting process and knowing all too well what this meant. In the Nazis’ eyes, the people in the camps were no longer human beings, but simply a burden on society; they thus thought they were doing those they executed a favour. It is hard to imagine how this was possible, how they could get to a point where this could happen.64

“I have a room, with smooth walls. Outside there is a copy of Percy Shelley’s poem Ozymandias, where the statue of this fallen king says: ‘Look on my works, ye mighty, and despair!’ and the poem goes on ‘Nothing beside remains. Round the decay of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare, the lone and level sands stretch far away.’ Inside, there is Hitler’s stupid drawing, 3 meter wide, and a lot of quotations from Hitler. It will be the least monumental I can do—yet really attacking monuments.” (Durham, interview by Sandqvist, 2011, 22–23)65

Communication: The being of material and our possible common origins

In crisis situations, in emotional states that transcend the ordinary, when you abandon security and act more by instinct, the finer details in your surroundings disappear. You look at the same situation both then and later, when it is calm, and it will not be the same image or motif. The brain blocks off parts of the view so as to give power and energy to something else; a redistribution of the resources that are at hand occurs, presumably as a kind of lingering survival instinct of some sort. But perhaps it is not necessary for these redistributions to take place? It is not the Hitler stones themselves that are evil, but us and our social machine; what we put into them (although if we were brought up by stone to begin with, then it could be vice versa). The ideas are attached to something physical, and the physical perhaps has no defence against it; or perhaps it has indifference, like the belief that what happens is the meaning? The difference is that between an object’s resonance for people and what we create as objects and says are objects. Is there anything that could be called an intrinsic resonance in objects? Could it be that it is memories that rattle around inside the objects, that they vibrate with memories? Durham thinks it is the material that chooses him, and not vice versa, sticks, metal and other stuff that ask to be allowed to come with him into the studio:

I’m innocent by standard. I walk alone. I used to walk alone, now I drive alone. … And things come up to me. A little piece of metal says: “Hi, what are you doing?” … And I say: Leave me alone. I don’t want a piece of metal. But I get a lot of metal. I have a lot of beautiful pieces of metal. Things are charming and they come up to me. And ask if they can join in something! If they are small enough, I pick them up, take them home. And after a while, they start maybe there, maybe one piece of metal lays next to a piece of glass for a few of years and they begin to have some relationship that they tell me about. So after a while they get together in an art show in some way. They’re glued together, sitting next to each other or something. It’s not my fault, it’s theirs. I’m the innocent by standard.66

We can talk with materials because they taught us to speak to begin with. But can searching for things, then, be nothing other than what we as human beings see as things, our own projection? There is nothing to look for unless there is a view that certain bits of material are more special than others. Why do we choose these bits over others? There are lots of stones, but you pick up one stone and none of the others; this is not just a matter of rationality and utilisation. There are, of course, sequences in which you know you will pick up lots of stones, but there is always an internal order in such a sequence, regardless of whether it is automatic or by choice. It is our gaze and our lines of thought, our memories, that designate different materials as things, objects, that are then added to our system. Everything that is treated and processed, changed; there is so much, we change so many things. Compared with other animals, we are so brutal in our expression outside of ourselves. But looking at oneself outside of the human isn’t possible, is it? Instead, we might think that all our thoughts still do not originate in us from the start, so we are not what we believe we are; we are something else that has us believe we are what we think we are instead. Actually we are a stone, a tree, a cockroach, lava, water, wind, and much else, all gathered into a container, into a vessel; an ever-open book.

Can we understand material because paint is like the wind? If we paint on lots of layers of paint, it is like the wind; it rounds the edges. Paint is like a very swift wind, a quick, hard wind that jumps over time as if it wants to exist outside of us. Paint is wind and weather
to stone and wood. It covers things over, and we find it difficult and see it on the basis of our sense of time. If you sit by a fire and tell stories, you need wood for the fire, but what you will understand through the material is perhaps nothing other than yourself and the being of others; understanding the materials themselves for what they might want, or understanding their right to exist by virtue of the same right as we think we exist in. Like trying to reach a subjective, projected understanding of what you believe the materials want and what their potential functions might want in order to be able to leave them behind you, both mentally and physically, albeit with respect to their being. That this can give some insight into our relationship. They have their own way of looking at things. At the same time as there is nothing in particular that could say of which the reverse is not equally reasonable; that we use the materials. It perhaps does not feel that way to you, but in whichever case that applies, we are constantly being formed by these things and they by us, which generates a development in us; we have for a long time put ourselves in a seat where we are not content solely with what our body has. We are not only ourselves; we are also our stuff.

“The validity of these judgments never [has] the validity of cognitive or scientific propositions, which are not judgments, properly speaking. (If you say, the sky is blue or two and two are four, you do not ‘judge’; you say what is, compelled by the evidence either of your senses or your mind.) In this way, you can never compel anybody to agree with your judgments—this is beautiful, this is wrong (Kant however does not believe that moral judgments are the product of reflection and imagination, hence they are not judgments strictly speaking)—you can only ‘woo, court’ the agreement of everybody else. And in this persuasive activity you actually appeal to the ‘community sense.’ … The less idiosyncratic your taste is the better can it be communicated; communicability again is the touchstone. Impartiality in Kant is called ‘disinterestedness’, the disinterested delight in the beautiful.” (Arendt, 1978, 269–70)

The discussion does not need me, but I can try to contribute to it, and perhaps it will then listen. The stone does not need me, but it helps me to think. It can be a matter of how language and translations, objects, sensations, and experiences are mediated. How they are negotiated, how these can be obscured, overlaid, or smothered by human language. Languages are coloured, and colour has an original significance in covering things over or concealing them:

If colors can be pure and innocent, can they also be impure and guilty? In the jungle all light is paralyzed. Particles of color infected the molten reflections on the twelve mirrors, and in doing so, engendered mixtures of darkness and light. Color as an agent of matter filled the reflected illuminations with shadowy tones, pressing the light into dusty material opacity. Flames of light were imprisoned in a jumbled spectrum of greens. Refracting sparks of sunshine seemed smothered under the weight of clouded mixtures—yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet. The word “color” means at its origin to “cover” or “hide.” Matter eats up light and “covers” it with a confusion of color.

Using that meaning, we can get a painting language that does not represent anything figuratively; instead, it conceals something else. The fact that the surface can also be seen as being a picture is perhaps secondary when what is seen, as a repository of memory, can act through any of the senses. We have to try to allow the art not to be primarily the most important thing in itself, but to be there for what it can do as an intermediary channel; as something that evokes memories, or as a type of writer of history. If lines of thought are seen as being something that are updated and based on what we have in common, and not that the thoughts in themselves are ever new, then all of our thoughts should be derived from other animals and plants, since we as a species emerged much later than many others did. Before these other lines of thoughts became what we call our languages, we must have been more in tune with the rest of nature via more shared types of language mixed together over other boundaries. Boundaries that today can appear closed. How great a part of our communication did we share with, or get from, other animals, from other materials, for example, from stones?

If my goal is to step outside our human languages, to try to understand communication as if it lies there, latent, but trembling, within things, then I cannot do this as a separate entity. I am not talking about internal languages, but about those that we have in common. Perhaps it is primarily through trying to alter thought patterns in others and in oneself by working in art that it can become possible. It is hard to go against one’s impulses, one’s automatic thoughts, but it may also be extremely necessary. When one has done this sufficiently many times, a new pattern has been created. Could communication that lies nascent or dormant within things be a language in itself and not just prediction? It inevitably becomes an analysis of language and time, understood through the imprisonment necessary to be a part of them, in the view of them that we share as well as we can. How well can we be considered capable of putting ourselves into someone else’s view of existence?

“Kant, who certainly was not oversensitive to beautiful things, was highly conscious of the public quality of beauty; and it was because of their public relevance that he insisted, in opposition to the commonplace adage, that taste judgments are open to discussion because ‘we hope that the same pleasure is shared by others,’ that taste can be subject to dispute, because it ‘expects agreement from everyone else.’ Therefore taste, insofar as it, like any other judgment, appeals to common sense, is the very opposite of ‘private feelings.’ Aesthetic
no less than in political judgments, a decision is made, and
although this decision is always determined by a certain sub-
jectivity, by the simple fact that each person occupies a place
of his own from which he looks upon and judges the world, it
also derives from the fact that the world itself is an objective
datum, something common to all its inhabitants. The activity
of taste decides how this world, independent of its utility
and our vital interests in it, is to look and sound, what men
will see and what they will hear in it. Taste judges the world
in its appearance and in its worldliness; its interest in the
world is purely 'disinterested' and that means that neither
the life interests of the individual nor the moral interests of
the self are involved here. For judgments of taste, the world
is the primary thing, not man, neither man's life nor his self.”
(Arendt, 1968, 222)

The language probably lies dormant in the particles that
together constitute a material and, later on, an object,
if a human being says so; otherwise they are particles
in waiting, particles that have yet to take on a material
form. Or that will change shape. They will have been
there for a long time, longer than the view of them as
something else will have existed. What was the first
material we made into an object? When did we extend
the body and start thinking that other things belonged
to our bodies? The next step was presumably that
things belonged to us, even if we were not ourselves
where they were. Someone placed one stone on top of
another stone, but these are not our stones, they are the
stones’ stones, and material things have a lifespan, in
that they are broken down into smaller components at
some point in time, and converted into something else.

The urge to carry on living can fade, but the body per-
haps does not give in to it. I do not know what it is like
to be on the run from one’s own country, but I know
how it feels when my thoughts run away and abandon
so-called rational thinking, when I have no longer been
able to recognise myself as I believed I was:

Supposing the expression if looks could kill meant ex-
actly what it says, it would have to be turned back
into its spirit when it is like this. When gazes can
no longer kill, when they should be able to, it can
be because the target, the person, no longer exists
in the same way in that moment. In a way, the shat-
tering of the soul, which happens within the same
person, is then a defence against this gaze of death.
You can kill the person, but not the part of the
person you remember and relate to. Bare life makes
its appearance when the soul is partly hidden, it
is something else that will die. The memory of
the person becomes even more mythical and will have
to be cultivated in another way by family members.
Consequently it does not matter whether it would
be possible at all, gazes cannot kill in the way they
are thought to do. It would not change anything at
that point, it would require a rehabilitation of the
person for it to be able to be carried out.68

"The Art History Room in Durban put on show an ‘evo-
olutionary ladder’ of artefacts, artworks, and cultures from
across the world. Its effect, if not explicit objective, was to
underline a Eurocentric vision of things—a view not un-
common in art studies of the time. …

"But did the display also open up—perhaps quite unwitting-
ly—counterviews, alternative readings? … What light could
this throw on today’s migratory swirl of peoples and cultural
elements—on prickly issues of multiculturalism, its limits
and shortcomings; on questions of living with diversity,
difference and multiplicity; on much-thumbed notions of
hospitality and tolerance; on ceaseless everyday cultural
translation and cosmopolitising forces—all in a setting
of apparent racisme sans race?” (Maharaj, “The World
Turned Upside Down” course materials)

We divide time up into portions. One of these is that
between private life and working. Private life can be
transformed into work; there is an interaction. Private
life perhaps needs to be more private, in order to be
manageable, than work needs to be as work. Might a
good approach be to let the private element of obser-
vation be work and, on top of that, self-help, without
their impinging on each other? Is there not a need for
refuge from work occasionally? In contrast, a refuge
from the private should be more like a flight from real-
ity, but what you are as a person is not as malleable at
its core as your work is. The private, though, involves
more basic needs; these become harder to criticise
since they deal to a greater extent with feelings and the
unconscious. So how can one deal with one’s private,
everyday life and our shared problems in work both
together? Not as in being alone, or on your own, in the
same way as they say one dies alone. One can die both
internally and externally, with others and with oneself.

The private goes over into being fuel for a working
method and, thus, one can work relatively privately
without exposing oneself to danger, to risks that one
does not want to take. It is not me, it is largely a tool
like any other, like when Marcel Proust does not write
from the starting point of the self; no one can say that
it is himself that he writes about.69 As long as one knows
oneself where one is private, one can hide it better from
others. I choose the illusion; the private as work and
collaboration in a group and in stone. Can I devise an
educational method during the preparations before the
conversation? Large parts of the conversation occur
before it happens, so to speak. Can an educational
From the workshop in the Anti-Apartheid Room, Malmö Art Academy, 2017. Max Ockborn
method exist in the unspoken or unannounced changes to the physical workplace, so as to try to support and assist others? In the cultivation of ideas that goes on, back and forth, between us every day, perhaps not even whole thoughts, but indicative fragments.

Problems are absorbed into the working process and turned into methods or physical contributions to it and, besides that, in this way they hopefully do not need to create problems for others. My hope is always that private problems will avoid being other people’s problems. Or at least that we can come together in the general aspects of the problems. The problems have become practice, loneliness has generated work. This is about being precise in declaring one’s own view of things in order to be able to distinguish it for oneself; it becomes heavy-going if one gives up on the belief that the self exists. If one loses one’s voice, then one is exposed; then one is no longer solely oneself. Someone has stolen part of you, and you do not know how it will come back. I do not believe, on the contrary, that it is a matter of a need for control in such a demarcation. The working process can generally be seen as being in constant transformation and, thus, one cannot know what will lead where. One has to be receptive and adapt to the situation, to the group, to oneself. That which is always the same is change itself. When one is working, one is not alone in the same way; it is always partly in common. The aim of the work is neither private nor in the singular; if that were the case, it would be purely selfish. Yet, it surely needs to be more like a symbiosis than a parasitic relationship in which someone’s self has taken others hostage. Loneliness lives in the self, in any case. If I am excessively afraid when I am alone, and no longer know what can be considered reality, as well as experiencing it as too private, then others presumably feel the same thing. Is there anything unique about dread? What is perhaps unique is the lack of communication, the absence of anyone to share the fear with. Might the fear be about worrying that your family will starve and die before your own eyes? What would you do to avoid this happening? Would you sell stones to neo-Nazis if the state guaranteed the safety of the deliveries?

Support groups are formed by our being open and transparent about our fears. In the solitary state I fear I will at some point again get fixated on some ideas that I often have, that I cannot get myself out of, and will not be able to get back from, that I will be shut inside my brain; this has happened before. It is disturbing not to be able know who you yourself are, who others are, and what the difference is. How many times can you manage to make your way back if you are shut in? If you experience things that no one should have to experience? The soul can be hollowed out, but you can also help others by talking about your problems, by cutting steps in the path for others, being part of a shared development, an atoning rehabilitation. There is enormous potential in sharing, in the language about the private in work. How we tell stories to each other, and how we do it again in order to anchor them in the collective memory. I do not know much about having been a refugee of war, but I have been a refugee of myself forever. However much I try to help, these actions are not enough in the eye of the mind; there is no serenity available.

How We View Existence and How It Shifts in Longing’s Glint of Something Else

Can we consider we are individual in our thinking without considering that we receive proposals, impacts, and influences from others and, in that case, when would it be like we are wholly and entirely individual? The singular, the unique, perhaps always exists in our own thoughts, but it is impossible to communicate it to anyone else in exactly the way we experience it. Besides the fact that every person appears as separate from others in a purely physical sense. There is perhaps no evidence that the subjective exists in this way.

“...Taste is this ‘community sense’ (gemeinschaftlicher Sinn) and sense means here ‘the effect of a reflection upon the mind.’ This reflection affects me as though it were a sensation. … ‘We could even define taste as the faculty of judging of that which makes generally communicable, without the mediation of a concept, our feeling [like sensation] in a given representation [not perception].’” (Arendt, 1978, 269)

If we cannot share it, how can we know that it exists? Even if we are our own in our thoughts, we have no possibility of knowing it. If one can maintain an interest in whatever is being discussed, one can perhaps still steer this to what one actually wants, changing how the tracks lead. Making something, anything at all, means simultaneously not making all other things. What one foregoes is thus incomprehensibly greater in quantity. So, what are we to propose, what are we to whisper about? The decisions can seem to be very lonely ones, but they are also an illusion, something that we have invented to fit into our conceptual apparatus. What then does it mean to not make a decision, and is that even possible given our automatic thoughts? What is a decision? In a subjective, vision-oriented inspection of a spatial image of a room, one always excludes all the angles apart from the one that the eye fixes upon, but the eyes’ central vision is, as a percentage, very little. The gaze flutters around in order to build up images of
the room. In peripheral vision, in contrast, what goes on is a kind of negotiation between memory and eye; thus, seeing goes on solely in the present moment, and the eye is an instrument. It is not the eye that sees the image, but the brain. The impression of a spatial image of a room outside vision, acquired with other senses, greatly affects the overall image of it. The memory of the feel of a material from a touch can mean that, later on, when one sees it, one can add this feeling to the visual impression. But this works differently in a group; one can cover a larger area as an organism, as a network. Making a choice is thus fundamentally painful and difficult, whatever one chooses. We are used to that. But again, what then does it mean not to choose? How has prehistoric thinking been managed and changed? How is information supplied in our common mental space, and when? What does the negotiation on the periphery look like? Are the threads of thought shut down with time, and do they become outdated? Can one talk about origins when the issue is information? We look straight at those origins in nature every day, but no longer understand the connection. If I look at a table and am able to concentrate on the fact that I am seeing a table, that can feel very good; I am happy about seeing it. But usually I do not see it as I do when I think I am doing this. Arendt states:

Every particular object, for instance a table, has a corresponding concept by which we recognize the table as a table. This you can conceive of as a Platonic “idea” or Kantian schema, that is, you have before the eyes of your mind a schematic or merely formal table shape to which every table somehow must conform. Or: If you proceed conversely from the many tables which you have seen in your life, strip of them all secondary qualities and the remainder is a table in general, containing the minimum properties common to all tables. The abstract table. You have one more possibility left, and this enters into judgments which are not cognitions: You may meet or think of some table which you judge to be the best possible table and take this table as the example of how tables actually should be—the exemplary table. (Example from eximere, to single out some particular.) This is and remains a particular which in its particularity reveals the generality which otherwise could not be defined. Courage is like Achilles. Etc.

We were talking here about the partiality of the actor who, because he is involved, never sees the meaning of the whole. … The same is not true for the beautiful or for any deed in itself. The beautiful is, in Kantian terms, an end in itself because all its possible meaning is contained within itself, without reference to others, without linkage, as it were, to other beautiful things. In Kant himself, there is this contradiction: Infinite Progress is the law of the human species; at the same time man’s dignity demands that he is seen, every single one … in his particularity, reflecting as such, but without any comparison and independent of time, mankind in general. In other words the very idea of progress—if it is more than a mere change of circumstances and an Improvement of the world—contradicts Kant’s notion of man’s dignity.70

It is rare for one to be there where one sees the table as one perhaps should see it, without masking. These instances of clarity, when one experiences that one is there in the moment with what one is thinking about or looking at, are quite infrequent. When one succeeds in leaving runaway thoughts alone for a while, when the vision of the future corresponds to the present moment. But what is it that one is actually seeing? There is a lot that is put into the table that is not the table itself. This in itself does not perhaps mean so very much at all to you; it is a combination of many different experiences and efforts that lead to your appreciation and vision of it. Threads of events that have led there, just when you are in sync with what you are looking at. But there are perhaps still more directly appreciated things to consider for observation. One can talk about longing in seeing, but if what one is looking at can be seen with longing, then it perhaps entails one not really being there. If one is inside an experience, one presumably does not, at the same time, long for that same thing. Can one even long for the same moment that one is experiencing in the present moment, at the same time as it is being played out? How long is the present moment, and would it add a romantic shimmer to the situation? Like the shimmer of summer heat further along the road. When one reaches what one was looking at, it has vanished, moved further away up the road.

In “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,” Benjamin states:

Clearly, it is another nature which speaks to the camera as compared to the eye. “Other” above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious. Whereas it is a commonplace that, for example, we have some idea what is involved in the act of walking (if only in general terms), we have no idea at all what happens during the split second when a person actually takes a step. We are familiar with the movement of picking up … a spoon, but know almost nothing of what really goes on between hand and metal, and still less how this varies with different moods.71

Benjamin also says this in the same text:

The stripping of the veil from the object, the destruction of the aura, is the signature of a perception whose “sense for sameness in the world”
From the workshop at the gravel area at the back of Malmö Art Academy, 2017. Sculptural installation. Dimensions variable. Max Ockborn
The amount of matter in the universe stays the same, at least on the level at which a sculptor may use matter; and all the possible shapes already exists, at least in a Jungian or Platonic sense; so that the ‘creation’ is not a category of concern for the sculptor. From this perspective we could substitute, ‘he created a new piece’ for ‘she changed another object.’ The implied question should always be, ‘Why did she change that object, and what does that have to do with me?’” (Durham, 1993, 70)

One can be afraid of losing hold of experiences while one is having them, but one can perhaps also find oneself in being inside the experience of liking that very longing as such. Then perhaps what one is seeing or experiencing is also subject to that very longing as an entity. The longing perhaps needs the images, sounds, smells, tastes, feelings, and touches in order to exist and emerge, but it is something else in itself, complete as an experience; longing as a sense-based entity. A single sense can have the power to activate all the other senses together.73 Then we can see the longing and like it as it is, as an overlapping. May art needs to be a universally overlapping madeleine cake. When we are on our own in our thoughts, in the sense that we cannot reproduce an experience for someone else in the way that we ourselves experienced it, then communication perhaps always becomes a negotiation. Communication lies dormant in most things, and is active where the living and the dead meet, where roads cross. One can describe these crossings in what the objects communicate to the living inhabitants of a spatial image of a room. They would not exist without us except if they have been simply taken straight off for what they are from the nature outside our sphere. In such cases it is the situation that they did not find themselves in before that is the difference, not the physical one. They would have the same form and content, apart from what has fallen away during the mental transportation. A stone can be a table, but what is a stone according to itself? Fossils were once alive and became stones; cells are alive, but not when they are dust. A large part of the dust in our rooms consists of dead skin cells and bodily detritus; we are constantly meeting in the dust. The stone is us eventually, at any rate if it can still be seen as being a part of us at that point. Our dead cells float around among us. Dust does not care whether it came from something private or from work; we can no longer see the difference.

The group’s dust collects where we work, the dead and the living meet in mobile situations, and death is not always as quiet as one needs it to be when one is thinking about it and working on it. It is swift and takes no account of how we look at things; we have alienated ourselves from death in the linear, in time as a human invention. The living and the dead are the same thing, albeit at different points in time; they perhaps do not meet at all in the sense that they can be seen as being the same as information or matter. Without the concept of death, we have no life at all. What we call the dead and the living meet, and it is there that there is communication. We see ourselves in the dead and wonder how things function when one is dead. But when one is dead, one can no longer work, but one is extremely private to many other people (unless one has been denied this possibility). Everything that existed before me writes along with me and my negative thought patterns, which I want to change. What falls off during our transportation is what becomes work; the rest is probably too private, I assume, since it is not here to be read.

Workshop Three, at the Academy, in the Anti-Apartheid Room, and on the Gravel Area behind the School

The third workshop built on what was done in the two earlier ones and, this time, the invitation was open to the public, with the group consisting of people both from Malmö Art Academy and outside.74 The invitation to the workshop read:

Regarding the “Hitler stones” and how the Swedish stone industry traded with Nazi Germany before and during the Second World War. Regarding the importance of talking about or addressing disturbing events that have happened in the past and talking about them in our time; seeing history as something that is alive and not something that is over and done with. Talking about what may have happened, how we can work with art in the service of society so as to achieve various forms of atonement, and by doing so trying to see if art and culture can stop being so self-centred and instead be able to function as a helpful tool.

We worked primarily in the reconstructed Anti-Apartheid Room at the Academy, where Maharaj’s course “The World Turned Upside Down: Art and Ethics in the Rise of the ‘Stone Age South’” was held, but we also worked on the gravel area behind the school, where we made a joint work for the Academy’s annual exhibition. We used and discussed the models from the earlier workshops that were devised by the other groups. The group decided to write a long title and a list of materials, instead of making a new model
for continued working. This time, we mostly worked with what was already there on the spot, in what was more about transformation than about taking things there, of moving objects and of moving objects back, as mentioned earlier.

We watched Kjell Andersson’s documentary about the Hitler stones, and I showed pictures of Jimmie Durham’s works at GIBCA 2011, as well as from the earlier workshops. I had decorated the room in advance as a basis for the workshop, and some of my sculptures were present as guests, to take part and observe, to try and learn something. I encouraged the participants to bring their own artworks with them to the workshop, if they thought that these, too, needed to learn something. The participants got to choose a stone to spend time with and take care of during the workshop, and these stones were later used in the installation, in a ring around a tree. We made a brief excursion to the churchyard beside the Academy, to the grave of the stoneworker mentioned before, who is buried beneath the stone that killed him. We set up the installation and had a review during which everyone could say something about the artwork, the working process, the collaboration, what we now wanted to talk about. We finalised the title and the materials list, and then went out to the artwork and read them out to it.75

“Ah! Just imagine how surprised he was when he realised he was no longer a wooden puppet, but that instead he’d become a real live boy like all the others! …

“I wonder where old wooden Pinocchio has hidden himself?’

“There is a fantastic art-historical treatise. It is called Paradisus terrestris, myt, bild och verklighet [Paradisus terrestris, myth, image and reality], and it was written by Lars-Ivar Ringbom and published in Helsinki in 1958. A life of searching for the earthly paradise leads him to the mountain of the magicians, Shiz, in Azerbaijan. How does he find it? By being convinced that artists had depicted something that actually existed, that someone had seen it, and that these visual testimonies had faithfully preserved the image of paradise throughout the millennia. Patently and persistently he makes his way through early Christian mosaics, going via Sassanid bronze dishes and silver vases, and on to Albanian churches. He sees baptismal fonts from Gotland and Götene, as well as ossuaries in Ravenna and mystical sanctuaries in Roman frescos.” Gertrud Sandqvist, “Paradis,” in Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, exhibition catalogue (Gothenburg: GIBCA, 2011), 23.

“We have risk, uncertainty and disequilibrium at one end at odds with upturn at the other end, with the ascendency of Asia, the global South, ‘non-Western modernities.’ But if we see turbulence narrowly in terms of ‘financial bubble,’ of ‘boom and bust’—painful and devastating as its concrete consequences are for individuals, actual people and institutions—we overlook the fact that out of the maelstrom other modes and forms of order and designs for living are also brewing up. In this context, Pandemonium—Art in a Time of Creativity Fever grasps turbulence less as a point of utter termination and more as a phase of a dynamical system in which negative and positive pass over into each other—where order emanates out of apparent chaos—a creative, self-organising system, self-raising and self-erasing.” Sarat Maharaj, curatorial statement in Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, 6.

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1 See Max Ockborn, “In hopes of support from the rooms we use,” Malmö Art Academy Yearbook 2011–2012 (Malmö: Malmö Art Academy, 2012), 79–108.
3 In Jewish cemeteries people often leave stones on graves instead of flowers, since flowers do not live as long.
4 “Particularly in Europe, anti-monumentalism is my main engine. I think of Europe as monumental. The architectural impulse is monumental. Someone like the architect Philip Johnson joined the Nazi party. Architects need politicians who like monumentalism. Stone in Europe has a triple weight. There is such a heavy metaphoric weight stuck in the stone—from the obelisks to God’s laws written in stone. I like to work with stones as a tool instead of as a monument.” Jimmie Durham, interview by Gertrud Sandqvist, Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, exhibition catalogue (Gothenburg: GIBCA, 2011), 23.
5 “We have risk, uncertainty and disequilibrium at one end at odds with upturn at the other end, with the ascendency of Asia, the global South, ‘non-Western modernities.’ But if we see turbulence narrowly in terms of ‘financial bubble,’ of ‘boom and bust’—painful and devastating as its concrete consequences are for individuals, actual people and institutions—we overlook the fact that out of the maelstrom other modes and forms of order and designs for living are also brewing up. In this context, Pandemonium—Art in a Time of Creativity Fever grasps turbulence less as a point of utter termination and more as a phase of a dynamical system in which negative and positive pass over into each other—where order emanates out of apparent chaos—a creative, self-organising system, self-raising and self-erasing.” Sarat Maharaj, curatorial statement in Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, 6.
6 “There is a fantastic art-historical treatise. It is called Paradisus terrestris, myt, bild och verklighet [Paradisus terrestris, myth, image and reality], and it was written by Lars-Ivar Ringbom and published in Helsinki in 1958. A life of searching for the earthly paradise leads him to the mountain of the magicians, Shiz, in Azerbaijan. How does he find it? By being convinced that artists had depicted something that actually existed, that someone had seen it, and that these visual testimonies had faithfully preserved the image of paradise throughout the millennia. Patently and persistently he makes his way through early Christian mosaics, going via Sassanid bronze dishes and silver vases, and on to Albanian churches. He sees baptismal fonts from Gotland and Göteborg, as well as ossuaries in Ravenna and mystical sanctuaries in Roman frescos.” Gertrud Sandqvist, “Paradis,” in Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, 6.
7 Staffan Nihlén, Skulptur, Lunds Konsthall, October 1–November 27, 2016.
8 Hitlerstenen—En märklig affär i krigets skugga [The Hitler stones—A strange business in the shadow of war], documentary, directed by Kjell Andersson (Sweden: KMA Filmproduktion, 2011).
9 Skärvor från en vunnen tid [Fragments from a time gone by], documentary, directed by Kjell Andersson (Sweden: KMA Filmproduktion, 2004).
Historically, Hitler embodies exemplarily the figure of a loser who was unable to bring to conclusion anything he started—not even the work of reduction and annihilation. Amazingly, Hitler succeeded in losing utterly, not only politically and militarily but also morally—something that is almost unique as a historical achievement, for defeat in real life is usually balanced by moral victory and vice versa. As an absolute loser in this sense, Hitler holds a certain fascination for our time, because modern art has always celebrated the figure of the loser—this is the very penchant for which Hitler condemned modern art so vehemently. We have learned to admire the figure of the *poète maudit* [accursed poet] and the *artiste raté* [failed artist] who earned their places as heroes of the modern imagination not by victory but by spectacular defeat. And in the competition among losers that modern culture has offered us, Hitler was exceptionally, if inadvertently, successful.” Boris Groys, *Art Power* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 139.

A UK stone is equivalent to 6.35 kilograms.

The street was to be approximately twenty metres wider than the Champs Élysées in Paris, so as to outdo the French. This was incidentally the goal of several of the monumental buildings planned for Germany: the French Arc de Triomphe would fit into the space beneath the planned German one, while the Eiffel Tower could fit into the airspace inside the dome of the enormous Volkshalle. After the early successes in the war and victory over France, Hitler flew to Paris, but stayed for only a day. This was not, however, to inspect the military triumph, but to see the architecture of Paris with his architect friends, among them Albert Speer. They ticked off all the sights at a brisk pace and Hitler was very impressed. The intention was to demolish the buildings in Paris, but after this visit, the plan is said to have been changed. Hitler was convinced that his own buildings would soon outshine their French counterparts. *Visions of Space—Albert Speer: Size Matters*, documentary, directed by Robert Hughes (UK: BBC, 2003).

Consciously or unconsciously, the act of rebellion by the oppressed (an act which is always, or nearly always, as violent as the initial violence of the oppressors) can initiate love. Whereas the violence of the oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human, the response of the latter to this violence is grounded in the desire to pursue the right to be human. As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression. It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors. The latter, as an oppressive class, can free neither others nor themselves.” Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 56.

He acquired these theories solely when in his home city of Königsberg (which he never left), as well as from people there who were able to tell him stories: “While acknowledging that ‘travel’ by the scholar him or herself (or what one might call ‘fieldwork’ today) is an ideal way to gather knowledge of other cultures, Kant argued that reading travel books (regardless of their Eurocentric audience-appeal and their intended purpose: namely, propagandistic justification of foreign expansionism and exploitation) can legitimately substitute for fieldwork. It did not seem to matter for Kant’s anthropology or physical geography courses whether the research-scholar simply read in a travel novel, or actually saw in situ, that it is customary to desert children in China, to bury them alive in Brazil, for the Eskimos to strangle them, or that ‘the Peruvians are simple people since they put everything that is handed to them into their mouths.’ Kant writes: ‘Travel is among the means of enlarging the scope of anthropology even if such knowledge is only acquired by reading books of travel.’ It is common knowledge that one of the reasons why Kant never left Königsberg throughout his professional life was because he wanted to stay in the seaport town to meet and gather information from seafarers.” Emmanuel Chukwudie Eze, *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1997), 128.

Kjell Andersson’s *Stentrilogin* [The stone trilogy] includes *Skärvar från en svunnen tid* [Fragments from a time gone by], 2004; *Stickspåret* [Bohus knitting—From relief work to world success], 2007; and *Hitlerrstenen—En märklig affär i krigets skugga* [The Hitler stones—A strange business in the shadow of war], 2011.

“My fellow citizens! The horror that we in recent times have been hoping that the world would be spared has now come to pass. A new great war has broken in recent times have been hoping that the world would be spared has now come to pass. A new great war has broken in recent times have been hoping that the world would be spared has now come to pass. A new great war has broken in recent times have been hoping that the world would be spared has now come to pass. A new great war has broken in recent times have been hoping that the world would be spared has now come to pass. A new great war has broken in recent times have been hoping that the world would be spared has now come to pass. A new great war has broken..." Speech by Per Albin Hansson (Prime Minister of Sweden at the time) on Swedish radio on the day that Nazi Germany invaded Poland, September 1, 1939, and the Second World War started.

The Foreign Capital Control Office was an official body that existed from 1945 to 1956. It was set up to locate Nazi German assets left behind in Sweden after the war. The allied military powers wanted to confiscate these assets, but it was decided instead that they should be sequestrated and sold. According to an agreement reached in 1956, the Germans once again got the right to hold assets in Sweden and if possible to buy back their former possessions.


The word “ritual” is used perhaps primarily within religion, in the sense of being a prescribed or time-honoured order of service in a religious or church ceremony, which is then carried out according to that order. A more general meaning could imply that a ritual is a fixed order, a definite form, that is held in mind during recurrent occasions or situations, out of habit.


See Appendix 1.

“The raison d’être of libertarian education, on the other hand, lies in its drive towards reconciliation. Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.” Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 72.

Staffan Nihlén, born 1929, began his artistic training in 1944 and is still active.

“...The sculpture rises up out of the dark basin and induces a feeling of a burning flame. A flame of hope as a symbol of the hope that Wallenberg ignited in thousands of Jews through his courageous, humane work in Hungary.” Conny Pettersson, Jacob Faxe, Stig Johansson, and Gunnar Ericson, Konstguide—Skulpturer och offentlig utsmyckning i Malmö [Art guide—Scultures and public artworks in Malmö] (Malmö: ABF Malmö, 2006), 26.

“Throughout his work, Durham deconstructs language and architecture, which he sees as representations of Power and Authority. A favourite material, of course, is stone, which he paradoxically utilizes to undo the rigid, permanent, and monumental. ‘I try to make art that’s not connected to metaphor,’ Durham has said. ‘That hasn’t this descriptive, metaphorical, architectural weight to it. … I want to do different things with stone to make stone light, to make it free of its metaphorical weight, its architectural weight. … So I’ve been thinking of different ways to make stone work and to make stone move instead of making stone into an architectural element.’” Jimmie Durham, quoted in Dirk Snauwaert, “The Great Stoneface,” Farkett, no. 92 (2013), 22–23.

See Appendix 1.


Jimmie Durham, Material, 100 Notes, 100 Thoughts (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 13.

5 x Roy Andersson, Härlig är Jorden and Why and how the scenes were made, both directed by Roy Andersson (Stockholm: Studio 24, 2009).

Bruchfeld and Levine, Tell Ye Your Children, 71.


Sebastian Borges, Francis Patrick Brady, and Max Ockborn.

Kjell Andersson’s Hitlerstenen—En märklig affär i krigets skugga.


See Appendix 2.

Jimmie Durham, Between the Furniture and the Building (Between a Rock and a Hard Place) (Cologne: Walther König, 1999), 85–93.


Arendt, Hitlerstenen.

As mentioned before, this was, however, precisely what he left behind him in the form of ruins.

Arendt, Hitlerstenen.

Andersson, Hitlerstenen.

Andersson, Hitlerstenen.

Andersson, Hitlerstenen.

Andersson, Hitlerstenen.

Andersson, Hitlerstenen.

Andersson, Hitlerstenen.


Eze, Postcolonial African Philosophy, 118.

Groys, Art Power, 133.

Jonasson og Holmberg, Nazismen i Dokument, 164–175.


Rees, Auschwitz.

Jonasson and Holmberg, Nazismen i Dokument, 56–59.


Robert Smithson, “Incidents of Mirror Travel in the Yucatan,” Artforum, September 1969. Note that in Swedish, the word for “paint,” färg, means both “paint” and “colour.”

Ockborn, “In hopes of support from the rooms we use,” 80.


Arendt, The Life of the Mind, 272.


“...the waterlilies on the Vivonne and the good folk of the village and their little dwellings and the parish church and the whole of Combray and its surroundings, taking shape and solidity, sprang into being, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea.” Proust, In Search of Lost Time, 64–65.


Further References


Films and artworks


Appendix #1
This is what the template that we made during the first workshop looked like:

Template for making temporary monuments:
- Find or choose the place (monument)
- Survey the site
- Research any monuments already there
- Map out the circumstances (if anything interesting)
- If correlating with an exhibition or other event, get local insight
- Discuss the circumstances
- Discuss the possibilities
- Gather tools and maybe some materials
- Prepare the (outside) work
- Group site visit
- Map out the place together
- Talk about what to do at the site
- Prepare site and gather material
- Don’t forget rituals such as the coffee break
- Decide things
- Make things
- Clear up and clean
- Reassess, do the studio workshop, add the finishing touches
- Do the documentation
- Optionally stage a public event
- Discuss the temporary monument’s existence

Appendix #2
This is what the template that we made during the second workshop looked like:

Instructions/Suggestions for creating a long moment in public spaces:
- Take care of people (create a positive working and leisure environment)
- Reconcile your living area, reconcile your working area
- Why are we here?
- Find or choose the place(s) (a marker of interest)
- Gather materials and tools constantly throughout
- Survey the place (slowly understand it)
- Research stories or history already there
- Map out the circumstances (if any interesting ones)
- Discuss the circumstances
- Walk through the surroundings
- Mental breaks
- Make fires (think, write and read)
- Meditate
- If correlating with an exhibition or other event, get local insight
- Make plans for the time the group has at its disposal
- Find a site to work on
- Make the preparation for outside work
- Do field trips to discover more things in the area
- Probe the locals and probe materials
- Be seen in the local area and eat local food
- Don’t forget rituals such as the coffee break
- Clear up and clean
- Recalibrate plans to finish the project
- Put materials on top of other materials based on previous discussions
- Discuss what this arrangement means in this context (of the site/marker/local area/history/workshop)
- Don’t lie to the locals about what you are doing (to the best of your knowledge)
- Hold a ceremony if necessary
- Document
- Leave the site in a better condition than before
- Say a temporary goodbye to the long moment
- Be prepared to revisit and extend the long moment

Appendix #3
Here are the title and the list of materials the we wrote down in the group during the third workshop, which were then included in the information leaflet for the Art Academy’s Annual Exhibition:

Title:
A long moment in a public space created through our human labour; we made a hut by piling stones up the sides of a bicycle stand, we changed the ground, we created some kind of playing court, we used the time and measured it with stones, we cleared space and dug a hole, uncovering the root of a tree, we did not completely forget about the kids and they may quite like the work, but who knows what they would do with it, a woman sat eating her lunch and watched us work before smoking a cigarette, the work can be read from above as an ‘O’, we saw a stone that was both an epitaph to a deceased stone carver and the object that brought about his demise, we painted all the pebbles with our tears, we did not make anything to last that was physical but we did move things around, we did not, to our knowledge, commit any illegal activities, we spent many joules of energy, some of us replenished ourselves with local Chinese food from a restaurant that was occupied solely by lone men, people may remember this story or mis-remember it, we have added to a long title originally written by Max Ockborn and made it longer so that it requires a Herculean breath, “someone put a stone on another stone, but they are not our stones, they are the stone’s stones, and that which is material has a lifespan that will sooner or later dissolve into smaller parts and become transformed into something else”, this is where we reach the heart of the matter, we shared a long moment together with other matter, the stones and us have exchanged some brief conversations and even though our past and their present are different we could come to some kind of arrangement, as we had things in common.

Materials:
- Stones, pebbles, rocks, granite, hessian, masking tape, sellotape, packing tape, bike stand, iron wire, staples, iron screw, medium-density fibreboard, root of a nearby tree, dirt/soil and sand.
Vattnet vet/The water knows, 2017. A bottle containing a story is thrown into the pond by one of the participants. Wanås Konst—Center for Art & Learning, Knislinge, 2017. Kezia Pritchard
Vattnet vet/The water knows, 2017. A bottle containing a story is thrown into the pond by one of the participants. Wanås Konst—Center for Art & Learning, Knislinge, 2017. Kezia Pritchard
Vattnet vet/The water knows, 2017. A bottle from the project containing a story. Wanås Konst—Center for Art & Learning, Knislinge, 2017. Kezia Pritchard
Walk Talks: A Pedagogical Method Involving Dialogue and Movement with an Emphasis on Memory and Storytelling

“The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at that moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even after a long time.”
—Walter Benjamin

In his book *The Songlines*, Bruce Chatwin describes a trip he took to Australia to research the connection between song and nomadic travel. This book brought the link between land and collective memory to my attention. The songs the indigenous people of Australia perform as they walk along invisible pathways that crisscross the country are believed to sing the world into existence. Through memory and the spoken word, a layering of voices that stretches back much further than written documents can become merged between people. Historians have explained that in Australian oral traditions, the knowledge of a song or a narrative is often structured around the place where certain events occurred or the protagonists who become the custodians of the song. The places and the people are specific to the way these societies situate and retell their memories of the past.

According to Carolyn Hamilton, who specialises in the history and uses of the archive in South Africa, “fluidity is a core strength of oral accounts, rather than their fatal flaw.” She believes that, compared to written history, there is a significant change in perspective in relation to oral history as a way of recording the past. For most of human history, interviews would be “recorded” from one person’s memory to another’s or preserved as oral traditions in the form of a tale. Historian and filmmaker Dan Sipe explains, “retelling was an indispensable component of such oral history.”

Through the written word we are able to record and learn about past events, but to have stories told and retold adds presence and personal connection to the experience. Walter Benjamin contends that “among those who have written down the tales, it is the great ones whose written version differs least from the speech of the many nameless storytellers.” He connects the rapid distribution of information, with its lack of human interaction, in the early twentieth century to the decline of storytelling. He has written about how “the most extraordinary things, marvellous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.” According to Benjamin, the storyteller was better able to integrate the stories with the experience of the listeners, and those stories had the ability to transcend time in a way that the new systems for relaying information cannot. I read about how some oral traditions are vanishing in India due to the introduction of literacy, which is affecting people’s capacity to remember. Last year I wrote about the effect this has on memory through these traditions by referring to a passage in a book about a “folklorist” who wanted to collect and preserve songs of the Langa singers in the Rajasthan state of India in the 1950s. He sent one singer, Lakha, to adult education classes to learn to read and write, as the folklorist thought this would make it easier to collect the songs the singer had stored in his memory. However, the mission failed. On his return, while the rest of the Langa singers were able to remember hundreds of songs, Lakha now depended on his diary to recollect them. There is evidence to suggest that the memories of stories are made stronger when linked to experience and the way they are told, that is, to the
connection the listener has with the person telling the
story and where they were situated in the moment of it
being told.

Introduction
Until recently, my practice was primarily concerned
with how we remember past events and how, through
memory, the past and the present can merge. I am
interested in the connection between memory, dialogue,
and place, how movement affects dialogue, and how
certain memories are formed in relation to movement.
I have been investigating how dialogue and movement
can be used as a pedagogical method during my time
on the Critical & Pedagogical Studies course at Malmö
Art Academy. Initially, I wanted to see if the experience
of having a dialogue with other art students about art
while we walked would affect how the dialogue is
remembered and whether the memory of our conversa-
tion would be stronger because of being in motion.
This method was intended as an extension of the studio
visit, not as an alternative. I have continued to use this
method as an experimental attempt to find new ways
of discussing art with people who may or may not be
connected to an art institution. Through this thesis I will
explore how spaces of potentiality can open up through
movement and dialogue and how it is possible for art
to continue through memory and oral accounts. I will
compare what I have learned through my experience of
using the method of walking and dialogue in my role as
an art teacher within an art preparatory school and in
my role as a socially engaged artist at an art institution.

Pedagogy and Dialogue as an Art Form
I would like to highlight that my method of dialogue
and movement is not solely about making a personal
connection with somebody else, which is closer to the
intention of relational aesthetics, a method art critic
Claire Bishop would argue certain artists14 use to
strategically restage the institution as a “microtopian
site for relating”15 without questioning its structures.16
My method is first and foremost about the pedagogy
that takes place through the process. Gert Biesta17 says
that education has a relational character but that there
is no relation without the separation brought on by
the gap. In an educational setting, this space only exists
in communication between teacher and student and it
entails risk and opportunity. He argues that we cannot
have a theory of education because this gap is ultimate-
ly unrepresentable, so teachers can choose whether
to negate or acknowledge its existence. However, this
does not mean it can be forgotten, since it is the gap
itself that educates. Biesta believes meaning is not
in the minds and bodies of people, but is instead in
between them.18

I learned about the “educational turn” in art at the
beginning of my studies, which highlights a significant
shift occurring in art practice in recent years that recog-
nises pedagogy as medium and as form. The inception
of outcome-based educational reforms, such as the
Bologna Accord, which attempts to standardise all in-
stitutions and programmes of higher education within
Europe today, has been at the heart of invention for
a variety of alternative projects in art and education.19
In the introduction to the anthology Education from
the Documents of Contemporary Art series, its editor,
Felicity Allen,20 points to the desire within art academies
to avoid assessment criteria and instead focus on the
“becoming” in learning. For example, Irig Rogoff,
a professor of visual culture at Goldsmiths, University
of London, says thinking of the academy as potential
“allows for the inclusions of notions of both fallibility
and actualization into a practice of teaching and learn-
ing, which seems to me to be an interesting entry point
into thinking creativity in relation to different moments
of coming into being.”21 Citing Giorgio Agamben’s
notions of potentiality, she suggests abandoning the
focus on results and instead favouring potential22 and
prioritising “terms such as potentiality, actualisation
and access, which for me are the building blocks and
navigational vectors for a current pedagogy, a peda-
gogy at peace with its partiality, a pedagogy not pre-
occupied with succeeding but with trying.”23 Kristina
Lee Podesva24 writes about how the Copenhagen Free
University (CFU), like many projects associated with
institutional critique, engages with the academy as
an institution but is located discursively rather than
physically within the site of the academy.25 Podesva
states that the CFU “re-imagines the form and function
of art making, knowledge production (and by extension
the academy), and authorship (collaborative versus au-
tonomous). Moreover, it attempts to dissolve the barrier
between the public and private by siting educational
activities in a residential space”;26 its nature is that of an
art project that takes an educational form as a medium.
This was a turning point for me when thinking about
how effectively knowledge can be transferred through
dialogue. But, while situations are being created to talk
about art in order to open up the field for learning as
art, I wonder how much learning actually takes place?
Art historian and cultural critic Tom Holert is interested
in how the actual meaning around art processes and
production relates to the production of knowledge in
its field. In his article “Art in the Knowledge-Based
Polis,” he says that “within the art world today, the dis-
cursive formats of the extended library-cum-semin-
cum-workshop-cum-symposium-cum-exhibition have
become preeminent modes of address and forms of
knowledge production.”27 Holert refers to Rogoff’s
article “Turning,” in which she raises concerns about
the art world becoming “the site of extensive talking” as
a way of accessing knowledge. Rogoff wants to
address whether any value is being placed on what is
actually being said.28 In an earlier article entitled
“Academy as Potentiality,” she asks: “How can criti-
cality operate in the museum, turning it into a space
of learning in the real sense rather than in one of
information transfer, aesthetic satisfaction or cultural
edification?” I believe this is the defining difference between pedagogy as a symbolic act and pedagogy as an actual learning process in art. Artist, educator, and writer Pablo Helguera says, “pedagogy and education are about emphasis on the embodiment of the process, on the dialogue, on the exchange, on intersubjective communication, and on human relationships. The product may or may not be necessary or important. But it cannot happen if this exchange does not take place.”

The goal for the pedagogy in my work is not to represent education as art; the goal is for people to have an actual learning experience. Rogoff wants to “force these spaces to be more active, more questioning, less insular, and more challenging.” She stands by her belief that dialogue has the power to educate: “I would not wish to give up the notion of conversation, which, to my mind, has been the most significant shift within the art world over the past decade.”

Uncovered in Lee Lozano’s notebooks were entries from her Dialogue Piece (1969), for which she invited many people to engage in a dialogue with her. They could discuss whatever they wanted with no specific conversational direction. She was determined that the purpose was only to have a dialogue and not to “make a piece,” and she insisted that no recordings or notes were to be made during the dialogues. However, she does include details of the time and date of the dialogues in the later pages of her notebook, including the quality of the content and her state of mind at the time. Conceptual artist Ian Wilson sees the act of conversation as an artwork that contains an element of chance in his ongoing Discussion piece. Early on in the process of trying out my method of walking and talking with other artists, I realised that I did not want to record what was said during the process. Like Lozano, I do not consider the meetings to be art events, but rather
Dialogue, Walking, and the Creative Gap
Artist Janet Cardiff, who is well known for her audio walks, attempts to merge the past with the present by combining the sounds and/or videos from a recording of a place with the viewer’s actual presence in the same place at a different time as they follow the recording. Writer and performance researcher Sarah Gorman writes of the moments when the voice stopped talking during her experience of one of Cardiff’s walks in East London: “The overlapping narratives and invocation of both visible and invisible spaces might lead the spectator to become confused as to whether the fiction lies in the external world of the street or the internal world of the fiction which appears to be going on in their head. They may borrow from personal experience to fill the gaps in the narrative.” It seems as though the missing voice left Gorman feeling disoriented and with a desire to fill in the gaps based on her own reflections on the environment. The silences are charged with confusion and suspense. The voice gives the listener a context for the walk and what the listener leaves out is open for individual interpretation.

According to the cultural theorist Michel de Certeau, it is pedestrians who take the spaces of the city and turn them into places. They do not have a “god-like” visibility of the city as urban planners and cartographers do. Pedestrians are at ground level writing their own stories with their movements: “The ordinary practitioners of the city live ‘down below,’” below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are the walkers, Wandermänner, whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban ‘text’ they write without being able to read it.” They do this by projecting their imaginations onto the city through the manner of their movements. Each walker has their own style that, like a language, creates the city’s meaning. De Certeau explains: “The figures of pedestrian rhetoric substitute trajectories that have a mythical structure, at least if one understands by ‘myth’ a discourse relative to the place/nowhere of concrete existence, for a story jerry-built out of elements taken from common sayings, an allusive and fragmentary story whose gaps mesh with the social practices it symbolizes.”

Cardiff and de Certeau are both interested in how the individual interprets a space that has been given a specific purpose, such as the city. Cardiff’s approach to her walks activates an environment through the action of walking and listening and disorientates the viewer’s perception of what is real and what is fiction by leaving gaps in her recordings. As Gorman explains, “The vacuum created by the lack of coherence on the audio-track encourages the participant to look for ‘meaning’ in the context in which the information is received, to look to their immediate environment to furnish them with clues, or to even substitute themselves as one of the possible protagonists or personae participating in the fiction.”

Walk Talks at Ölands folkhögskola
In 2016, I had the opportunity to facilitate a one-week workshop at Ölands folkhögskola in Sweden. The workshop was about focusing on dialogue as process and as practice, and my aim was to introduce the students to discursive practice by having them participate in dialogue-based practical exercises, carry out and present a group-based assignment (to plan, create, and present an alternative dialogical situation), and take part in one-to-one walking tutorials. I wanted to see how dialogue and movement worked in this setting and if the actual place where we walked would affect our conversations. I also thought that by showing the students my method, which has been derived from my own practice, it could help them in finding strategies for thinking about their own project assignments for the week. The week ended with presentations and feedback sessions. For this thesis I will reflect only on the individual walking dialogues that took place.

The fact that I had been invited from Malmö Art Academy to share my working methods and experiences with the students was enough to create a strong hierarchy between the students and myself. I thought it would be important to use this pedagogical method to attempt to even out this structure. I tried to focus my attention on ways in which to avoid Paulo Freire’s “banking” concept of education, in which “the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits.” I also kept in mind educator bell hooks’s approach to teaching and learning: “I entered the classrooms with the conviction that it was crucial for me and every other student to be an active participant, not a passive consumer.” I explained to the students that the dialogues we were to have with each other have the potential to explore something new, or unexpected, which we could not have reached without the interaction of the other person. Philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin has written that the exchange that happens through dialogue can have a reciprocal effect, stating, “the result of a dialogical encounter is to open both participants to the ‘excess’ that is made possible by the provisional blurring of boundaries between self and other.” I wanted to make the students aware of the fact that through facilitating this workshop, I was also learning through its process. In her article “Art Students Making Use of
Studio Conversations," professor Ann-Mari Edström goes into depth with her research by focusing on the students’ use of studio conversations within a practice-based Master of Fine Arts programme in Sweden. Her article is written from the point of view of the art student, composed of transcriptions of verbal accounts of interviews between Edström and several students. I am not attempting to research the method of movement and dialogue in the same way; rather, my method is similar to a studio visit, where there is freedom within a framework. According to the pedagogy of philosopher John Dewey, there can be a certain set of rules or guiding principles that do not feel like they are restricting you, but without rules, there is no game. I aimed to begin each meeting with a framework to discuss the students’ work and the topics around it, but the direction and topic of conversation could be open to the situation. Like Dewey, I would attempt to drive the “direction of purpose” so both the students and I could feel secure in this method. Since I was also learning from this method, I kept a logbook to write down my own reflections within my role as the teacher at the end of each day and to keep note of the students’ responses.

Reflection: Walk Talks at Ölands folkhögskola

The discursive nature of my method involving dialogue and movement meant that this process worked well for some students and proved unideal for others. From the feedback I received, I discovered that all the students valued the method of walking and talking as a first meeting. However, to meet each other was not the sole intention of this approach, and although the method was not meant as an alternative to the studio visit, it does offer a different experience, and I learned that for some students, the studio visit was more beneficial for their work and we therefore returned to their studios after the walk to see the works in question. When the students required the visual work to be present, the meeting was either about themes around the work or personal anecdotes. It is not to say that dialogue and movement was not beneficial for meeting those students but, over time, I question if it would be beneficial for the work. It can be compared to one of artist Kim Engelen’s studio models, “The Personal Studio Visit,” which she explored in her master’s thesis in 2013. Engelen’s model is intended to contribute to “the human aspect of the art making profession.” Here, the student is able to choose a model for their studio visit in which they have the opportunity to discuss personal matters. When I encountered this situation with a student during our walk, it felt close to a therapeutic process. It is, of course, necessary to talk through a personal problem if the student requires it, but I wonder if there is a limit to the number of times the student can choose this model before it becomes unhelpful for the work. Engelen raises the point that teachers do not want to be therapists, but if students’ personal problems are not addressed, then it becomes impossible to teach. She explains, “when there is no care or no recognition of their inner conflicts, students shut down, and the status quo has been upheld. When teachers open up so that students can address their worries openly, they can offer affirmation and support.” With this in mind, there may be a lot of benefit to be found in a combination of walking and dialogue and a studio visit.

hooks writes about engaged pedagogy as a “practice of freedom” in her book Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. She believes that the work involved in the learning process from the side of the teacher is not only about sharing information but also about respecting the intellectual and spiritual growth of the students. She says, “to teach in a manner that respects and cares for the souls of our students is essential if we are to provide the necessary conditions where learning can most deeply and intimately begin.” hooks believes that engaged pedagogy is not only an approach for empowering students; that is, if there is to be a holistic model for learning, it needs to include the teacher’s growth too. She argues that “empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks.”

This relates to the idea of having a dialogical exchange in order to challenge the structure of hierarchy to help the learning process for both people involved. hooks continues, “when professors bring narratives of their experiences into classroom discussions it eliminates the possibility that we can function as all-knowing, silent interrogators.” At the end of her description of “The Personal Studio Visit,” Engelen mentions going for a walk as a different strategy for the studio visit. She explains, “you can have a walk or go with your visiting artist to a certain location, exhibition, person, job, migration office and so on. The only rule or boundary is the time frame you and the visiting artist have agreed upon.” This connects directly to my “walk talk” method, yet I would argue that the process is also effective without a personal issue that needs discussing.

The grounds of Ölands folkhögskola brought up memories for some of the students, and others had knowledge about the area’s history, but it seemed as though the action of being in movement and having a space of intimacy by being apart from their peers was what they gained through this method. I found it worked very well for those with an interest in discursive practice and tended to suit those who wished to talk about the process of their practice or talk through a problem. The effectiveness of the method varied depending on the nature of the students’ work and at what stage they were at in their processes. Some of the students said it challenged them to try to explain rather than show their work, and for some it was beneficial to leave the institutional setting. The walk talks were especially liberating for students who wanted to discuss
a topic with me in connection with the discussions that had arisen in class but who felt uncomfortable talking aloud in a group situation.

By carrying out the individual walk talks with the students, I was not only providing them with an individual tutorial but also demonstrating a method that was directly linked to their assignment for the week (planning, creating, and presenting a dialogical situation). Through taking part in my method, which has arisen from my artistic practice, they not only learned about an example for the task I had set them but were also able to experience taking part in one. How artists develop from teaching and learning from each other is an integral part of art education. Through my pedagogical method and through this workshop, I was able to introduce the students to first-hand experience of art pedagogy as an immaterial practice.

Walk Talks at Wanås Konst
For my exam project this year I made a socially engaged art project that took the form of a permanent artwork and incorporated the pedagogical methods with which I have been working. I wanted to try the method of movement and dialogue in an attempt to connect oral history to a site with people who are not necessarily from an artistic background and still keep art as the focus of the project. I decided to work in affiliation with an art institution so that the participants would understand the project was in the context of art. This also allowed me to take advantage of the institution’s promotional avenues to try to reach the specific public that was necessary for this artwork. The project took place at Wanås Konst in Sweden, a sculpture park and art gallery in the northeast of the southern region of Skåne. I wanted to work with this institution partly because the nature of the site encourages visitors to move around the area in order to see the work. The participants would likely know the area well due to living or working there, and I was curious to hear about the personal memories that might arise from the area as we walked through it. I advertised locally for people with a secret, a rumour, or an unknown story about the area of Wanås to contact me, and I let them know their story would be kept a secret and become part of an artwork at Wanås Konst. I arranged to meet each participant individually outside of the institution so we could go for a walk to engage in a dialogue about the project. When we arrived at Wanås, I asked each participant to write down their story, and together we sealed it in a weighted glass bottle with a cork and wax. After this, we walked down to the pond in the middle of the sculpture park, where the participant threw in their bottle from a place of their choice. All that remains of the finished project is the knowledge that the work lies on the bed of the pond as well as the stories of how the piece was created in the memories of the participants, myself, and anyone we pass these stories on to.

In the context of a museum or an art gallery, my pedagogical approach of walking and talking could be interpreted as an alternative guided tour. Similar to a tour guide, I described a project and brought related topics to the discussion as we walked. Yet in this case, the tour began outside of the institution and out of the exhibition season, and the conversations I had with the participants were of equal importance to the work we would make, and, in turn, they became part of the artwork itself. Artist Andrea Fraser is well known for her alternative guided tours within art museums. Instead of resisting the institution, she recognises that “we are the institution.” She approaches institutional critique from an alternative angle and acts out “its inherent contradictions and complicities.” This part of Fraser’s practice plays with a museum ritual that reveals absurdity in a procedure that many gallery visitors have become accustomed to, as each of Fraser’s performances “gains force and vulnerability from its co-present situation in shared time.” My method also borrows from this museum tradition, which already has its roots in pedagogy, but I am both the artist of the work and playing a part in educating the participants about the work. For the project at Wanås Konst, the walking and talking part of the process was a way for me to explain the next stage of the project to the participants and an opportunity for the participants to ask me questions about it. When artists are able to spend a long time with a community they want to work with, they are better able to acquire a deeper understanding of each other. Helguera argues that “most successful socially engaged art projects are developed by artists who have worked in a particular community for a long time and have an in-depth understanding of those participants.”

I had an apartment onsite at Wanås for the duration of the project, and although it would have been advantageous to spend more time getting to know the area in the lead-up to the project, I felt there would be enough time to meet each participant in the process. Through the walks, my plan was to have the time to talk about subjects connected to the project. I explained to the participants that I have been exploring how much we learn about art through people talking about it and how the existence of many artworks continues through storytelling. I mentioned there are many reasons why some artworks are never seen, perhaps because of scale or where they are situated, and that in order for the work to be known about, it needs to circulate through images and verbal information.

I wanted the participants to know why they would be playing such a central role in this piece. As curator and art historian Miwon Kwon sees it, “this investment of labor would seem to secure the participants’ sense of identification with ‘the work,’ or at least a sense of ownership of it, so that the community sees itself in ‘the work’ not through an iconic or mimetic identification but through the recognition of its own labor in the creation of, or becoming of, ‘the work.’” An
Vattnet vet/The water knows, 2017. Talking about the project with a participant during the walk from Knislinge to Wanås. Wanås Konst—Center for Art & Learning, 2017. Kezia Pritchard
artist who often deals with collective memory, dialogue, and participation in her practice is Esther Shalev-Gerz. She describes her works in the public realm as spaces constructed for memories activated by participation, that is to say, the moment when the supposed spectator becomes a participant by writing his name, using his voice or sending in his photo. Thanks to the traces left during these acts, these participants keep the memory of their own participation in the work’s procedure, which also bears witness to their responsibility to their own times.

Much of what I have read and heard about Shalev-Gerz’s work relies on the importance of the people who participate in her work. She explains, “I think that this is what makes it possible to produce the work: trust in the other person’s intelligence.” As a way of getting away from the logic of discourse, she attempts to enter a “space that opens between listening and telling.” The kind of dialogue I want to address has an emphasis on listening. I have been trying to find a way to access the sort of dialogue that the physicist and thinker David Bohm investigates, which is an uncompetitive kind of dialogue where “everybody wins if anybody wins.” He talks about a “common participation, in which we are not playing a game against each other, but with each other.”

Philosopher Gemma Corradi Fiumara believes that in the West there has been an “assertive tradition of saying,” and less emphasis on listening. She argues that Western philosophy and art needs to “begin to acknowledge the long-suppressed role of listening as a creative practice.” I believe artists need to undertake a great deal of consideration before inviting other people to participate in an artwork, handling materials, and working with spaces. As art historian Grant Kester says, “there must be a period of openness, of non-action, of learning and of listening” well before any art making takes place.

Reflection: Walk Talks at Wanås Konst

From the feedback I received from the participants at Wanås Konst, everyone gained insight from being part of the process of an art project, and there were moments when the process worked as I had hoped. In hindsight, however, I believe that I could have given more agency to the participants. For instance, they could have decided where we would walk and I could have let them decide the fate of their stories. In regard to Helguera’s guide for defining multilayered participatory structures, I had hoped that my project would fall between “creative” and “collaborative” types of participation. In creative participation the visitor “provides content for a component of the work within a structure established by the artist,” whereas in a collaborative participation the visitor “shares responsibility for developing the structure and content of the work in collaboration and direct dialogue with the artist.” These types of participation tend to develop over longer periods of time, and this longer-term relationship allows the participants to contribute meaningfully, becoming collaborators as opposed to participants directed by the artist. However, at times my project came closer to Helguera’s definition of “directed participation,” whereby the visitor “completes a task to contribute to the creation of the work.”

I was able to refer to the work and methods of some of the artists I have mentioned in this thesis, such as Janet Cardiff and Esther Shalev-Gerz, during the walk talk process, because Wanås Konst has commissioned work by these artists as permanent features in the sculpture park. If we passed near their works during a walk, I asked the participant if they knew about them. On a number of occasions, the participants were able to teach me something new about the works in the park, especially if they saw a connection to my project or had learned something new through meeting an artist or taking part in a guided tour organised by Wanås Konst. In the case of Cardiff’s audio walk, the only evidence to suggest that the work is there is a signboard explaining the background of the work and the fact that it is possible to collect an MP3 player and headphones at the gallery entrance in order to experience the work. By taking part in my project, some of the participants might have a better understanding and insight into a work like Wanås Walk (1998), which, like the final manifestation of my artwork, is without a visible form.

Sometimes we spoke of the connection the upcoming exhibition SculptureMotion (May–November 2017) at Wanås could have to my project and whether the permanent works relating to movement would be given prominence. In this way I oscillated between the role of artist and the role of tour guide, but the latter role also worked both ways, since the participants were local to the area and had more knowledge than me about many of the works.

One example of when the process worked well was when one participant wondered whether there was any point to the work when you cannot see it. This was the kind of dialogue I was hoping for, and it led to a longer discussion on these topics, raising questions such as: What does it mean to make an artwork for a sculpture park that cannot be seen? How much of the details of the project should be shared with the public? Will its existence survive only in the memories of those that saw and took part in it? This is closely related to the intention behind the practice of artist Tino Sehgal, who describes his works as “constructed situations,” in which the materials are stripped back to the human voice, language, movement, and interaction. His works exist ephemerally and are documented only in the viewer’s memory, living on
in the memories of those who witnessed or participated in it. Sehgal’s approach addresses the economic motive within the materiality of visual art, saying that “while visual art proposes that we can extract material from natural resources to then transform it and have a product that is there to endure, dance transforms actions to obtain a product or artwork and produces and deproduces this product at the same time.”72 My intention for my project was not to question the product-based nature of the art market (there are also objects embedded within my project), but I concur with Sehgal that the afterlife of the work lives on in memory, which raises new questions about what form the work takes when the event is over. Artist Magnus Bärtås believes that the spaces for reflection after the event, which he refers to as “post-construction,”73 are crucial for the continuity of the work. These spaces of dialogue are often where art, through storytelling, can take on a life of its own and move outside of the artists’ control.74 Bärtås has written about how there are many artworks he does not have first-hand experience of, and yet he knows and makes reference to them. He explains that he has often experienced them through images and texts but also through the retelling of experience in conversations and lectures.75 Through the medium of storytelling, Bärtås says he has his own unique experience of these artworks.

One approach to the continuity of my exam project is through offering guided tours at Wanås Konst in which I talk about the history of my project in relation to themes of dialogue, movement, memory, and oral history and which also bring into focus other works in the sculpture park. One of the regular tour guides at Wanås, who participated in my project, said he would also integrate the story of the project into his tours. In this situation, he almost adopts the role that I previously had, and rather like Benjamin’s storyteller, he is taking what he tells from experience and, in turn, makes it “the experience of those who are listening to his tale.”76 There is a transfer of roles, since this participant has actual experience of taking part in the project and will now be educating others about its process, thus continuing its story.

When I listened to some of the feedback on how participants had understood the pedagogical aspects of the project, I realised that, for some of them, I could have been clearer at relaying my intentions for the walk in the promotional information. I could have explained that I would be speaking a bit about my research into pedagogy as an art form through the process of the walks, instead of trying to approach the subject through the dialogue as it happened. This confusion led some of the participants to think that their only purpose in the project was to convey their stories to me rather than to engage in a dialogue. However, it was this drive, arising from their knowledge of the land and their personal social histories (especially from the older participants), to tell me stories of the area that they do not want to remain hidden that made me want to write about this experience as the next stage of the project. My aim, through the documentation of the process, is to make a book formed from the participants’ comments and what I have learned through the process of hearing a part of the oral history from the area.

Conclusion
In this thesis, I have analysed how my pedagogical method derives from my own artistic practice in combination with theory I have learned during my time on the Critical & Pedagogical Studies course. I made reference to the educational turn in art and raised issues about its purpose. I highlighted the importance of how learning must be prioritised within projects that aim to use pedagogy as a form or a component within the work. To quote my teacher, artist Maj Hasager, “it feels like we are in a moment of time when we can discuss the different potentials in pedagogy and education in relation to artistic production.”77 I have attempted to use a method to mediate my practice to others in the form of art pedagogy, which is one medium among others that makes up the body of my practice. I agree with Hasager’s view that “teaching and pedagogy can play a significant role in expanding the multiple positions that one can inhabit in an artistic practice.”78

I have also explored how dialogue and movement can be used as a pedagogical method to enhance the dialogical space between people when discussing art as form and as process. I used this method as an empirical study in two different settings: one complemented the studio talk and the other appropriated the guided tour. The pedagogy accessed through walking and talking did not work for everyone, but it could be used as an alternative model for those who are interested in finding new ways of discussing art and who think they might find movement beneficial to their thought processes, as well as for communicating one-to-one. If I compare the two experiences, I would say that using this method with art students at an art school brought focus to the pedagogy in the moment; it helped to even out a strong hierarchy and, when we moved outside of the institutional setting, it proved beneficial for the dialogical exchange. When the method was used with participants at an art institution, the initial meeting was made easier through being in motion, which, in turn, provided an appropriate setting for the dialogues, and the content of these was often connected to memories from the place, at times prompted by the site as we walked through it. I have referred to other artists, including Janet Cardiff, who attempts to merge the past and present through her artistic process, which causes the viewer to engage with her work through their own memories, and Esther Shalev-Gerz, who believes that the memory of a process is made stronger when it is ingrained in the working process.
Vattnet vet/The water knows, 2017. Stories are written down and sealed in bottles. Wanås Konst—Center for Art & Learning, Knislinge, 2017. Kezia Pritchard
I have given examples of how experience and human interaction are linked to the quality and effectiveness of memory through oral traditions, and how memory and storytelling is valued as documentation for the work of some artists. In the long run, I cannot evaluate exactly how much the students and the participants learned from the pedagogy in the process, but I hope that if memory is more effective through oral communication, and that if this is indeed reinforced through being in movement, it is possible for the pedagogy in our encounter to continue when we are no longer in one another’s physical presence.


3 Chatwin is direct in his writing about the effects of British colonisation of the indigenous people in Australia and the actual condition of life for the people at the time the book was written. The loss of their land though the British invasion and occupation of the continent from the late eighteenth century onwards has had a devastating social and physical impact. See “Aboriginal People,” *Survival International*, http://www.survivalinternational.org/tribes/aboriginals.


7 Oral accounts feature widely in philosopher and critical theorist Walter Benjamin's fiction writing.


10 I read this text during the “Track Changes—Collective Editorial Processes” course at Malmö Art Academy with course lecturers Laura Hatfield and Matthew Rana.

11 This passage can be found in William Dalrymple, “The Singer of Epics,” in *Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 95.

12 Komal Kothari was an Indian folklorist and ethnomusicologist from Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

13 This text was produced during the “Track Changes” course.

14 For example, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Liam Gillick.


16 “Instead of looking forward to a future utopia, this art sets up functioning ‘microtopias’ in the present.” Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October*, no. 110 (Fall 2004): 54.

17 Gert Biesta is a professor of education whose work focuses on the theory and philosophy of education, education policy, and the theory and philosophy of educational and social research.


19 For example, School of the Damned (2014) and School of Panamerican Unrest (2006).

20 Felicity Allen is also an artist and educator.


Rogoff, “Academy as Potentiality,” 15.

Kristina Lee Podesva is an artist and writer. She was also the editor at *Fillip*, a Vancouver-based publishing organisation formed in 2004 to expand spaces for critical discussions on contemporary art.

The Copenhagen Free University was founded in 2001 by Henriette Heise and Jakob Jakobsen.

Podesva, “A Pedagogical Turn.”


Rogoff, “Turning,” 43.

Lee Lozano was a visual and conceptual artist who withdrew from the art world in the early 1970s.


“The purpose of this piece is to have dialogues, not to make a piece. No recordings or notes are made during dialogues, which exist solely for their own sake as joyous social occasions.” Lee Lozano, *Lee Lozano: Notebooks 1967–70* (New York: Art Publishers, 2009).

“One doesn’t know how a conversation partner will respond to a question or expression of thought, and vice-versa.” Waldow, “Constructed Situations.”

Visitors are able to listen to the artist’s voice on an MP3 player as they join her on an audio walk. The listener often experiences how the recording coincides with actual occurrences in the present environment.


De Certeau, *Walking in the City,* 93.

De Certeau, *Walking in the City,* 102.


Folk high schools are a form of adult education in Sweden with no grading system, and the students who study there are usually not under eighteen years of age. The educational theorist Paulo Freire was writing from a very different context of education than I am, but I believe his theory still has significance in a setting where a strong hierarchy is present.


Engelen, “The New Studio Visit,” 244.


hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 21.

hooks, *Teaching to Transgress*, 21.


Beautifully written and thoughtful, the text provides a unique perspective on the intersection of art and education. The use of specific examples and references to other works adds depth to the discussion. The author’s approach to the subject matter is clear and engaging, making the content accessible to a broad audience.

Wanås Walk (1998) is the title of Janet Cardiff’s audio walk at Wanås Konst. Visitors are able to listen to the artist’s voice as they join her on a thirteen-minute walk along a winding path through an unexplored part of the park.


“Post-construction is nothing to be ashamed of (as many artists are) but should be regarded as belonging to the domain of afterthought and as a fundamental part of the self-observation and reflection on one’s own practice.” Magnus Bärtås, “You Told Me: Work Stories and Video Essays” (PhD diss., Valand School of Fine Arts, Gothenburg, 2010), 58.

Bärtås, “You Told Me,” 50.

“Within the art world, works of art are often mediated as stories and are allocated a place within circulation and reception first and foremost as a story of a series of actions. I call the account of these actions a work story.”

Bärtås, “You Told Me,” 46.


Hasager, “We Are Multiple,” 8.
Sketches for an Unseen Future, 2017. Bound book of drawings from workshop at Skissernas Museum, Lund, 2017. 8 x 30 x 22 cm. Lucy Smalley
Situating Drawing: Between Technique and Deskilling, Institution and Public, Pedagogy and Social Practice

After shifting focus away from an insular drawing practice and towards the spaces and discourses of socially engaged art, I began to establish an interest in the intersection between drawing and pedagogy. Utilising the classical educational format of the art workshop has allowed me to introduce the possibilities of drawing to a number of different groups and to experience the varying effects that this has. Within the roles of artist, teacher, and the spaces between, I have approached each workshop with different strategies and expectations, and as a result I have found myself attentive to the enunciation of social binaries.

Singular ideologies that are accentuated within workshop practice such as “artist,” “non-artist,” “capable,” and “incapable” can produce boundaries that separate one group of people from another and prevent access. In these pedagogical spaces it has been my aim to carefully and temporarily dismantle hierarchies that appear to be consequences of inhibitory boundaries, and to explore the possibilities of art practice to mobilise these otherwise fixed structures. It is not my intention to create a mass revolution through the potential of art making, but instead to highlight the precarious nature of these boundaries and to show that they are passable. In many cases the passing of boundaries is neither helpful nor necessary; many people have no desire to be engaged in art or art making and we should not expect to change that. However, I have seen that the unusual discursive spaces that can be accessed through practice are useful for many, firstly by locating the underlying reasons for disengagement and then, if desired, in making use of a space where people can temporarily step away from these reasons.1

Working within this space is something I aim to do within my studio practice, as I concentrate on depicting things that can no longer be seen. By using basic drawing methods to try to make sense of mental imagery, I become dislocated from the present; patterns and mark making become visual languages to communicate past sensory information and imaginary landscapes. With distant memory images as a starting point, I am forced into a duality where I am both on the inside and the outside; much of my work naturally takes an aerial view as I look down onto the scene that I am no longer part of.

The main research for this text takes the form of three case studies, and it is within these three settings that the foundations for further research and analysis have been formed. I use my experiences and observations in these separate pedagogical spaces to then navigate around complex issues surrounding community engagement, the institutional public, and the role of drawing practices within art. By first examining the definitions of community practice and using theoretical insights to demonstrate the positives and negatives of community on a more general level, the community arts genre and the role of the artist can then be approached. The aim is to unpick the potential issues within this negotiation and to explore examples of community arts projects and their positioning within the intricate relations between artist and community. This then leads into an analysis of the institutional public, primarily through a discussion of the fluidity of the term “public,” followed by a scrutinisation of pre-existing institutional structures in regard to inclusivity and exclusivity. Exploring the genre of public art in relation to the public within the museum means that typical
pedagogical methods employed by gallery educators and artists can be investigated and problematised. The text ends with a reflection upon the potential roles and expectations of drawing practice within the greater picture of art and the public sphere.

Case Study 1
Beginning in January 2016, I started to introduce art practices to a community-house group. The members had been brought together not because of their interests, their education, or their location of residence, but rather because of their struggle with mental health.

My interaction with the house started with process-based workshops, going into specific methods of using the limited materials we had. This didn’t seem to work so well: a few were engaged in the activity but many felt anxious; they readily compared themselves to others around them, and it was common for half to have left the table over the course of the lesson. It became apparent that I had to create a situation where it was possible for people to join and leave the activities at any moment, that is, to set up an open space for physical ability.

The materials are now instead laid out on the table and participants are free to use whatever they want, however they want. There is a strong focus on the benefits found in the processes of practice, and as a result many sketches are discarded or abandoned.

I still attend the workshop at the community house every week, but I know that it will go on without me even after I stop participating. When I arrive, they have already set up the table and gathered the materials. I sit at the table and work on my own projects with them; they have conversations, make jokes, and start arguments in Swedish. I am simultaneously a crucial part of the group and simply a symbolic gesture; I have developed strong friendships with the members and take part in house activities, and yet I am not a house member. In a sense, running the workshop has been the most helpful method for me to monitor the way in which perceived identity binaries operate and to experience this first-hand. As an artist who is not a member of the house, my goal from the outset was to use my “outsider” position to investigate the possibility of subverting or dismantling these seemingly strict ideologies of “artist,” “non-artist,” “capable,” and “incapable.”

This workshop was never about creating a new power group of professionals to enter into art-world systems, but instead more about encouraging a perspective on art making that frames personal creative output as something possible, enjoyable, and potentially beneficial. In becoming aware and understanding that many house members felt estranged from the entire idea of art due to their school experiences of art education, it became somewhat of a goal to encourage as many as possible to join the activities.

Within the workshops there is still a conflict of interest, and I don’t think that will change. Outsider perceptions of art are often bound up with traditional values of skill and aesthetics, so to try and get people to draw for the sake of drawing or to begin painting without planning it out first is largely optimistic—that is, they might try out my alternative methods, but they are participating and investing time in the workshop for different reasons. My position within an art academy means I am often associated with traditional art practice, so I am sometimes looked at sceptically when I draw with my wrong hand or scribble mindlessly on paper. If one workshop member is a “good” artist because they have drawn a very realistic portrait, then I am perhaps by this skills-based logic a “bad” artist. Although I am not necessarily practising a skill in these workshops, I am working from the education I have received at art school. I can accept that I am in a position of power and privilege in this area, but I also come from the standpoint that this way of working through process-based making is not exclusionary; the mindset is accessible, the reasoning is universal, and the process is possible if you have materials and basic physical ability.

The community house where I run these workshops is part of a larger organisation that was set up in the 1940s in New York, initially created in response to the alienating effects of mental health categorisation. Following a philosophy that recognises that mental illness is never black and white and that there are varying degrees and ways in which it can manifest, the organisation’s members are free to be in a communal house that works towards the practicalities of normalising mental illness, actively encouraging reintegration, productivity, and self-confidence.

In what might be seen as a similar gesture, my intent in running the art workshops is to show that being an “artist” or a producer of “artworks” is not determined by the supposed fine line between “being able to draw” and “not being able to draw.” Even if we are not confident in our abilities, the art workshop can be an opportunity to talk about why we might be unhappy with our work, what we want to change, where these thoughts come from, and ways in which we can challenge them. These are also more general strategies that can be used to encourage reintegration through the creation of a relaxed social environment, increase productivity through a temporary involvement in art projects, and build self-confidence by challenging previously negative value judgments.

Case Study 2
In the autumn of 2016, I worked for a week as a visiting artist at a preparatory art school in the north of Sweden’s Skåne region. Taking my pre-existing knowledge of the school and the level that the students
were likely to be at, I created a course entitled “Communication through Graphic Failure.” I was asked to deliver a conceptual drawing course, and my intention was to introduce students to the indefinable nature of failure and what this means within an art school context.

The physical characteristics and setting of the art school provided ample space for creative freedom, experimentation, and safety. It is located in a small town in the countryside where students are almost forced to adopt a slower pace of life, and this seclusion seemed to be a selling point for the students. Many of them were at the school because they wanted a place where they could be encouraged to grow in a safe and forgiving environment. As a result, despite the institution advocating an experimental and open approach to art making, the tendency of this insular setting to produce insular artistic responses and ideologies proved difficult to dismantle.

A lot of the student work I saw was a reflection of self-identity, emotional states, and thought processes; art was treated as a way of revealing underlying psychological states through signs and symbols and as a tool for self-discovery. As a result, the works rarely seemed to reference life outside the institution. As art theorist Boris Groys points out in his text “Education by Infection,” contagious ideologies, whether positive or negative ones, are a common characteristic of art schools:

The closed world of the art school keeps bacilli permanently circulating. ... And most important: precisely because the art school is closed and isolated, the individual bacilli can be identified, analyzed, and bred—as is also the case with isolated, sterile medical laboratories. The isolation of the art school can be an attack on the health of students, but it offers the best conditions for breeding the bacilli of art.

I saw my week teaching at this institution as a chance to find out whether it was possible to temporarily break down previously established definitions of “success” and “failure” within the classroom. From my own experiences in graded art education, I understood the complexities and anxieties associated with subjective failure, and so led a number of sessions where the aim was to open up and reveal the positive potential to be found within failure. Some of the students that I worked with were incredibly bound up in traditional notions of art—they were at the school to develop skills in their given discipline and were resistant to even momentarily letting go of this.

As with the similar situation at the community house in Case Study 1, I here also questioned whether my pedagogical role and methods of encouraging deviation from the norm were always helpful. On the one hand, the clear conflict of interest in this case was easier to deal with, as my role was perhaps more explicit; I was employed to teach a temporary project and therefore my motives were easier to legitimise. On the other hand, the students were already trained in traditional disciplines and had clear motives for their practice that would not necessarily benefit from that specific kind of intervention. I was met with frustration when I didn’t allow the students to work from photographs, and some students adapted tasks and broke the rules so that they would feel more comfortable.

In comparison to the house members from Case Study 1, I found that generally the art school students found it harder to step away from their judgments and approached each task with a greater sense of hesitancy. Despite not coming from any kind of formal arts training, the members in the house seemed to feel much more comfortable when trying out unusual drawing methods. This noticeable difference of course encourages a questioning of the structure of arts institutions; although the preparatory art school prided itself on its open approach to teaching and its experimental structure, the container of “art” and the expectations of studying seem to, in some cases, cause students to freeze up. A constant stream of visiting artists provides a multitude of voices, and although this can be inspiring and the intention is to develop students’ practices, it also has the potential to be somewhat paralysing.

Case Study 3

By comparing the first two case studies and making notes of the reasons behind the participants’ formation of negative value judgments about art and art making, I was able to clarify the structures and ideologies that I wanted to confront in the implementation of my exam project. My aim became to look at individual engagement within a mixed-group activity and to determine the possibilities of artistic practice within an art museum to function as a method to dissolve inhibitory boundaries between communities and individuals.

On March 16, 2017, I organised an event at an art museum entitled “Sketches for an Unseen Future.” This event was in some respects a way for me to bring what I had learned and experienced into a public forum; visitors were invited to take part in a process-focused drawing activity within the event and exhibition spaces of the museum, using the context and collection at the museum as a starting point for their own sketches and ideas. Participants were unable to visually monitor the progress of their drawings, and the physical products collected at the end of the night were bound together as one collective work to be given back to the museum.

The Skissernas Museum was first established as the Archive for Decorative Art in 1934 by Ragnar Josephson (1891–1966), who was at the time a professor of art history at the University of Lund. Josephson highly valued the artistic creative process and was interested in how it differs between artists. His book
Konstverkets födelse (The birth of the work of art), published in 1940, talks of the crucial development of ideas from the artwork’s “birth” to the final product. Josephson’s collection of sketches grew rapidly, and its movement from an archive context to a museum context importantly brought the collection from private into public space.

Since 2013, Skissernas has taken on the official mantle of “Museum of Artistic Process and Public Art,” although arguably it has had this ethos from the very beginning. Though remaining a home for traditional sketch works for public spaces, Skissernas has more recently embraced the changing nature of public art by providing a platform for discussions on contemporary creative process and a meeting space for cross-disciplinary engagement.

The museum reopened in January 2017 after going through perhaps the most radical change in its history, not only structurally but also systemically. Skissernas hoped that extensive renovation of the rooms and the addition of new spaces within the museum would create new conditions for it to interact with “wider society.” The introduction of a new Thursday Session programme, which my event was a part of, was meant to gather this “wider society” to the museum and to encourage the general public to see the museum programme, which my event was a part of, was meant to create new conditions for it to interact with “wider society.” The process of advertising the event was one that was important to me. I aimed to achieve. It was from these one-to-one conversations that word was able to spread—many of the participants heard about the event through friends rather than through social media or poster advertising.

The underlying motive of the project was quite simple: to enable an anonymous public to draw visions of the future within the context of the museum. The future as something unknown and inaccessible then paradoxically allowed the activity to be accessible to all, and the conditions of the drawing activity didn’t permit visual judgment of drawings on the night, by the creator or those around them. These conditions were put in place specifically because of the research I have conducted into the issues surrounding self-efficacy within arts education and my experiences leading workshops. As writer and educator Mark Graham notes, “there is some agreement that declining artistic activity and confidence is linked to an interest in realism.”

By not allowing anyone who had a pre-acquired skill to automatically “succeed” at the activity and consequently set a visual level that others could only aspire to, I was able to put in place a more level platform that accurately portrayed the non-linearity of imagination and the impossibility of transferring images from something mental into something physical. Although the task was primarily communicated through a didactic list of instructions and background information, its scope was still broad and open to interpretation. Participants were instructed to take a piece of paper that had a sheet of carbon paper attached to it, which they would draw on, transferring an image to the paper below. Using only the provided pencils with no lead, they were asked to draw their vision of the future in ten years’ time. They would add their finished sketch anonymously to a collective box, and write their name and e-mail address down on a separate sheet so they could be credited for their work and contacted with updates.

A key aim for this event was for it to take place outside of the space usually designated for creative activity. The large “creative workshop” at Skissernas is where the museum’s education department is situated and where the workshops typically take place. Within the activity I organised, participants had the freedom to utilise any area in the museum. Many stayed in the event space and completed their drawing as part of a social activity, while others took their drawings to exhibition spaces, halls, and stairwells to allow for a more individual and immersive experience. Within the event space there was a rolling video of archived works from sketchbooks that I had picked out from the museum’s database. It was important to me to include these specific works, as I found them in many ways to be relevant to the task I was asking the participants to undertake; they somehow reveal more about the artists’ process and methods of working than a finished work can. Although many of the artists featured are on permanent display at the museum, these sketchbook drawings offered visitors an unusual chance to see the artists’ work in a more vulnerable and personal condition. Alongside museum director Patrick Amsellem, I hosted a guided tour entitled “Future Visions in the Skissernas Collection.” The tour took the audience through the permanent exhibition spaces, highlighting
work that is particularly visionary and explaining the context behind the pieces. The tour was arranged in the form of a conversation between Amsellem and myself, and was a helpful way for me to make our collaboration concrete, for both us and the audience.

With this in mind, it was not of absolute importance to me to create an art event that was outright in its criticality towards the museum, or to use my position as a student on the Critical & Pedagogical Studies course to go into a public discourse about the institution and its audience in a provocative or intricate manner. As this was a testing ground for the workshop, I wanted to work with the museum rather than against it in any way; the event was undoubtedly a pedagogical activity and was successful by those who work at Skissernas. I believe that I was able to gather a large number of people to the museum because it was an accessible activity: it wasn’t outwardly grounded in complex art theory and was presented in a way that I hoped everyone would understand and relate to in some way. The activity did, however, at the same time generate some frustration and confusion for the participants who could not understand why they were not allowed to see their drawing. It went against the usual museum pedagogy route of being able to take your craft home and own it, and it asked participants to draw something that was ambiguous and not entirely straightforward. Perhaps for these more subtle reasons, it could be said that I succeeded at temporarily modifying the usual pedagogic structures of the museum.

Community Practice

The word “community” is usually used to talk about a specific place and the people that live there, but it can also mean “a social, religious, occupational, or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists.” This insular aspect of the word is what seems to drive socially engaged art practices to these places; the rise of technology-based sharing, communication, and access highlights the importance of physical communities and the people and processes that structure them. If communities share a common space, they can be easily approached, and such a fostered collective identity can lead to the assumption that the characteristics of this smaller community can then be applied to a larger domain.

As explained by theorist Grant Kester in Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art, “community contains both a positive and negative dimension. On the one hand, collective identities encourage us to break down our defensive isolation and fear of others. … On the other hand, collective identity is often established through an abstract, generalizing principle that does as much to repress specific differences as it does to celebrate points of common experience.” Kester’s comments here resonate quite deeply with my recent experiences of interacting with communities and highlight a common problem.

The community arts genre that came into play in the late 1960s is most often categorised by its participatory and dialogical approach to working with communities, particularly communities that otherwise do not typically engage in arts projects. Within the huge repository of critical texts written about community arts projects, the primary concern appears to be rooted within the nature of the communities that are targeted and the potential for these communities to be compromised and become secondary to the interest of the artist and their ambition for the work. Kester outlines these dangers for community-based art by explaining the potential for socially engaged practitioners to seem like “tourists of the disempowered, traveling from one site of poverty and oppression to the next and allowing his or her various collaborators to temporarily inhabit the privileged position of the expressive creator.”

Here he places the two sides in opposition to each other and sets up what he sees as a hierarchical relationship.

In this case, the artist is in an intellectually and institutionally empowered position with the potential to exploit, and the communities they interact with are chosen for their perceived need of empowerment. Although Kester explains a very real danger here when it comes to the artist’s intention and the well-discussed trap of community arts practice, I believe Kester to be somewhat damning in his assessment of the artist as always in the position of instrumentalising their working group. Kester doesn’t discuss the potentialities of a community having influence over the artist’s will, or the possibility of artists deciding against imposing their own desires or working methods on the community. What then happens when the artist embodies the role of the outsider to the group and goes into community spaces that are not known to them? The artist has to negotiate within an alternative complex system that they may not yet understand; there are often specific hierarchies or substructures of knowledge that have to be discovered with time. The sense of alienation that comes with working in this way allows the artist to step back and let the community take charge—to not push their own requirements or beliefs about necessary creative empowerment, but instead to negotiate with whatever knowledge the community is working from. Particularly if the project is only short term, socially engaged artists should gladly accept the position of outsider and facilitate a collaborative and agreed upon common project rather than implement their own.

A much-discussed example of community arts that subverts the typical oppositional relationship between artist and community comes from Turkish artist group Oda Projesi. Literally translating to “room project,” Oda Projesi do not bring the communities they interact with into the art institution, but instead work with them in local and known environments. They are interesting in this respect, as they practically deal with
the potential roles of socially engaged art and non-object-based practice in a country that is, to an extent, still rooted in traditional art practice. As theorist Claire Bishop describes, “The group talks of creating ‘blank spaces’ and ‘holes’ in the face of an over-organised and bureaucratic society, and of being ‘mediators’ between groups of people who usually don’t have contact with each other.”

However, their gestural approach is not a method to promote social transformation; rather, their slogan “exchange not change” outlines how the group attempts to create spaces for new forms of communication. Swedish critic and curator Maria Lind conducted a case study on the group and wrote a key text that reflects upon how the group actualises public space within ungentrified areas of Istanbul. Lind’s analysis of Oda Projesi gives a clear example of how an art project can interact with communities in a way that escapes issues of exploitation. According to Lind, Oda Projesi’s “activities are primarily pursued far from the established art institutions, in other social contexts such as housing areas or schools. In this way, a kind of reverse exclusiveness arises: those who are attracted to and captured by the project have more access to this art than the usual art public.”

One of the consequences of working away from the restrictions and expectations of the art institution is that in some cases the actual art content becomes difficult to place. The substance of Oda Projesi’s work seems to be based on unrestricted activities, and as such, what happens cannot always be described to outsiders and the fulfilment of their aims appears hard to prove. Lind explains:

Activities vary, but a common denominator is that they are not about showing or exhibiting a work of art but about using art as a means for creating and recreating new relations between people through diverse investigations and shaping of both private and public space. ... They say they want to create “a monument composed of gestures from everyday life and layers of memories of the community,” and they point out that this always occurs together with, and not for, the participants.

In Oda Projesi’s work, the aim is to make material live on in the form of human relations; projects are documented only through descriptive diaries and they ensure that no physical objects that could be interpreted as art remain from the events. In interviews they have disclosed their aversion to physical artworks by explaining that they find the topic of aesthetics “dangerous,” but in many ways the consequently fluid and abstracted afterlife of their projects then makes it very difficult for any outsider to access. In Bishop’s analysis of the group and specifically Lind’s text, she is concerned primarily with the domination of ethical judgments and the subsequent position of art within Oda Projesi’s projects. She says that in their work, “art and the aesthetic are denigrated as merely visual, superfluous, academic—less important than concrete outcomes, or the proposition of a ‘model’ or prototype for social relations.”

With the implementation of a clear ethical framework and an open approach to authorship, does the work of Oda Projesi then serve as an example of how socially engaged practice can tend to subvert the artist-community relationship to the extent that the actual art content is no longer given appropriate status? Is it possible to find a balance that satisfies the need for art content and social good in any relationship between artist and community?

When we bring these questions back into the spaces of art, educator and artist Mick Wilson’s text “Between Apparatus and Ethos” is useful in discussing and defining the new relationships set up when communities directly engage with art institutions. He uses the concept of ethos—a Greek word that means “acustomed place,” and pertains specifically to “custom” and “habit,” to introduce the terms “host” and “guest.”

When discussing artists’ movement between disciplines, he applies the terms to define shifting habits and behaviours when we become guests in another’s “disciplinary turf.” There are often customs that the “host” will put in place to accommodate the “other,” or “guest,” in order to enable a meeting “as insiders and outsiders beside each other.” Though Wilson uses these terms to describe interdisciplinary engagement, the insider/outsider and host/guest binaries are also useful within the context of community engagement, and indeed within the wider picture of art institutions and their relationships with the public.

Inviting a community to take part in an event means that they take on the role of the guest—they do not always have control over what they do and instead follow the rules of the artist, who is hosting them within a space that legitimises the artist’s actions. This binary relationship and power structure is hard to avoid; while there may be a conflict of interest, often the guests feel a degree of obligation to be a part of the activities, which means they are operating within an unfamiliar territory with different rules and social frameworks than they are used to. The problems of categorisation and the negotiation of materials from separate sides appear to be a larger recurring issue in community arts projects, not just in the general concept of “host and guest” but also within the very structures that determine who the guest is and why the host has chosen this specific guest to be a part of their project.

When we decide to bring communities into the context of art and view them as a working group, the structures of these communities begin to serve a new fabricated purpose that is not necessarily a reflection of their original autonomous structure. As a result, the idea of collective identity that can seem useful for a community arts practitioner who wants to easily define their working group is largely fictional; by shrinking individuals down into a group stereotype or cliché, we not only undermine the individual voice but also
limit our own knowledge and cannot necessarily guarantee meaningful results. There is therefore a need for careful analysis from within the institution, and a clear understanding of whom we are working with. As Wilson continues:

An uncritical reflecting upon and processing of the encounter can lead to a shoring up of differences, freezing of identities into clichés and an aggressive policing of boundaries and territories. ... But a critically reflective and properly dialogical process of consideration of what is at stake in any given encounter across disciplines makes another kind of encounter possible. Guests and hosts can become critical friends enabled by the strange unstable reciprocation of the rules of hospitality and ethos.19

It is clear that the issued roles of guest and host do not always have to be implemented in a negative and/or exploitative manner. As Wilson points out, this relationship should not be something fixed, but rather subject to change and adaptive within the situation that has been created. It is perhaps in this way that community arts projects can be at the same time artist-run and sensitive to a fair distribution of power and voice.

The Institutional Public

The “public” as an abstract and generalizing term is largely used within art practice to talk about a potential audience, those who will have access to a work or who may be affected by it in some way. The public is not something that we can necessarily have power over; it is a temporally based and indeterminable number of people who have the possibility of entering a space. In many ways, publics are the opposite of communities. Whereas communities are usually knowingly formed and share some aspect of identity, publics, as social theorist Michael Warner claims, “exist only by virtue of their imagining.”20 He describes publics as “queer creatures ... you cannot point to them, count them or look them in the eye. You also cannot easily avoid them. They have become an almost natural feature of the social landscape, like pavement.”21 There are no fixed structures of a public, no rules or prerequisites for being a part of one. It could be said that with the growth of digital forms of communication, the public is now more unknown than ever; when information is put online, there are no real limits to what this public could be. As a term, the “public” cannot be any more concretely defined, and yet there often seems to be a particular kind of public that is attracted to activities going on within arts institutional venues.

Within Grant Kester’s thorough analysis of publics and public art, he casually creates a division between an “art public” and a “nonart public.”22 He does this in reference to Rachel Whiteread’s public sculpture House (1993) and its interaction with the community in which it was placed. He says that art texts written about this particular piece “give little or no validity to the hostile reactions the work provoked among the nonart public. These are interpreted as a philistine reaction, typical of those whose ‘social time-space’ has been rudely disrupted.”23 Kester’s labelling here implies that the “nonart public” is inherently anti-art. The set-up whereby the public is divided between those for and those against, those who appreciate art and those who don’t, is interesting when we presume that those with experience and education in art (the “art public”) will automatically be in favour of a particular work as the bearers of a privileged gaze. Furthermore, in this context what does it mean to be “nonart”? Can we be nonart solely out of choice, or is this also a matter of institutional exclusivity?

In The Birth of the Museum, cultural theorist Tony Bennett discusses how the museum has developed its relationship to the public over time and highlights the institutional structures that have been put in place that can paradoxically both avoid and encourage exclusivity. He cites museum studies professor Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, who argues, “The public museum was shaped into being as an apparatus with two deeply contradictory functions; that of the elite temple of the arts, and that of a utilitarian instrument for democratic education.”24 Bennett goes on to claim that the demands for institutional reform over the last century, based on equality, accessibility, and “representational adequacy” within the museum, are ultimately “insatiable,”25 and further that “however much it may have aimed at promoting a mixing and intermingling of those publics—elite and popular—which had hitherto tended towards separate forms of assembly, the museum also served as an instrument for differentiating populations.”26 Bennett does not seem convinced it is possible for the museum to escape exclusive hegemonic structures and function as a place for this “intermingling”; in the end, a museum will struggle to attract a mixed public because of its very definition as a museum. Through an analysis of museum visitors, Bennett claims that museum attendance adjusts directly with the variables of income, occupation, class, and education, and that non-attenders (perhaps, then, a nonart public) perceive barriers between themselves and the institution as a consequence of culture. He states, “Those sections of the population which make little use of museums clearly feel that the museum constitutes a cultural space that is not meant for them—and, as we have seen, not without reason.”27

Who, then, is to blame for the exclusive structures of the museum? Is there anything more that the museum can do to attract those who embody an outsider position to these institutions, and even if there were measures that could be taken, would anything change for the better? Artist Andrea Fraser in her influential text “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique” argues that the museum is already well embedded in a system that we can’t necessarily do anything about. She refers to the social binary of inside/outside as a structure that is within us as individuals,
Sketches for an Unseen Future, 2017. Installation of carbon paper negatives from workshop. 267 x 320 cm. Annual Exhibition, Malmö Art Academy, 2017. Lucy Smalley
and goes on to pave the way for a more complex and multifaceted way of perceiving this polarity:

There is, of course, an “outside” of the institution, but it has no fixed, substantive characteristics. It is only what, at any given moment, does not exist as an object of artistic discourse and practices. But just as art cannot exist outside the field of art, we cannot exist outside the field of art, at least not as artists, critics, curators, etc. And what we do outside the field, to the extent that it remains outside, can have no effect within it. So if there is no outside for us, it is not because the institution is perfectly closed, or exists as an apparatus in a “totally administered society,” or has grown all-encompassing in size and scope. It is because the institution is inside of us, and we can’t get out of ourselves.28

By moving away from a more concrete definition of the institution as embodying a specific place, like the museum or the academy, Fraser’s argument opens up the possibility for the institution to become instead a social field, something that is encouraged through our own relations and our ways of framing and communicating what we do as artists.

In terms of the museum’s relationship to the wider public, can there be a helpful and contemporary function for the museum? I believe Fraser hints at how the symbolic spaces of the museum can become more useful for public engagement. When discussing the work of Hans Haacke, an artist commonly associated with institutional critique, she explains that as a result of displaying Haacke’s Condensation Cube (1963–65) and MoMA Poll (1970), “the gallery and museum figure less as objects of critique themselves than as containers in which the largely abstract and invisible forces and relations that traverse particular social spaces can be made visible.”29

Sociologist Oliver Marchart, in reference to Michel Foucault’s concept of heterotopias,30 also contributes to this notion of the inside and the outside as in flux. He argues that what might be described as existing outside of hegemonic structures is largely unknown and impossible to define:

As spaces of the outside in the inside, heterotopias are real, existing Utopias. And they are above all multiple, i.e. we should really speak of many small outsiders in the plural. … If the outside is “real and existing” and occurs at many places inside, how can we speak of an outside? Benjamin Genocchio posed the same question in the following way: “How is it, that heterotopias are ‘outside’ of or are fundamentally different to other spaces, but also are related to and exist ‘within’ the general social space/order that distinguishes their meaning as different?31

There is much we do not know, and as such it is not feasible to determine the conditions of an outside. In this case of the art institution, how much does the unknown outside determine its placement? With links back to Fraser’s analysis of the institution as something that exists inside of us, Genocchio concludes, “The categorisation of heterotopias is apparently an arbitrary act of the author.”32

In this situation, who is the author? Is it the individual member of the outside public or is it the institution? Can the institution be the author? When we work within the institution’s framework, expectations, and public reception, perhaps we are no longer capable of framing our own heterotopia, however arbitrary the act may be.

Even if there are tensions and perceived barriers, museums should exist as spaces where the differentiation of publics and the division between “elite” and “popular” can enter group discourse. Museums can be activated as spaces of potential, where, if desired, the so-called art and nonart publics can meet and question the frameworks they operate within in an open and critical manner—not even necessarily to create change but simply to bring difference to light. The issue is in being able to ascertain how important it is for the institution to use its spaces for this discourse, and to encourage these alternative publics to be part of it.

To what extent is the nonart public an ultimately unwanted public for the museum? If neither the institution nor those outside it feel like they are particularly missing out, then is there any reason for change? Of course, it may be most straightforward for us to take Fraser’s point of view and work with the concept of “nonart” on the basis that it is an internal mindset of both sides rather than an alienation prompted by the “art world.” On the other hand, is this potentially nothing more than a good excuse for passivity?33 As writer and historian Larry Shiner points out, there is something to be lost if we undervalue the potentials that can arise when the popular public engages with fine art institutions:

Critics have typically contrasted fine art to mass art as complex to simple, original to formulaic, critical to conformist, challenging to escapist. Those more sympathetic to popular art reply that the best works of popular art are often complex, original, and challenging within the limits of accessibility and that the “masses” are not an undifferentiated lump of passive consumers but are capable of scepticism and independent interpretation.34

The Skissernas Museum is a museum of public art, but just as the definitions of what is public and private are in constant flux, the definition of public art is also debatable. Art historian and curator Miwon Kwon divides the genre into three different schematic categories that highlight the shifting nature of public art: “art in public places, art as public spaces, and art in the public interest.” While the collection at Skissernas is perhaps adjusted more towards “art in public
places”—artworks specifically made for schools, churches, and public squares—the element of public art that is more useful within this discussion (and yet not easily represented within the institution) is “art in the public interest.” Kwon also links this to the category of “new genre public art,” as coined by Suzanne Lacy in 1994, and it could also be referred to as “socially engaged art.” Kwon describes this kind of public art as “often temporary city-based programmes focusing on social issues rather than the built environment that involve collaborations with marginalized social groups (rather than design professionals), such as the home-less, battered women, urban youths, AIDS patients, prisoners, and which strives toward the development of politically-conscious community events or programs.” I find Kwon’s definition here rather limited; if “art in the public interest” only involves working with marginalised social groups, then where exactly does the “public” interest lie? Is the artist relegated to only providing helpful solutions that will improve societal relations in these marginalised areas? Though there are of course instances where new genre public art does not work only with marginalised groups, an example of a practice that fits into Kwon’s schema is the work of Culture in Action, a community-based art project that took place in Chicago from 1992 to 1993:

Culture in Action set out to provide forums for culture in otherwise underserved communities by generating culture from within the communities themselves, as opposed to simply serving up a local statue or mural. … Culture in Action’s prevailing aesthetic trait was its invisibility: not only in the sense of many of its operations not being evident, but also of their not being easily consumed. By fundamentally contradicting high art’s aesthetic principles, its privileging of vision and the commensurate disengagement of passive viewers from static objects—i.e., the physically alienating experience of most cultural institutions—Culture in Action framed its artists, its communities and its viewers themselves as the structure and content of its art.

When we compare this project to the work of groups such as Oda Projesi, it is clear that in both contexts the work is public art due to its engagement with those who would otherwise not necessarily feel comfortable with accessing institutional spaces. The work becomes a direct reflection of those who helped create it as well as its subsequent viewers. In the case of Culture in Action, the significance of the work seems to lie in its reception by those who would usually be part of the art public in galleries. Culture in Action’s projects were “scattered around the city among people who would not feel comfortable in places like the Museum of Contemporary Art,” such that “these activities reversed cultural power relations so that members of the museum and gallery world, for a change, were the outsiders who wondered why these strange activities were called ‘art.’” In this sense, both Culture in Action and Oda Projesi use the framework of social practice to reverse the kind of public who would usually have access to their work.

Though the event I organised at Skissernas Museum gathered participants from different communities that did not necessarily represent the typical art public drawn to events at the museum, it still happened within the privileged spaces of the art institution. Those who were most interested in the activity, who maintained a dialogue with me, and who returned a fortnight later to open the sketches and discuss the process were mainly people involved in art making either in their profession or their recreational activities. Nevertheless, perhaps one of the reasons the event attracted a varied public was because the components of the event were accessible, not overly complicated, and openly welcoming of amateur drawers of all ages.

Artist and educator Felicity Allen highlights the strange relationship between the art institution and the education that goes on within it, stating that “in the last decade, educational and artistic models have regularly been described as if in polarised opposition.” With reference to the distribution of power and voice in a hierarchical structure, it is clear that so long as art institutions continue to be a platform that provides exposure for the privatised art public, the work within gallery education will always paradoxically aim for the opposite. Allen continues, “A common part of gallery education’s work is to give voice to people who are not seeking fame, within institutions which have made a major contribution to the manifestation of fame and legacy to the anonymous individuals in the cultural sphere.” Of course, if we want these two sides to relate, it makes most sense for the structure of gallery education to change; it is inherently pedagogical and in many cases demands a concrete outcome or degree of learning. There was a strong sense of struggle between the pedagogical work and the artwork within the project I conducted at Skissernas. I had the freedom to implement a critical event that was about the production of a group artwork, but the simplified pedagogical structure of a workshop created a framework that was easier for a wider public to engage with. This format was strengthened by a detailed instruction sheet written in both Swedish and English, which clearly explained everything to the participant; I did not teach anything and was not always present to explain how the activity worked. This presented a similar situation to artist Adrian Piper’s staged collaborative performances called Funk Lessons (1982–84), the goal of which was to educate an audience that didn’t necessarily have any prior experience or understanding of funk through dance and music. Though these sessions were described as having a lesson format, she recalls:

The “Lessons” format during this process became ever more clearly a kind of didactic foil for collaboration: Dialogue quickly replaced
Drawing

Drawing has a complex relationship to art, as its popular social value is mostly related to its traditional usage within realism as a display of talent. Within pedagogy, the traditional models of the drawing class and specifically the practice of life drawing have an extensive and well-established historical significance that is still very much alive and revered today. Yet drawing remains a simple and accessible means of communication and expression; it does not require skill to make a mark on paper and it operates within a space outside verbal language. It could be said that drawing is the earliest and most fundamental art-making method—its physical outcome is the direct response of the artist using a tool to impact a surface. Within a contemporary art context, drawing is instead related to process and gesture; it often signifies a going back or a retreat to former, organic ways of working. It is for these reasons that it made sense for me to bring drawing practices back into the museum, and specifically the Skissernas Museum, which champions the sketch and empowers artistic failure but nevertheless displays works of the masters that could easily be mistaken for finished articles.

In my drawing event, taking away authorship and responsibility within the drawing task allowed for a distance to be created, stepping back from the definitions of “artist” and “non-artist.” At the same time, the activity promoted a sense of equality and levelled out the authority of those who engaged with it; the professional artist had no choice but to remain on the same level as the six-year-old. The concept of “deskilling” as discussed by Claire Bishop in relation to theatre and performance reflects my aims for how drawing can be viewed within workshop practice. In reference to the term “spectralisation,” which denotes the death of the traditional artist who has a specialised body of knowledge, Bishop explains, “The avant-garde’s desire for spectralisation has been the tacit, paradoxical engine behind innumerable attempts to make art more democratic and accessible, and de-skilling has long been the preferred strategy for accomplishing this self-extinction.”

The carbon-paper drawing method used in the workshop was a pedagogical tool for deskilling that brought everyone to the same level, but that also created a degree of blindness that accurately relates to our human lack of knowing and our fallible cognitive processes. Deskilling in this sense was not a process of asking each participant to purposely “deskill” themselves and start drawing in a new way, but instead it was a condition put in place to make the drawings less about meticulous realism and more about the ideas themselves and the process of creating. In addition to its more practical function, the two-layer drawing pad used in the workshop links symbolically to Sigmund Freud’s understanding of the mind. He claimed that “the perceptive apparatus of our mind consists of two layers, of an external protective shield against stimuli whose task it is to diminish the strength of excitations coming in, and of a surface behind it which receives the stimuli.” From feedback I received about the task, the alternative drawing pad I created encouraged new ways of thinking and planning out what was to be drawn. The disruption caused by losing one’s bearings in the surface meant that participants were able to come at the image from many angles. This process of re-entering the drawing sounds inhibitive and impractical, but in reality allowed for a more natural reflection of attention and engagement.

From 1973 to 2009, artist Robert Morris created a series called Blind Time Drawings, drawings done with his eyes closed, which art historian Eve Meltzer talks about in relation to the aesthetic of conceptualism and structuralism. Meltzer argues that Morris’s Blind Time Drawings “deploy the artistic gesture of turning away in order to make room, as Morris says, for ‘the world to enter into the art.’ This world, it turns out, finds its irreducible ground not in systems of arbitrary signifiers, but in movement, affect, and something Morris calls ‘the motivated.’” Writing about his search for the “motivated,” Morris describes it in opposition to the “arbitrary” and says that it takes place “on the level of behavior which is prior to visible formal results.” Like Morris’s Blind Time Drawings, the drawing activity I implemented had its basis in this prior behaviour. The process of blind drawing itself provides space for something else to enter the work; Morris believes this is the function of art, stating, “art’s function as an adaptive mechanism is an antidote to the habitual. Its social value lies in its presentation of a practice area where one can embrace the disorientating experience.”

Jacques Derrida argues that the disorientating experience of blindness is inherent within the wider sphere of drawing. In the text “Memoirs of the Blind,” Derrida’s philosophical journey through the act of drawing and its relationship to blindness is illustrated through a number of personal anecdotes. In his discussion of what happens when you draw without seeing, he gives examples of writing while driving a car and of waking up in the middle of the night to write something in the dark; he explains: “At once virtual, potential and dynamic, this graphic crosses all the borders separating the senses, it being-in-potential at once visual and auditory, motile and tactile. Later, its form will come to light like a developed photograph. But for now, at this very moment when I write, I see literally nothing of these letters.” These notions of tactility and movement are enhanced only when drawing blindly; we rely on our other senses and inner vision more strongly when we are confronted with darkness. Derrida’s describes this as the “thought of drawing.”
and says the condition of blindness allows one to “do something with one’s eyes, make something of them.”

The increased focus on the “thought of drawing” that comes with blindness is very much connected to Morris’s vision of the “motivated,” and this process-orientated way of working was of course characteristic of the conceptual artists working in the 1960s. Sol LeWitt’s short text “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art” strengthens this connection and distances conceptual art from skill-based working. He writes: “The idea becomes a machine that makes the art. This kind of art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive, it is involved with all types of mental processes and it is purposeless. It is usually free from the dependence on the skill of the artist as a craftsman.” With clear links back to Bishop’s text on deskilling and her use of the term spectralisation, LeWitt’s instruction-based wall drawings symbolise the death of the artist, as he completely relinquished control over aesthetics. He opens up the possibilities for drawing by placing emphasis on the idea of the drawing and employing others to actualise the drawings in space. These instructions are usually quite vague and purposefully open to interpretation, with LeWitt seemingly taking the role of the powerful artist-instructor while simultaneously using the nature of his instructions to take this power away. In a similar manner, the instructions I gave participants in the drawing event created a simple framework for them to follow but allowed them to question their own decision-making; through the activity they were able to reflect upon their “visions of the future” and what this broad term could mean or look like.

LeWitt’s ways of looking at art seems to coincide with the general ethos of Skissernas Museum, and his texts and drawings were also useful tools within my workshop at the art school in Skåne. His emphasis on the importance of process and sketch works is well explained within his text, and they offered a way for me to ground and legitimise my intentions within recent art history. LeWitt states:

If the artist carries through his idea and makes it into visible form, then all the steps in the process are of importance. The idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work of art as any finished product. All intervening steps—scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed works, models, studies, thoughts, conversations—are of interest. Those that show the thought process of the artist are sometimes more interesting than the final product.
Within the workshop at Skissernas, this notion of visualisation was confronted. The mental idea that LeWitt talks about was made physically visual without being seen; it was clear that the idea alone was the driving force behind the work being collectively created during the workshop, but it was not made visible until a fortnight after the marks were made. Each person will have dealt with the activity in different ways: some of the drawings represent a direct reflection of thought process and others represent careful planning. It could be argued that without this direct transfer from mental visualisation to physical visualisation, the original strength of the initial idea as supported by LeWitt remains within the paper.

**Final Thoughts**

Within many of my workshops, such as my weekly contact with the community house in Case Study 1, there is an undeniable therapeutic element. I believe that art, specifically drawing, has the ability to function as a means of personal escapism, and for that reason can be a useful tool in dealing with complex psychological issues. As a socially engaged artist I feel a constant struggle between the demands of art and the need for a degree of “social good” or positivity in what I do. Through my engagement with Skissernas Museum, I wanted to use my position to be critical of the notions of institutions and publics, but I ultimately still cared more for the experience of the participants and wanted the activity to be helpful and enjoyable for them. The comfortable atmosphere I created within the institution undoubtedly affected the outcomes of the drawing activity; perhaps if I had thought about the project more critically, the resulting work would have greater significance within the context of art.

The criticism certain theorists direct at social practice is largely concerned with these notions of prioritising social good over critical good. Working as a socially engaged art practitioner seems to legitimise actions that would not otherwise be associated with art, but we are told that art should not attempt to solve social problems, as these problems are often the very conditions needed for art to survive. In Claire Bishop’s landmark text “The Social Turn,” she discusses that with the rise of socially engaged art, there has been a consequential shift in art criticism, and she highlights the issues with this new framework. This shift has produced new discursive criteria for socially engaged art, which she describes as “drawn from a tacit analogy between anticapitalism and the Christian ‘good soul.’” In this schema, self-sacrifice is triumphant. In the conclusion of the text, Bishop suggests an alternative option to which we can turn in the face of a self-sacrificing schema. This option appears capable of satisfying what she views as the underlying purpose of arts projects:

The best collaborative practices of the past ten years address this contradictory pull between autonomy and social intervention, and reflect on this antinomy both in the structure of the work and in the conditions of its reception. It is to the art—however uncomfortable, exploitative, or confusing it may first appear—that we must turn for an alternative to the well-intentioned homilies that today pass for critical discourse on social collaboration.54

Going forward from this research, I believe it will be important for me to find a way to situate my curiosity with social ideologies, binaries, perceived boundaries, and the potential role of the artist more firmly within the critical framework of art. It is perhaps Robert Morris who most clearly articulates the possibilities to be found in art when he talks about the successful conceptual artists working in the 1960s. He explains that they succeeded in their work due to an awareness that “the terms of this interaction are temporal as well as spatial. … [that] existence is process. … [that] art itself is a form of behavior that can imply a lot about what was possible and what was necessary in engaging with the world while still playing that insular game of art.”55

Though Morris’s statement was made forty-seven years ago, art today is in many ways still an “insular game” whose rules cannot be understood by everyone; however, there are methods that can be used to extend this basic necessary engagement with a wider audience to a more ambitious possible engagement. These terms of engagement could allow artists the power to work critically in the unmarked spaces between institution and public, even if only temporarily.

Within my own practice, the aesthetics of deskillling within drawing practices seems for now to be a clear base for this. Here, drawing offers a chance to work between the boundaries of art, the institution, and pedagogy. Using a traditional methodology with the aesthetics of deskillling keeps the boundary between professional and amateur unfixed and largely unknown. When gathering together the work of many different people as a public or community within a socially engaged practice, this aesthetic seems to be an option that makes sense outside of defined spaces. The established craft of drawing can even be temporarily undone through these pedagogical methods; if the institution of art is something that is “inside of us” rather than existing as an apparatus of a “totally administered society,” then drawing can certainly be liberated from it.
Perhaps this is indeed the underlying quality of all art: in theorist Nicolas Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics*, he references Karl Marx’s idea of the interstice in relation to the functions of art. He says art “creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life, and it encourages an inter-human commerce that differs from the ‘communication zones’ that are imposed upon us.” Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 1998), 16.

Claire Bishop references deskilling in relation to arts education: “Unlike amateurism, de-skilling denotes the conscious rejection of one’s own disciplinary training and its traditional competences. Crucially, one has to have acquired this training in order to reject it. … De-skilling, in other words, always requires a re-skilling if it is to convince us that it is more than simply amateur.” Claire Bishop, “Unhappy Days in the Art World? De-skilling Theater, Re-skilling Performance,” *Brooklyn Rail*, December 10, 2011, http://brooklynrail.org/2011/12/art/unhappy-days-in-the-art-world-de-skilling-theater-re-skilling-performance.


This included contacting every advertised society that is part of Lund University, going into local shops, cafés, and small businesses, and approaching organisations that support the elderly, religious venues, cultural venues, libraries, and schools.

The concept of self-efficacy is heavily discussed within the work of psychologist Albert Bandura, who defines it as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that effect their lives.” Albert Bandura, “Self-Efficacy,” in *Encyclopedia of Human Behavior*, vol. 4, ed. V.S. Ramachaudran (New York: Academic Press, 1994), 72.


Dictionary.com, s.v. “community.”


Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 122.


Wilson, “Between Apparatus and Ethos,” 357.

Wilson, “Between Apparatus and Ethos,” 359.


Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 90.


Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum*, 104.

Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique,” *Artforum*, September 2005, 104.

Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions,” 103.
30 Heterotopias are defined as spaces that exist outside of hegemonic structures and are “presented as privileged, forbidden or sacred places within our society, spaces that mark out a space of transition, crisis or deviation.”

31 Marchart, “Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s).”


33 There seems to be some clear links here to Jacques Rancière’s pedagogical theory. In Kristin Ross’s introduction to The Ignorant Schoolmaster, the “Bourdieu effect” is brought into the discussion of unequal social structures and access to education. It can be “summed up in this perfect circle …: ‘they are excluded because they don’t know why they are excluded; and they don’t know why they are excluded because they are excluded.’ Or better:
1. The system reproduces its existence because it goes unrecognized. 2. The system brings about, through the reproduction of its existence, an effect of misrecognition.” Kristin Ross, introduction to The Ignorant Schoolmaster, by Jacques Rancière (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), xii.


37 It may seem natural to list artists here, but to go off on a further tangent, it could be argued that most artists work with social engagement in some way due to art’s natural communicative function. New genre public art, socially engaged art, and social practice are all fluid concepts that are hard to define within a contemporary context.


39 Shiner, The Invention of Art, 296.


43 Bishop, “Unhappy Days in the Art World?”


49 Derrida, Memoirs of the Blind, 122.


51 LeWitt, “Paragraphs.”

52 Helmut Draxler of the Merz Academy in Stuttgart talks about this in his lecture as part of a larger forum entitled “Art in public space, art as public space, and art in the public interest” (a title borrowed from Miwon Kwon) that took place in Berlin in 2012.


54 Bishop, “The Social Turn,” 183.

55 Morris, “Some Notes,” 90.

56 Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions,”104.
On Mount Chimaera, above the woods, you fell (with Attic red-figure askos, c. 420 BC. Paris, Louvre G 446), 2017. Still image. Video, 3:41 min. Elena Strempek
Seeing Oneself in the Dark: Art Making and Subjectivity between Care and Control

Introduction
In a time of not only the exploitation of the physical workforce (Arbeitskraft) but one where every affect and sociability is giving way to radical exhaustion, I find myself concerned with the question of whether art making can exceed its contemporary function as a blueprint for precarious creative labour and serve as a method of taking care of the self and of others. I will consult Michel Foucault’s lectures on the subject of the “culture of the self” to investigate the ancient model of epimeleia heautou.1 Hannah Arendt’s The Human Condition has provided me with categories to think through notions of labour and contemplation, as well as the role of the artist. I will also look at the care of the self through a feminist lens, and with the help of Audre Lorde, Luce Irigaray, Peggy Phelan, and other feminist scholars, I will compare it to the field of art making, in particular to poetry and performance art. The key phrase “poetic education” will allow me to connect the antique discourse on mimesis found in the writings of Plato and Isocrates with contemporary notions of art education and further link it to my own practice as a performance artist.

During the writing of this thesis, a methodological question came up: Is there a feminist way of writing a paper like this one? Often I’m confronted with the thought that I’m aiming to maintain complexity, but I fail when I try to make sense. I’m aware of the grand scale of the subject I’m undertaking in this text, and find myself at the beginning of a philosophical journey. I have a problem with appropriating and simplifying complex theories for argument’s sake, and I want to avoid words like “truth” and “self,” since they stir up a hornet’s nest of philosophical debate that I don’t feel properly equipped to face. But at the same time, I refuse to be awestruck and back off. Emancipating myself from the paralysing effects theory can have, putting the emphasis on the process of understanding instead of making sense, making insecurity transparent, and dedicating rather than appropriating shall be my personal guidelines for this paper.

On this note, I would like to thank the participants of the workshop “A Body of Work—A Labour of Love,” which I facilitated at Kassel Arts University last autumn,2 for our fruitful discussions and their generous input concerning the entanglements of art making and labour, from which many of the strands of this paper have derived. I would also like to thank my fellow students and tutors at Malmö Art Academy for their rich and often challenging feedback and inspirations.

Professionals of the Self
“What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor, that is, without the only activity left to them. Surely nothing could be worse.”3—Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition

Throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, labour was seen as a despised necessity that was ideally done by others in order to be able to indulge in a contemplative life. The vita contemplativa had no purpose; it was purpose itself. In a reversal of this hierarchy, the active life became the dominant characteristic of modern life, and Hannah Arendt explains that what had not changed is the proposition that one “central human preoccupation must prevail in all activities of men.”4 She thus dedicated The Human Condition, her major philosophical work, to the question of “what we are doing,”5 and in it differentiates between three different categories of the active life: “labour,” that which covers our basic needs and creates products for consumption; “work,” which introduces artificial, human-made things into the world; and “action,” a “non-material interaction with the plurality of humans that live on our planet.”6 She diagnoses a glorification of the first category, labour, in modern societies and identifies a reversal of the hierarchy between the contemplative life, which had been the main ethical principle of antiquity, and the active life, which dominates contemporary society. Arendt is convinced that in modern times labour became glorified and is now the one crucial activity that preoccupies society. In the German version of the book Arendt states that Dichter und Denker (poets and thinkers) is the only
group of people who are still engaged in philosophical and spiritual activities without calling it their job in the way that politicians and Geistesarbeiter (brain-workers) do.  

Where today would we find these poets and thinkers who don’t call these pursuits their job? For many years, the art academy has been a refuge for transdisciplinary thinking, offering students a couple of years to engage with their fields of interest in various ways without shaping them into specific professions. It is questionable if the art academy can provide this space any longer, following its incorporation into the neoliberal education system, with its focus on measurable outcomes and future employment. Artists and art theorists discuss whether art making can be considered work or not. The dilemma can be summarised like this: calling art making “work” makes it more likely that one will be paid for doing it, but also applies the conditions of labour to it, making artworks commodities like any other and reducing creative freedom.

Historically, art, religion, and philosophy have been socially accepted exceptions to the traditional divisions of labour. German social scientist Michael Hirsch states that nowadays neoliberal politics governs people by destabilising everyone’s identity in terms of labour division through the threat of unemployment. The artist seems to have a peculiar role in this, shifting roles backwards and forwards, treads on the foot pedal three upon them by pure chance. As she does this she rocks up the materials with both hands as if she had come as if she were flying, draws them together and picks you watch her you see that she spreads out her arms materials and weld them together beneath the electrode. If amount of work. She doesn’t simply pick up the mate-

“Could we be able to go on like this?” asks whether there are ways for us (and the “us” is the ever-expanding group of creative types, as he calls it) to perform with our own agency instead of being at the forefront of “insanely restless performers … who are changing things for the worst.” While he finds possible strategies in artistic modes of latency and “existential exuberance,” I would like to start from further back and examine our performance of culture itself as
internalised strategies to either govern or (and?) liberate ourselves. So let’s go back in history and look at the performance of a specific ancient culture: the culture of the self.

The Art of Living
In *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, a lecture series held at the Collège de France in Paris in 1981–82, the French philosopher Michel Foucault traced the concept of self-care back to Plato's *Alcibiades* and demonstrated the different developments of the practice of the self throughout antiquity, often set in relation or compared to more recent ideas of subjectivity. Having been concerned with analysis of power for most of his career, in the early 1980s Foucault turned to the topic of self-care. Although a simplification, one could say that he turned from the examination of external power execution (with his interest in institutions of power such as the prison and the psychiatric hospital) to processes of internal modes of control.16

The starting point for *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* is Plato's notion of self-care as a practice that enables an aristocratic man to become a good leader. In *Alcibiades*, one of the Socratic dialogues, Plato paints a fictional meeting between Socrates and the young nobleman Alcibiades during which Socrates instructs his young lover, who wants to govern the city. His education is described as insufficient for this task. In making Alcibiades aware of his inadequate preparation, Socrates introduces him to the care of the self and its major imperative, which is knowledge of the self. The ultimate aim of the care of the self in Plato's understanding is the well-being of the Athenian city state.17 Only someone who knows how to care for himself is able to care for others. The technologies of the care of the self encompass rites of purification, methods to concentrate the soul, practices of withdrawal, and tests of endurance. Not only is the care of the self a major philosophical topic in Greek antiquity, but Roman authors such as Plutarch and Seneca also refer to it, using a wide range of vocabulary to point out different aspects of the ancient self-care, such as the examination of the self (“paying attention to oneself,” “turning around to look at the self”), a withdrawal into the self away from the world and others (“retiring into the self”), freeing the self from external circumstances (“emancipating oneself,” “being the master of oneself”), the therapeutic aspect (“curing” and “healing oneself”), and general enjoyment of the self (“having pleasure in oneself”).19

Throughout antiquity, Foucault illustrates, the care of the self gradually became detached from political responsibility, and in the Hellenistic and Roman periods it constituted a means to an end, and a “culture” of the self was developed independently from political imperatives. The cathartic function of the care of the self was put into focus, and caring about oneself became a universal principle, including a set of rules and a field of knowledge, which required dedication and sacrifice to be practised by only a very few.20 The care of the self was no longer in service of the care of others. In post-Platonic movements, the care of the self became identical with the art of living and a fundamental definition of philosophy itself.2 It can be considered a critical activity in which one observes and regulates one’s own behaviour according to ethical standards, a training beyond professional specifications that equips the person to be prepared for any possible event or misfortune. Foucault describes the ancient care of the self as a construction of an insurance mechanism22 and a way of ensuring ethical behaviour through constant self-examination and regulation: “In this reversible figure of the relationship to the self, we can see the source of an austerity that is not only more intense but even more internalised because it concerns, on this side of actions, the permanent presence of self to self in thought.”23

Inadequate Pedagogy
Socrates famously asked young men on the streets to care for themselves. Following the Cartesian moment in the seventeenth century, this concept lost its relevance for Western philosophy; merely one aspect “survived”: the idea of *gnothi seauton* (know yourself), which was interpreted as a rational understanding of one’s own personality from the Enlightenment onwards. René Descartes’s rationalism declared truth as being found only through reasoning and gaining knowledge. For Foucault, the spiritual search for truth, which demands a transformation of the self, became marginalised as natural science established an understanding of truth as something exterior; the subject no longer needed to transform to find truth.24 “Knowing yourself” became an external consideration. It is important to acknowledge that both the ancient concept of self-care and the modern, rational method of knowledge acquisition are tightly bound to certain privileges. In the Greek polis only free men, usually male members of the elite, were entitled to political and philosophical activities while others—their wives, slaves, and the rest of the working population—kept the “toils and trouble” of labour away from them. Modern access to knowledge seems less strictly encapsulated, but in fact is underlain by formal, cultural, and moral conditions such as class, gender, and certain states of mental being (i.e., not being mad).25

According to Foucault, the concept of self-care in Plato’s *Alcibiades* is rooted in an inadequate pedagogy. Alcibiades hasn’t learned how to care for himself properly, so Socrates takes him by the hand and explains to him the importance and principles of the care of the self. For Plato this contemplative activity of self-care is the prerequisite for becoming a good leader, and acquiring the knowledge of the *epimeleia heautou* requires a teacher. The master’s relationship to the pupil is significant to the antique notion of self-care: the master cares...
for the student in a way through which the student learns to care for himself. Foucault calls it “loving the boy disinterestedly,”26 and further states: “In this case the question of ‘taking care of oneself’ is no longer linked to the question of ‘governing others’ but, if you like, to the question of ‘being governed.’”27

It is the question of “being governed by others” versus “being governed by oneself” that hasn’t lost its relevance in a contemporary teaching situation. The theorist, activist, and educator bell hooks writes of the necessity of self-actualisation in order to be a good teacher.28 She is convinced that empowering education can only be accomplished when the teacher is committed to a process of self-actualisation and promotes their own well-being.29 She quotes the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, who says: “The practice of a healer, therapist, teacher or any helping professional should be directed towards his or herself first, because if the helper is unhappy, he or she cannot help many people.”30 The notion of looking at oneself first relates well to the aspect of the Platonic self-care that is in the service of the care for others. But what Foucault describes as a typical Western experience is the constitution of a relationship of the self to itself, 31 the idea of self-care as a reflective and corrective tool, a method of governing oneself.

For Audre Lorde, the self-proclaimed black lesbian feminist, mother, poet and warrior, self-care is essential and radically political.

“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”32

Lorde’s statement illustrates that nowadays self-care is usually associated with an egoistic, hedonistic lifestyle. When speaking of self-care today, we usually mean caring for our bodies, for our health. In an article about Lorde’s statement, feminist scholar Sara Ahmed points out that some bodies have the privilege of being cared for by the system whereas others don’t, and—in order to survive—in particular have to care for themselves. The accusation of self-indulgence towards these oppressed bodies is a way of maintaining the status quo. In particular women are expected to care for others and are accused of individualism when they care for themselves.33 It is interesting to see how self-care is linked to privilege, but under different, contrasting parameters. Self-care in Plato’s sense was an ethical imperative for the powerful to govern justly; they could care for themselves spiritually because others cared for them physically. In Lorde’s understanding, however, self-care is self-preservation as a means of survival and a way to fight oppression; she has to care for herself spiritually and physically because the system does neither for her. The ancient description of self-care as an “emancipation of the self” and “being the master of oneself” can be rethought in regard to Lorde’s notion of modern self-care. As an oppressed body, in Lorde’s case as a black woman, it is a constant struggle to obtain power over oneself, that is, to govern oneself instead of being governed by the powerful. Although Lorde wrote that statement in the 1980s, recent political events in Europe and the US have made it painfully obvious for the Western world that women’s bodies are still massively governed, for example through the overturning and denial of abortion rights in Poland, Ireland, and in several states in the US.34 The Black Lives Matter movement has drawn attention to the systematic criminalisation, imprisonment, and murder of black people in the United States,35 and at Europe’s borders human rights are being denied to people fleeing from war and poverty in the Global South.36

Brazilian educator and activist Paulo Freire, whose ideas remain highly relevant, provides a definition of oppression in his pioneering 1968 book The Pedagogy of the Oppressed: “Any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person.”37 What Lorde describes as “political warfare” is the fight against oppression and for the possibility of unhindered self-affirmation, and eventually for the possibility of seeing oneself.

In Zami: A New Spelling of My Name, Lorde builds up an autobiographical narrative that she refers to as a “biomythography.” Zami is an unapologetically subjective account of her youth, her early friendships and relationships in the gay community of New York’s East Village, the awakening of sexual pleasure, and her deep connection to poetry. She describes the struggle to earn a living as a disenfranchised person and the process of writing poetry as a liberating and self-affirming act. Part of her myth is that she had not been able to speak before she started reading, at age five. She wrote poetry from an early age, and it was her way to relate to herself, to get in contact with her feelings, to make sense of the world around her, often hostile and cold. By calling Zami a biomythography, Lorde uses autobiography as a genre of self-presentation and doesn’t deny its poetic and radically subjective character, rather embracing the fact that there is no such thing as objective representation of the self. Through poetry she was able to reclaim subjectivity. In her theoretical writings and through her activity as a lecturer, she developed a theory of the erotic, which she posits is not reducible to the realm of sexual pleasure but in fact exceeds the dialectical relationship between the emotional/psychic and the political, or what Lyndon K. Gill describes as epistemological and pedagogical pleasure.39 Gill outlines the difference between the two in his essay about Lorde’s uses of the erotic: “pleasure in coming to know what we know about our-selves and our world (epistemological pleasure) and pleasure in teaching what we have learned and learning from those who find pleasure in teaching us (pedagogical pleasure).”40 In the next section, I would
like to link this notion of epistemological and pedagogic pleasure to the discourse of poetic education.

The Pleasures of Tragic Learning

“Twisting back and forth assuming every shape until you escape me.”

—Plato

In Ion, Plato’s Socrates complains about the rhapsode Ion, a performer of epic poetry. He cannot grasp his identity, since Ion’s knowledge and his social function is not attached to a demarcated field of knowledge. Shifting between roles, Ion cannot be defined as having a “personality” outside the performance. In “‘Mimesis’ between Poetics and Rhetoric: Performance Culture and Civic Education in Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle,” Ekaterina V. Haskins provides an overview of the position of the mimetic tradition in the writings of three Greek philosophers. I would like to focus here on the conflicting judgments of poetic education in Plato and Isocrates as elaborated in Haskins’s text.

Mimesis for Plato means dramatic impersonation; the speaker speaks in the voice of another, imitates the other, and adopts their identity. Mimesis is a complex concept in Greek philosophy and falls somewhere between dramatic enactment, mimicry of speech, and imitation of model behaviour. Plato is generally suspicious of poetic representation and the audience's emotional identification caused by the “submission to the spell” of a performance. He criticises the poetic tradition for its failure to represent subject matter adequately and fears its effects on citizen training. As Haskins notes, Plato expands the concept of “mimesis from dramatic imitation to the entire spectrum of artistic depiction and a simultaneous reduction of the poetic craft to style as an outward show.” Haskins suspects that it is not the artist’s failure to represent reality but his ability to do it all too well that threatens Plato’s rational city.

Plato’s contemporary Isocrates, however, positions himself against his rival. In his philosophy school, students were encouraged to memorise poetry and prose and through performing a discourse they entered the public realm. Haskins calls this “training in social conduct.” Isocrates went even further, not without provoking Plato, and promoted *philosophia* as the old art of the training of the soul, and included traditional poetic education in his curriculum. According to Haskins, Isocrates believed that artistic and social sensitivity is fostered by studying and reciting poetic texts, and through identification with fictional and historical characters, the student gets an impression of the wide spectrum of social roles and situations. In the Homeric recitations for example, there is “no original,” only the “tradition,” which was performed in a way that deeply engaged the audience through rhythmical repetition, melody, and the performing body.

Although Plato dismisses poetic and rhetoric education as dangerous and false, he cannot, as Haskins remarks, erase mimesis as education and it haunts his own writings like a phantom, for example when he uses Socrates for his own educational purposes, turning him into a mime.

Foucault refers to the great polemic between philosophical teaching, which is according to Plato and Epictetus in charge of the care of the inner self, and rhetorical and poetical education, which teaches—in their eyes—how to make an outward appearance, how to please others. There is a clear differentiation between the self/the soul and the body/the representation of the self. This links to Plato’s famous allegory of the cave: mankind is paralysed and chained by the shadow play on the cave wall, and the philosopher’s task is to leave the cave to search for the truth beyond/behind representation. In the case of the care of the self, the philosopher or the person dedicated to the practice of self-care must mistrust representation and, in a contemplative move, they must turn away from the world of representation, and thus see the true self. But—as we have seen in *Alcibiades*—in order to do so, the philosophically engaged person needs the other: the teacher, the tutor, the friend.

In Plato’s *Alcibiades*, Foucault identifies a major principle of Platonic and Neoplatonic thought:

To care for the self one must know oneself; to know oneself one must look at oneself in an element that is the same as the self; in this element one must look at that which is the very source of thought and knowledge; this source is the divine element. To see oneself one must therefore look at oneself in the divine element: One must know the divine in order to see oneself.

Can we transfer this concept of seeing oneself to our times? In “The Obligation to Self-Design,” cultural theorist Boris Groys examines modern Western self-presentation. Before Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God in the late nineteenth century, Groys says, God had been thought the only viewer of the soul. Groys states that the individual “designed” their soul according to ethical rules, so God would grant them mercy and eventually salvation. With the death of God, this viewer of the soul disappeared, so the presentation of the soul had to be externalised, so it could be seen by others. Groys’s thesis is that the human body has become an aesthetic presentation of the hidden inner subject, a design object: “The soul became the sum of the relationships into which the human body in the world entered.” His analysis focuses on the view of the subject, neglecting the view of the subject of itself through the other. Long before Nietzsche, in Plato’s *Alcibiades*, a human other was needed: Socrates, who helps Alcibiades to see himself. And let’s not forget that the figure of Socrates is Plato’s fictional and
rhetorical spokesman: he lets him speak, take on a role, and perform his educational task (not in a physical way but in a metaphorical one).

An Awkward Dance

“Noncontinuous, full of jerks and rears, the body moves, like an awkward dancer trying to partner someone she can never see or lay hold of.”
—Peggy Phelan

At first glance, performance art seems an emblematic contemporary form of self-presentation. Unlike in traditional theatre, there is not necessarily a role performed, and often the “self” of the artist is on display or even constitutes the performance. Performance art has been crucially shaped by women artists, often with a strong feminist agenda. Alongside (or within) the women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s, performance artists used the deconstructive potential of performance to question common practices of knowledge and identification. As Jeanie Forte in her survey text “Women’s Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism” outlines, performance art has challenged conventional approaches of understanding, critique, and definition. Artists like Ulrike Rosenbach, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, and Yvonne Rainer blew up traditional cultural categories and opened up a new terrain for deconstructive activities and pedagogies.

In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir showed via her ground-breaking study The Second Sex that “Woman” is a socially constructed category that operates in affirming opposition to the first sex, “Man.” As we can read in his quote in the previous section, Foucault underlines how the (ancient male) subject, in order to see himself, had to find an element that is the same as the self. In Luce Irigaray’s reading of Jacques Lacan, the man has made “Woman” his “Same,” but with a distinctive lack: the symbolic phallus, the insignia of power—hence “Woman” becomes a mirrored man without the possibility of representing herself as a man.

Groys’s analysis that the subject, after the disappearance of the divine, had to find a new other is obviously based on the male subject, and one could propose that the function of “Woman,” and further categories of otherness such as the “exotic,” as a mirror for the male subject has been employed even more intensely following the disappearance of the divine element.

Feminist performance artists since the 1960s have demonstrated the objectification and commodification of women in society, unmasking this representational function of “Woman.” Without dismantling this socially constructed category, the female subject is excluded from “seeing herself,” a domain almost as hermetically sealed as in Plato’s times, when women and slaves had no access to philosophical self-care, their roles instead to make it possible, through their labour, for the elite man to see himself. But how can Woman see herself when she is made the object that makes a subject out of man?

Feminist psychoanalyst and cultural theorist Luce Irigaray connects Plato’s cave with the hysterical maternal womb. She identifies the dark inside of the cave as the site of origin, the womb from which all mankind derives, whereas the bright outside of the cave stands for the patriarchal ideal of truth, towards which Plato’s truth-seeking man arrives violently through a long, narrow passage. In a startling feminist critique, she carves out Plato’s dismissal of the representative realm as a misogynic denial of the origin of mankind from the female womb. The shadow play on the cave wall, which is for Plato an illusion, is for Irigaray the “womb-theatre.” Or, as theatre theorist Elin Diamond phrases it, “mimesis without a true referent—a mimesis without truth.”66 The rebirth into the light of philosophy as an entry into another “true” world beyond earthly representation is only accessible to the free man, but it can only exist through and in opposition to the realm of maternal care (the womb, the domestic, the sphere of labour).

Diamond points out that “for feminists, this ‘truth’—usually expressed as Truth, a neutral, omnipotent, changeless essence—is inseparable from gender-based and biased epistemologies.”68 The question that arises from the image of the cave as the hysterical maternal womb is: How can the representative realm be the site of women’s oppression and—at the same time—female?69 Diamond remarks that answers to that question are complex, and one strategy to deal with it can be the activation of mimicry as an epistemological and liberating tool. She states: “Mimicry can function, in other words, as an alienation-effect, framing the gender behavior dictated by patriarchal models as a means of ‘recover[ing] the place of her [the performer’s] exploitation.”70

We have seen that mimesis is threatening to Plato’s conception of truth, since it implies a difference and thus destabilises the rational male citizen, and what Diamond suggests is that mimesis can be utilised against this conception. In reference to Irigaray, Diamond proposes that mimesis is not a stable mirror but “a trick mirror that doubles (makes feminine) in the act of reflection.”71

I’m now daring to make a bold leap to labour theory and the discourse of alienation. In Marxist terms, “alienation” describes the process of self-loss through the conditions of capitalist production. It is based on the notion of an original humanistic, authentic, and true self, which is developed in dialogue with Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s idealism.72 Self-care as a search for the authentic self can be connected with the Hegelian notion of a humanistic essence and the
concept of alienation, as employed by Marx to describe the brutality of the capitalist system of production, which dehumanises workers by stripping them of their original possibility of shaping the world through their labour. Paulo Freire, arguing within that same humanistic tradition, defines oppression as a dehumanising process and states that it is through working that we transform the world.73 Overturning the notion of alienation into one of “active estrangement” and recognising one’s distance to capital’s interests and thus transforming alienation into a condition for resistance (through striking, refusal to work) was one of the most contested intellectual projects of the Left in the 1960s.74

In The Second Sex, de Beauvoir uses the word *aliénation* in relation to the constitution of gender roles, and she posits different intensities of alienation account for sexual differences.75 Similar to feminist Marxist scholar Silvia Federici’s criticism of the modern notion of precarity through the argument that women have always lived under precarious labour conditions,76 one could argue with de Beauvoir that women in Western patriarchal societies have always known alienation, since the “true” self has always been constituted as the man’s, an ideal never socially achievable for women.

Using mimicry as an alienation-effect offers a strategy to protest against this function and claim one’s subjectivity back from the self-assuring male gaze and patriarchal judgment and control; these are persistent narratives that arise in feminist performance art. By exposing the body to the gaze of a self-chosen audience on her own terms, the artist pluralises the viewer, scattering or excluding “him.” Perhaps unsurprisingly, feminist performance artists of the 1970s often performed in front of all-female audiences.77

In 1960s New York, the dancer and performance artist Yvonne Rainer presented a sequence of movements called *Trio A*. It explicitly dealt with the performer’s involvement with the gaze.78 Rainer describes how the dancer’s eyes are “always averted from direct confrontation with the audience via independent movement of the head or closure of the eyes or simple casting down of the gaze.” Rainer’s preoccupation with everyday situations and movements, with “what one does,” aimed at a demystification of dance through a presentation of a banal but subjective moving body.79 Through a quote of Rainer’s—“Comes over one the absolute necessity to move”—art historian Soyoung Yoon connects this approach to Frau Heinrich’s additional movement.80 Rainer’s movements constantly shift between the representing and “being,” and rather than demonstrating the difference, she shows that there might be none.

At this point I would like to refer to Peggy Phelan and what she describes as an “attempt to walk (and live) on the rickety bridge between the self and the other—and not the attempt to arrive at one side or the other.”81 By employing psychoanalysis and feminist theories of representation, Phelan argues in *Unmarked: Politics of Performance* for a reevaluation of a belief in subjectivity and identity that is not visibly representable. An “I” that is not able to be seen. But how to see the self if one is not seen by others? Phelan insists on the importance of differentiating between representation and the Real and sees performance as a strategy to evade the reproduction of sameness: “Performance, insofar as it can be defined as representation without reproduction, can be seen as a model for another representational economy, one in which the reproduction of the Other as the Same is not assured.”82

For Phelan, identity lies in the impossibility of expressing oneself truly and “is perceptible only through a relation with an other”—a relationship marked by the “loss of not-being the other and yet remaining dependent on that other for self-seeing, self-being.”83 In the afterword to *Unmarked*, Phelan expresses a notion of hope and suggests a pedagogy of “active acceptance of the inevitability of misunderstanding,”84 “a pedagogy for disappearance and loss and not for acquisition and control.”85

**Chimaera Class: A Performance between Multiple Heads**

In the following section, I would like to briefly sketch my graduation project, a performance called *Chimaera Class*, which I presented on three nights at Skånes konstförening in Malmö, Sweden, in March 2017. It is not my intention to prove or attest to any solutions to the questions that are discussed in this paper; rather, I would like to provide insight into how I try to put these theoretical thoughts into practice, without purely illustrating them. The format of a performance allows me to experiment with these questions in a different way—in a social situation, together with other people.

The set-up is the following. The audience waits outside a door, and two people at once are asked by an assistant to enter the first room. The small room is filled with artificial smoke and I stand in the middle of the room welcoming those who enter. They place themselves in front of me, and I talk to them about what I call an image, asking them to take care of it over the course of the performance. There are three different images, one of which is given verbally to each pair. After I finish with the short text, I ask them to enter the second room and make themselves comfortable. The second room is covered with a thick dark-red carpet and two projections are screened on the opposite sides of the walls. I am the last person who enters the room, after I told the image to the last pair. The participants have placed themselves around the room, most in a sitting position. I ask them to close their eyes and tell them to relax each body part one after the other. This common relaxation method is followed by a short meditation during
which I ask everyone to focus on their breath. After a while, I break the silence with singing: the productive body has, so to say, a surplus of energy which can be used for work. Arbeitskraft. I use this line as a sort of refrain that comes back at certain points of the performance. In the following forty-five minutes, I shift between different roles. Besides the meditation guide, there is the lecturer, explaining the projections on the walls, which depict a Pompeian pillar with a mural painting, giving art historical information, drawing conclusions, and posing questions. Another role is the poet, reciting Ovid, Dante, and self-written poetry. These roles overlap; I tell anecdotes and improvise and then shift back into another mode. But all these characters are hard to separate from my “personality”; they are aspects of “me,” social forms I assume. I move through the room, asking the participants to change their position, to stand up, to rub parts of their bodies. I use text fragments from Peggy Phelan, Ovid, Dante, Marianne Herzog, Pseudo-Hyginus, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Artemidorus, Pliny the Elder, Hannah Arendt, and Richard Sennett, of which some are found in this paper. I manipulate, sometimes I instruct clearly, sometimes I leave things unclear. A figure that returns is the mythological Chimera, a fire-breathing female hybrid beast, “a three-formed creature said to breathe forth fire. Likewise: forepart lion, rearpart snake, middle she-goat.”86 For me she becomes a polyvocal, deconstructive female subject, a modus operandi. The performance is structured through rhythm in movement and speech. At the end I ask the participants to close their eyes again and to find a comfortable position; many lie down. I ask them to recall the image from the beginning, or what is left of it. I tell them to focus on their breath and to feel how the warmth leaves their bodies. I stand up, turn off the light, and leave the room. The participants are left with their eyes closed and without an instruction.88

Conclusion; or, Seeing Oneself in the Dark
Let me rephrase my research question: Is art making a contemporary form of self-care?

We have seen that certain aspects are analogue: both the ancient care of the self and art making are cultures that are theoretically open to everyone considered a participant of society, but that are still quite exclusive, demanding special sacrifice and devotion. For many artists, making art offers a critical activity, the possibility to engage with philosophical questions and reflect on oneself, be it at the art academy or outside the institution. More pessimistically, one could say that art making, or maybe put more generally, creativity, has been employed (or less passively, we employ it) to govern ourselves, to make us “able to go on like this,” which also resonates with Foucault’s interpretation of the ancient care of the self as a technique to regulate and control the self. Perhaps, like other forms of contemporary self-care, such as Western practices of yoga and meditation, it compensates for the abstraction capitalist mechanisms impose on us.

Foucault describes the ancient care of the self as a technique of self-regulation and a search for an ideal truth, an authentic subject. This search is a constitutive part of the vita contemplativa, but we have seen that for Plato it was the condition for ethical leadership: to care for oneself to care for others, or, one could say, to govern oneself to govern others.

But what if there is no true subject? In postmodern thought there is no essence of man: the humanistic man is a social construct that essentialises power relations. As Irigaray has shown, Plato’s cave is a narrative to degrade the representative realm against the pure ideal philosophical truth. As we have seen, for women, the discussion of the true subject cannot be untied from the question of representation. Deeply rooted in Western thought, the concept of woman as the representation of man—as the instrument of his self-affirmation—has led many feminist thinkers and artists to challenge not only the representative role of “Woman” but the patriarchal truth of the (male) subject. Active estrangement from gender roles that are inextricable from economic exploitation has been an effective strategy for feminists to lay bare and challenge power relations.

Finally, I would like to come back to Arendt’s categories. She describes the artist as homo faber, who works to put an object into the world that lasts longer than he does and is not intended for consumption. On the one hand, Arendt places the artist in opposition to the interactive, political person due to their preoccupation with material things, and as such defines the homo faber as unpoltical. On the other hand, she states that the artist cannot be without what she calls the “space of appearance,” the public realm in which the artwork is acknowledged and actualised by other people. Arendt states, “the only character of the world by which to gauge its reality is its being common to us all.”90 She interprets a noticeable decrease of this common sense in the modern era as a sign of alienation from the world. In reference to Marx, Arendt states that in a society of labourers, alienation is particularly extreme since a commercial society lacks relatedness with others and political interaction through which common sense is constituted.91

What is interesting in her analysis is that she sees alienation not as an individual pathology but as the consequence of a systematic lack of common “realisation” of the world through social interaction. Her categorisation of the artist as homo faber can be challenged when we think of artists whose artwork is social interaction, using artistic formats that have been termed, for example, socially engaged art92 and relational aesthetics.93

In Arendt’s acknowledgement that the artist needs the “space of appearance” to present their artwork, she was
not thinking of artists that don’t use objects, but as such offers a narrow entry point for the homo faber to transgress their category and enter the political sphere …

When in 2015 and 2016 the Swedish performance artist and choreographer Stina Nyberg offered workshops for employees from different workplaces, one could hardly apply the features of Arendt’s homo faber to her artistic activity. The participatory performance was called Tal om arbete (Speaking of Work), and with its dialogue-based concept it aimed at highlighting the social aspect of the workplace and turning it into a public sphere where people interact beyond productive communication, where they feel their bodies, where they reflect upon working conditions and philosophical questions connected to work and social relationships. Together with the employees, she created a temporary “space for appearance.” For Arendt, who pleads for a reactivation of human interaction, it would have been an impossible surprise that those who we call artists have the means to create such a space.96

Opposing Plato, Isocrates saw the function of poetic education as fostering the student’s ability to think and feel through different social roles and situations. In postmodern terms, one could say the poet grasps the complexity of social life beyond strict identification with a “true” self. Feminist theorists, poets, and performance artists have shown us that there is no ontological homeland beyond representation. If there is no such thing as an ideal true self, if there is no ontological homeland, how then to relate, how to understand reality?

Frédéric Gros, editor of The Hermeneutics of the Subject, describes the Foucauldian practices of the self as “neither individual nor communal: they are relational and transversal.”97 I think this aspect effortlessly connects to art making. The education theorist Gert Biesta sees the task of an engaged democratic education as “learning how to live together in plurality,”98 making reference to Arendt and her definition of “understanding”:

Understanding, as distinguished from having correct information and scientific knowledge, is a complicated process, which never produces unequivocal results. It is an unending activity by which, in constant change and variation, we come to terms with and reconcile ourselves to reality, that is, try to be at home in the world.98

In this sense I would like to see art making not as a formula for acquiring philosophical self-knowledge but rather as a way of exploring and, yes, (mis-)understanding how the always changing and shifting self is, to paraphrase Freire, with this world instead of in this world.99 As a way of not making the other the same and thus seeing oneself in the other but as a way of seeing oneself with the plurality of others.

In my opinion, Lorde, Rainer, and Nyberg have shown us that with poetic, epistemological, and pedagogical pleasure, the artist and the art educator alike (sometimes even as one person) can open up a space for a holistic engagement with complex social realities beyond the blinding light of patriarchal “truth.”

A Space for Seeing Oneself in the Dark.

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2. “A Body of Work – A Labour of Love. A Workshop on Art-Making, Labour and Love with Elena Strempek” was conducted at Kassel Arts University in October 2016 and accompanied by the conference Liebe und arbeite! [Love and work!].
8. Historically, the art academy was an institution of highly specialised and professionalised education; think, for example, of the seventeenth-century French Académie royale de peinture et de sculpture with its strict categorisation of techniques and genres. I’m instead referring here to art schools shaken up by anti-authoritarian and critical movements of the 1960s and 1970s, especially within the German context.
11. This narrative of course neglects the social conditions and global mechanisms of exploitation that maintain the mythos of the artist as the autonomous genius.
In the classical Marxian analysis of industrial production, the capital owner employs a worker who is paid just as much as can sustain their labour force and the worker creates surplus value (Mehrwert) through the work that exceeds what they are paid as salary.


See Frédéric Gros, “Course Context,” in Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 513.

Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 176.

Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 85.

Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 86.

Interestingly enough, Foucault shows that the care of the self was not always necessarily an aristocratic privilege, as other free (or freed) men could also devote themselves to a philosophical life, for example in Epicurean communities. Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 174ff.

Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 86.

Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 94.

Gros, “Course Context,” 541.

Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 18.

Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 18.

Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 59. Here erotic platonic love plays a role as well, which is interesting in that context but would exceed the framework of this paper. The “disinterested love” could also be linked to Jacques Rancière’s “ignorant schoolmaster,” who nurtures the student’s will to learn but leaves the learning itself completely to the student.

Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 44.

bell hooks, Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom (New York: Routledge, 1994), 15ff.

hooks, Teaching to Transgress, 15.

Thich Nhat Hanh, quoted in hooks, Teaching to Transgress, 15.

Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 230.


To name only one example of many: in accordance with the EU-Turkey deal, Turkey closed its borders in March 2016 on behalf of other European countries, such as Germany, leaving thousands of migrants from Syria living rough in refugee camps at the Turkish border.


Gill, “In the Realm of Our Lorde,” 189.


Haskins, “Mimesis,” 8f.


In a tutorial with Gertrud Sandqvist I learned that Epictetus was a slave who was freed by his master due to his outstanding mastery of the self.

Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 96.

Foucault remarks that the authenticity of certain passages of the text is debated and could have been added later by Neoplatonists or Christian Platonists. Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 70.

Foucault, The Hermeneutics of the Subject, 70ff.


Groys, “The Obligation to Self-Design.”

Groys also forgets the priest, as a representative of God in Christianity, the human other to whom sins are confessed. See Gros, “Course Context,” 510.

Phelan, Unmarked, 172.


This is strikingly formulated in her iconic sentence: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”


Here a very important subject to which I do refer in this paper is only marginally mentioned: orientalism and the whole decolonial critique of Western subjectivity. Edward Said’s famous study Orientalism provides a good introduction to Western othering and decolonial theory.


Arendt also uses the metaphor of light and darkness to illustrate differences between the public and the domestic spheres. Arendt, Vita activa, 44.

In a footnote Diamond refers to feminist scholars Linda Gordon and Evelyn Fox Keller, among others.


Diamond, “Mimesis, Mimicry, and the ‘True-Real,’” 64.


This is of course a much more complex discourse within Marxist theory and I’m massively simplifying here. Franco “Bifo” Berardi gives a schematic overview upon which I’m drawing. See Franco “Bifo” Berardi, The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy, trans. Francesca Cadel and Giuseppina Mecchia (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009), 27ff.

Freire, The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 27.

Biesta refers specifically to the workerist-compositionist movement and Mario Tronti, in The Soul at Work, 44ff., 115ff.


For example, like Faith Wilding in her 1972 performance Writing, See Forte, “Women’s Performance Art,” 218.


Phelan, Unmarked, 3.

It is a point that Phelan makes a similar point when she says that only in relation to others are we the self, in a lecture called "The Human Condition," Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, February 28, 2008, http://www.cccb.org/en/multimedia/videos/the-human-condition-vulnerability-survivability/211495.

Phelan, Unmarked, 13.


Phelan, Unmarked, 13.

Phelan, Unmarked, 173.

Phelan, Unmarked, 173.


Afterwards, the participants were invited to join a communal dinner, which allowed for an informal conversation about what happened during the performance.

Arendt uses the male pronoun.

Arendt, The Human Condition, 208.


The term “relational aesthetics” was coined by Nicolas Bourriaud to describe artistic practices that deal with social relations as subject matter. See Nicolas Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods (Dijon: Presses du réel, 2002).

Tal om arbete was commissioned by the Sveriges Konstföreningar and conducted at different workplaces in 2015 and 2016.

This is surely just a beginning of a discussion, and Arendt would probably argue against this assumption.

Gros, “Course Context,” 545.

Biesta made these comments in a lecture at Malmo Art Academy on September 2, 2016.

Gert Biesta, “Reconciling Ourselves to Reality: Arendt, Education and the Challenge of Being at Home in the World,” Journal of Educational Administration and History 48, no. 2, (2016): 184. In his paper Biesta takes a closer look at Arendt’s notion of education and what it means “to be at home in the world.” I wish I had found this article earlier on in my research, but it will definitely come back to it in future.

Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 56.
Chimaera Class—A Performance between Multiple Heads with Elena Strempek

Skånes konstförening, Malmö, March 17–19, 2017
Duration: One hour

The lecture and the meditation class are different pedagogical formats which share the desire of the transformation of the subject. Both could be seen as inadequate, proliferating a high performance culture, boosting the participant’s capability to work—intelligently and efficiently. But can we use them to find a way to perform with our own agency? Following an archaeological approach, images from the past will perform on us. We will close our eyes, we will hear many tongues. We might lose our heads, and find others to put on. Likewise: forepart lion, rearpart snake, middle she-goat.

—(Press text, Chimaera Class)
On Mount Chimaera, above the woods, when wearied, you were weak from following, you fell, your hair spread on the hard earth and your face pressing the fallen leaves, 2017. Still image from a recorded rehearsal of Chimaera Class. Skånes konstförening, Malmö, 2017. Elena Strempek

A rigid social order based on body temperature—Rub your legs, 2017. Photograph of a staged version of Chimaera Class. Skånes konstförening, Malmö, 2017. Elena Strempek
One Performance is Many Performances

Performing Performance-Embedded Knowledge

Introduction

“I think my greatest aspiration … is to become a needle to sew everything up, but first to push my way in there, and sew all this history up again. I don’t want to delve into the past for archaeological pleasure … but because the past has a reality which conditions us deep down. Then if you bring it to the surface, it’s full of possibilities.”
—Jannis Kounellis

Once upon a time a performance took place and then it was no longer there. Some witnessed it and others only heard about it. We weren’t there but we know about it because we can imagine it and carry that image with us and make it our own. The past speaks to us in the present and informs us about where we are in that present, but it never reveals itself fully as it was. Bits and pieces are put together in a reconstruction through a subjective eye and mind.

Performance art appears to be an art practice that only spends. It uses, and then there is nothing left other than the record of a performance. It doesn’t have the endurance of a solid work of art. However, this loss, the lack of concrete material, does give us something else in return. Jannis Kounellis holds that the past is full of possibilities as soon it is brought to the surface. The same can be said about performance art’s afterlife. The question here is what this possibility for performance art’s afterlife can mean in terms of a performance art practice that invites space for pedagogy.

This question led me to employ a “didactic” method in a practice that uses the memories of performance artworks. In this text my aim is to identify and theorise the pedagogical elements used in the work I have done. The following sections cover materials from my research project One Performance is Many Performances, comprising seven case studies that were finalised and eventually presented in a lecture at Nikolaj Kunsthall.
in Copenhagen. The method used in the case studies involved the sharing and recycling of performance art “histories” by means of the personal memories of the artists in question. The method, which we can call a “performative mode” of storytelling, placed an emphasis on decisions that I made concerning the situation and/or locations that were specifically assigned to each particular performance memory. A performance of spoken word was then carried out in the selected location, a performance in which I narrated the events as described by one of the artists. Through reference to the seven case studies, I will describe the effects of using this performative method and the questions it raises in regard to its use as a pedagogical method and the state of performance art’s afterlife. I will argue for the method’s pedagogical strengths and consider its inadequacies.

Furthermore, I want to argue that performance art, often understood as a time-based practice, should be conceived of as less fixed to a particular time or geography than it usually is assumed to be. Along the way, a brief discourse will therefore be undertaken on the matter of performance art documentation and a few examples of practices that are concerned with re-enactments and the use of a performance art archive by Re.Act.Feminism will be provided. In the final part of the thesis, I will connect the developed “performative” and “didactic” method to the question of performance art’s displacement in time and space.

Performance Monologues:
The Retellings of Memories

I came into the Critical & Pedagogical Studies (CPS) programme as an artist with a performance art practice in order to explore the role of pedagogy in this practice. In the first year, 2016, I developed Performance Monologues, which is a means of circulating live spoken records of past performances using the memories of the artists who carried them out. When one is practicing performance, it’s often inherently part of the execution of a work to consciously decide whether to produce documentation or not to produce documentation. Peggy Phelan writes:

Performance’s only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance.3

We can ask whether the artwork only happens in the present, and whether it is really no longer there once the performance is over. Usually only a few people experience the “original,” because it is impossible for most people to attend the many works of live art. This means that performance art, in general, is experienced through its documentation. It often seems that the documentation replaces the “original.” I regularly have occasion to talk about my own past performances, and it is often unsatisfying. At other times, it has been rewarding to describe a past work, because I could edit my narrative into a story that could actually be a more successful work than the original work might have been. But of course, what I say never completely represents the actual event.

This unsettling relationship between the actual event of a performance and its reliance on documentation fascinates me a great deal. It made me wonder how other artists talk about their performances. I started visiting them in their studios or at their homes, where I would interview them. Soon I decided to start asking the artists to describe one of their performances from memory and to deliver it in the format of a monologue. For this process, I both listen in person and also make audio recordings. In one year, I have collected more than thirty-five monologues from artists I have met during my travels to Chicago, New York City, Copenhagen, Berlin, Amsterdam, Helsinki, and Vienna. The artists are from different generations and backgrounds. Some I know personally, but I also started reaching out to artists I heard or read about. For example, in the publication Re.Act.Feminism, I read about female artists who did live actions that couldn’t be called performance art at the time, because they lived in the GDR, where such art was repressed.4 From this group, I visited Karla Woisnitz and Else Gabriel in Berlin.

In the second semester of CPS, I took part in an archive course5 that resulted in a group exhibition at the Inter Arts Center in Malmö. Instead of exhibiting the audio files I had recorded of artists, I decided to retell the recorded monologues in person, using the first person pronoun “I,” at the gallery. Any given monologue I performed concluded with me giving the artist’s name and the title of the work they had described. For these performances, I had to memorise the audio recordings I was going to recite. The decision to exhibit the memories in this way came to me as a result of my realisation that a similar person-to-person transmission, such as I am often part of myself, is conducted whenever an artist speaks to someone about a past performance work. It’s a different kind of encounter with a work than is offered by the photographic or video record of performance art. Performance Monologues performative method of storytelling brings the story of performing a work back into a live format, and so the means of remembering is thus itself like a performance. The collection of stories has also become a great source of learning about the works of other artists, works not often found in books on performance art. The ones that can be found in books do not include the voice of the artist or their verbal narrative of the experience.
One Performance is Many Performances: 
Seven Case Studies

The project One Performance is Many Performances is my final exam project for the CPS course and it represents a step forward in the project Performance Monologues, described above. I selected nine stories from the series of monologues I had collected and used them for the seven case studies that I will describe in more detail below. For each of the selected monologues, I chose a different location in which to perform it, taking into consideration the particular circumstances of the listener or listeners. These chosen sites were: the hairdresser, the university classroom, my home, a bakery, a live model drawing class, a train, and an art exhibition space. In reciting the monologues at these specific places, I wanted to ask how the circumstances affect the listener’s appreciation, but also how location might influence the meaning of the performance described in the monologue. Is this performative method a valid way to mediate performance art for a new listener? And what function does reciting the story in first person play? Are the body and the image of the artist and what function does reciting the story in first way to mediate performance art for a new listener? Is this performative method a valid in the monologue. Is this performative method a valid influence the meaning of the performance described in the monologue and location might the listener’s appreciation, but also how location might in the monologue. Is this performative method a valid become? And what information is passed on about a work of art that is live, if such information can only be received by listening to my voice under those particular circumstances? Each location brought another kind of listener into the picture. Some weren’t familiar with performance art and others were. Janneke Schoene, who I had recently met as a person interested in performance art and others who I had recently met as a person interested in performance art and who studied its theory, was appointed as observer for all seven cases.

Case 1: Hairdresser
March 10, 2017

#31 The Meaning of Life
Irina Danilova*

Location
Hair Therapy, hairdresser in Malmö

The hairdresser is the place where people talk about their lives. Customer Heidrun Führer and hairdresser Di Yang agreed to have me sitting with them and reciting the first monologue while Führer had her hair cut and Schoene sat nearby to observe the full event. Also, there was a video camera set up in the back of the shop. All participants except the hairdresser, Yang, were informed that the story I would tell would not be my own or drawn from my own memory but would be that of another artist.

Irina Danilova was the original artist in this case, and her monologue is about a performance that she started in 1984 and that repeats every four years. Each leap year, she shaves all her hair off. In this monologue, the artist’s personal life is merged with political and art historical facts of the time, a period during which she moved from Ukraine, to Moscow, and finally to the United States. The cutting of her hair marks the end of a period of time in her life and the beginning of a new one.

After she graduated from art school in Ukraine, Danilova felt neither she nor any of her fellow students had any knowledge of foreign contemporary art. Despite Danilova’s symbolic hair-shaving action, which indicates links to performance art history, she had never heard about happenings, action art, or performance art. In her monologue, she provides descriptions of how the shaving of her hair is done at different places, both with and without an audience. One time, she shaved her hair alone in front of a mirror. I speak of her experiences as she had spoken them to me, addressing particularly Führer, who sits in the chair, sometimes making eye contact with her via the mirror. The whole monologue takes about thirty minutes. There is sometimes a break, when Yang is using the hairdryer.

After the monologue, the four of us had a conversation about it. Führer said that during my recitation I took down my own voice to get into Danilova’s story without getting my own story into it. The situation was that of mirroring, but in this case the reciter was not the one getting the haircut, as it is in the monologue, but instead it was the listener. Führer understood this to be my projecting the artist’s situation onto her while she herself was to project the person in question, the original artist who did the performance, onto me.

When I asked Führer what it was like to listen to this story at a hairdresser, her answer was that I mixed the art with the everyday, which would not be the same if it were told in an art institution. She emphasised that she’s a scholar, which makes her experience different, but speaking from the perspective of a non-scholar, she could still see the artificial quality that I brought into this everyday space of a hair salon. We discussed the question of when something becomes a performance, since in Danilova’s monologue this question is a prominent matter. Führer commented that to speak of performance where there is no audience, apart from a mirror, is difficult. In her view, the creation of a series of similar actions is what makes it a performance, and the fact that every four years Danilova has to cut her hair again. This creation of a series is a way to make meaning in life where there is no meaning, and in this way this performance is very much about how to create meaning in life.

Führer also spoke about our habit of reconstituting meaning because we want to have wholeness. As soon I came closer to the present in my narrative, Führer said, she felt that she wanted things to come to a conclusion. In the monologue, Danilova has her last haircut in
2016. It’s an open question whether or not the performance concludes, because the artist is still alive. Führer remarks that she only had a problem with my body. I’m not sure how to understand this, but it is maybe because my body is too young for the story that is told. Schoene then said that this problem is important because it has to be clear that the monologue is not a real embodiment. Schoene followed by saying that I don’t try to look like the artist, so that the listener doesn’t get completely immersed in the fiction but rather stays in the real time of the monologue and our situation. At this point further questions came up. For example, Führer brought up Bertolt Brecht’s famous verfremdungseffekt. For Brecht, spectators are to watch out for the illusions of fiction, and to take care to keep thinking for themselves in this “alienated” condition. According to Führer, such alienation is one result of the ambivalence between the realistic and the fictional in my monologue. She could also see that I was making eye contact with her, and when I was searching for words or trying to remember, she felt that she was actually participating in creating the story. In this way she was an active observer.

Case 2: Classroom—Teaching Performance Art

March 27, 2017

#5 In the Absence of a Body
Diaz-Lewis

#12 Please don’t touch, I will come and fix this as soon as possible
Frans van Lent

#3 Background Materials
Michal Samama

Location
“Total Work of Art” course,
Dept. of Arts and Cultural Sciences,
Div. of Culture Management
and Intermediality, Lund University

The classroom is a space for teaching and receiving education. During this particular meeting of the course, students are introduced to the broad concept of the “total work of art” at a highly theoretical level by associate professor Heidrun Führer. The monologues I perform during the class act as a counterweight to the theories under discussion, which include theories of performance. I’m attending the class together with the students, and after one and a half hours, I suddenly announce that I want to say something about performances. I start talking, and the students aren’t prepared for it. Before the class began, Führer and I had decided that I would do the monologues unannounced in order to bring in an element of unpredictability, which is a common quality of performance art.

Through the retelling of the monologues of various artists, different aspects of performance art were touched upon. #5 In the Absence of a Body is related to the artist’s personal life as a Cuban residing illegally...
“In some cases iekte repeats the movement of the monologue, for instance when she talks about the artist who would go to the gallery to hang paintings on the wall, iekte acts as if she is hanging paintings on the wall.”

“After the monologues there is a discussion with the students. Someone says: “You made something present in my head.”

… A new performance is created in everybody’s head—some new kind of ‘knowledge’ is created that differs from the historical knowledge [see Amelia Jones].”

“The experience of a monologue, as a not-distant form of performance ‘documentation’ is very different from ‘proper’ documentation forms.”

—Excerpts from Janneke Schoene’s observations.

“iekte says ‘I’ very often → one gets lost in the illusion that she is the actual narrator of the story. One has to choose whether to stay in the ‘real’ time (here and now) or follow the illusion of the story. Something long gone becomes present somehow. This is even more the case because the cutting of the hair in the story and at the hairdresser create some kind of similar situation (co-presence within performance art: see Erika Fischer-Lichte). It is not only like a recording of the performance, but more an intense moment.”

—Excerpt from Janneke Schoene’s observations.
in the United States. The experience gave him the idea of living unseen behind a fabricated wall built for that purpose within an art exhibition that lasted for three weeks. #12 Please don’t touch, I will come and fix this as soon as possible discusses art outside the frame. The artist hung paintings wrapped in thick plastic during the opening of an art show and immediately took them down again. The same action was repeated numerous times during the opening. The third monologue, #3 Background Materials, is also concerned with a kind of invisibility. The artist recalls leading the audience to the middle of a room, where, in the nude, she began to move slowly, touching her body to all the corners of the space, areas that often stay unnoticed. She states that with her action she wanted to be in the background. As a reciter, I brought these three monologues together in order to point out the way they each engage in a dialogue about peripheries. And through that process, my performance in the classroom was meant to offer a view of the position that performance art takes within the history of art.

After performing the monologues, my impression was that the students were firstly a bit confused, as I had undermined the authority in the classroom and suddenly it required a different mindset from them. They were not pre-informed, and because of that they were not pre-informed, and because of that they should react. The conventional rules of the classroom no longer seemed to apply. That is, the decision they should react. The conventional rules of the classroom no longer seemed to apply. That is, the decision to bring performance art#12 into the classroom created a sudden shift from the mode of the more traditional process, my performance in the classroom was meant to offer a view of the position that performance art takes within the history of art.

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In his 2016 lecture “Reconnecting Art and Education,” Gert Biesta#13 discussed art in education. His proposal is to help children and young people to be in the world through an education that is not curriculum centred or even child centred, but world centred. As an individual, each of us creates a relation with the world in which freedom is important. According to Biesta, freedom is relational and freedom is difficult. Freedom provides space for one’s own expression, but what if this expression is not constructive? It is thus important to learn to encounter resistance, because if one tries to deal with such resistance, it will be in dialogue (here by “dialogue,” I don’t mean in the sense of “a conversation”). Resistance can work as a form of art within education as a means of interruption. An example given by Biesta was that of using material in the process of making art: when one sculpts a stone, the stone doesn’t always do what the maker has in mind. The maker encounters resistance and has to change their approach and find a different way of reaching their goal. This requires looking at the possibilities of the stone, which Biesta calls being “in dialogue with” the material. #14 For me, this opens up the possibility of an educational setting where one is aware of the conditions one is in and is required to interact and respond, such as what might have been triggered with the sudden intervention of my monologues in Führer’s classroom.

After the monologues, there was a discussion. We talked about the function of the first-person pronoun “I” in the monologues. It didn’t matter that the “I” wasn’t me; the “I” helped to immerse the listener in the story and made them more engaged with the narrator. One student said it was helpful to have me there as an actual person who could be imagined doing the performances as described by me. Some students said they felt more engaged when they listen to a person talking about their own experiences, and it wouldn’t have been the same if the monologues were in the third person. In an e-mail I received from a student afterwards, I realised that the monologues can also have the opposite effect—that of closing off the listener—and even can become intimidating.

Since some students still had difficulty believing that it wasn’t me who went through the experiences I spoke about in the monologues, we talked about the power of illusion and the sense of truth. The line between fiction and reality had been blurred. Here the theory Führer had just been lecturing on came into play. It concerned the notion of representation with reference to the ideas of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. My notes say: “Representation is a lie because it always becomes something different. Representation by itself doesn’t constitute knowledge; we need to go beyond representation to recognise another representation. Knowledge is a system, a synthesis of representations.”

Case 3: Home
March 28, 2017
#10 To Look and Be Looked At
Anet van de Elzen

Location
ieke Trinks’s tiny studio apartment in Malmö

Visiting someone’s home can be a kind of trespassing. For example, if the resident’s personal life is exposed within the space thus revealing more of this person’s identity than was previously known, a visitor can feel like they are trespassing. The role of the listener is that of a guest under the host’s hospitality. In this setting, a visiting stranger likely would have brought a more in-depth situation, but none came. Instead, two visitors came to my home at separate times, both of whom know me and are familiar with performance art, and furthermore who also know about my monologues project and are aware that the “I” in the story is not me. Still, the aspect of the visitor showing openness and politeness in the host’s home played its part.
The monologue recited on this occasion is about an artist doing a performance in a former prostitute’s room in the Red Light District of Amsterdam. During the original artist’s performance, many prostitutes were working in the same street behind windows while large numbers of tourists passed by. The artist sat on a pile of potatoes, cleaning each potato and rubbing the dirt from the potatoes onto her face. In this way, the artist brought basic needs into a controversial space where women sell their bodies and which contributes to the flourishing of the tourism industry in Amsterdam. I tell this story in my tiny apartment while I sit on my bed.

“The environment is very important and for each monologue is carefully chosen. … In this case the private room of i ske’s apartment is chosen and can be linked to the fact that the prostitutes in the story sell their body, their most private possession. When the ‘I’ of the story wonders ‘why do the visitors come here in the Red Light District,’ I feel caught, like I am actually asked this question because I came to visit i ske in the apartment.”

“I wonder about my own role because of the camera. I feel like I have to give some kind of feedback, like nodding, and can’t just sit there and listen; otherwise I would maybe have looked around the room while i ske told the story.”

—Excerpts from Janneke Schoene’s observations.
With the first visitor, I could read in her expression her engagement with the story. She was nodding and making sounds of understanding. Afterwards she told me she happened to have been in the Red Light District a couple of times, which made it interesting for her to imagine this setting. She asked why I brought this monologue into my home. Was it because of the private setting? I asked her how it affected her to come to my home to hear it. She explains she had prior knowledge of my project, but if she hadn’t, it would have been very strange. She would have not known what was going to happen, and it might have been scary. It was good that this monologue was short, she says, particularly if a person listening feels uncomfortable.

The second visitor was Janneke Schoene, and afterwards we talked about the experience of visiting someone at home. For me, travelling to see a performance or attend an art exhibition in general influences my experience of the artwork. And knowing that I’m going to someone’s home would affect me mentally, particularly when it is a situation in which I’m alone with this person. I wouldn’t experience the same intensity if I were alone with a person in a public setting. In retrospect, I wonder: Do the questions asked by the artist in this monologue speak more directly to the listener if the listener hears them in a private setting? And if you are the only listener, will it make you more responsible as listener?

Case 4: Bakery
March 29, 2016
#30 Sacrament
Inari Virmakoski

Location
Sankt Knuts Bageri in Malmö, a bakery run by a Lebanese family

Sankt Knuts Bageri is a semipublic space where its customers are offered a story about a performance. The bakery’s clientele is very diverse, and none have been informed of the project. Some don’t know much about performance art; others do vaguely, but connect it with theatre and dance. Some visitors aren’t invested in art at all. Over the course of two hours, I recite the same monologue to six different tables, with one or more people at a table each time. After the monologue, the encounter often continued in conversation about the meaning of the story, the act of storytelling, or simply in curiosity about my identity as an artist and whether it matters if it was me who did the performance that was spoken about in the monologue. Sometimes we talked about performance art in general.

The monologue at the bakery is about an artist who did a performance inspired by a dream she had of walking on bread in a beer garden in Munich after she had visited a monastery. She decided to use this dream for her first public performance, which she did in 1995 in a factory building in Tallinn. For her performance she walked on bread and afterwards cut it into smaller pieces and invited the public to take a piece. In her monologue, Inari Virmakoski emphasises that she spoke aloud the sentence “The table is ready,” which is a sentence usually said by the priest during communion.

In general people were very open to listening to the monologue, which took about five minutes to recite. In this setting of the bakery, people were not prepared for the performance, as had been Führer at the hairdresser or the visitors who listened at my home. Nor were the customers at the bakery surprised by a sudden, unrequested monologue, as the students in the classroom had been.

The reactions of the listeners varied between appreciation that usually turned into a conversation and a more mellow response with little dialogue at the end. My experience of this setting—sitting at a table in a café-like place while music was softly playing—created an open environment for questions and reactions during the course of reciting the monologue. There was no hesitancy to interrupt me in my story. In one case, a woman and a man (mentioned in Schoene’s observation) were familiar with the work of a Swedish performance artist, Anna Odell. This artist has received extensive coverage in the Swedish media. For them, Odell’s work was too provocative, the kind
of performance art they said they did not appreciate. They preferred the monologue. I don’t know if that also included the performance in the monologue itself, or whether it was specifically because they were approached in the bakery and offered this monologue by an artist like me. At another table I was seated with a young couple who were working on an Arabic translation. The man was from Morocco. They were particularly interested in storytelling and connected it to the ancient tradition of storytelling in a square in Marrakech that still takes place to this day. They also mentioned that nowadays there is a storyteller in the square who specialises in retelling feature movies.

Another couple I spoke to searched for the meaning of the story. According to them it was very symbolic, such as the walking on bread.

Case 5: Life Model Drawing Class
March 29, 2017
#27 Untitled
Julischka Stengele

Location
Sketching class with Christel Lyberg
at Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund, Malmö

This case took place in another classroom situation, but one different from the theory course mentioned earlier. In this instance, the physical body is central. The body in this classroom is an object for learning how to draw different poses, for understanding the effect of gravity on the body’s muscles and joints, for comprehending human anatomy, and for learning how to represent different perspectives. The participants are told that the model is a performance artist and is going to do a fifteen-minute monologue while they are drawing her.

I’m the model and reciter of the monologue. I describe a performance done at a performance art festival near Prague. In this monologue, I explain that I was sitting in the nude with the audience in a circle around me. I kissed myself all over, leaving red lipstick prints on every centimetre of my body that I was able to reach. For the parts I couldn’t reach myself, I asked for the help of the audience. Only one at a time and only after negotiating the spot on my body do members of the audience leave a kiss print, each using a purple lipstick colour. In the monologue there are moments when I talk about trying to reach my knee and upper leg, which is very difficult, I say. In the original performance, it was Julischka Stengele’s body that did the performance, which is a different body than mine. Because of this difference, the story runs out of sync with the reality of the body I seem to be speaking of.

I recite this monologue to two groups. After the first session, I receive a response from one student who says it was very easy to draw while he was listening. For him it was similar to listening to an audiobook while working. He also got new input through the story. Another man said he was distracted and his drawing went slower. In the next group, a woman stated she was very much into the story and asked about how it was for the artist to have strangers kissing her, while another woman said that she started to care for my body (see Katarina Ek’s e-mail, page 355).

I brought this particular monologue into the life drawing class in order to bring different “worlds” together, juxtaposing the “objective” and the “subjective” body experience. It also placed the world of the practice of life model drawing next to the theoretical discourse on the representation of the female body in art. Stengele sat in the nude with the audience in a circle around her, looking at her. She said that this set-up was similar to a life model drawing class. Stengele’s body was very prominently on view. In her monologue, she addresses the struggles that one faces when coming from a queer and feminist perspective.17 The emphasis on the nude model in a life drawing class, which I have experienced from both sides as a drawing student and as a model, always directs attention to the body as the object of study. For me, the nudity in this context is often experienced as comfortable. Ironically, when I do modelling I don’t feel nude because it is only my body that is nude. It is functionally nude. Through reciting the monologue while modelling, a separation between my body and the “I” became more present.

“Monologue about a dream that becomes reality in a performance, more like a fiction. … Next listeners: elderly Swedish couple. Very open, but very pointed. Do we have to pay you for it? Who are you? Is there any obligation for us? Do you do that for a living? … Although ieke has already told the couple about her monologue project, they ask after the monologue: ‘Have you had any other dreams?’ So they heard ieke say ‘This is not my story,’ but they didn’t care, it didn’t matter, they still thought it was ieke’s story and pictured her. The woman even says: ‘It doesn’t matter if the artist is a man or a woman.’ So the story is clearly detached from reality. Woman: ‘I like your story better than performance art itself. It’s a nice feeling, it’s nice to look at you while you tell the story.”

—Excerpt from Janneke Schoene’s observations.
This separation of the body and subject was also shared in feedback by the witnesses. It was like a glimpse into deconstructing the body’s subjectivity, which I connect to the ideas of the American historian of feminist and body art Amelia Jones. She addresses several scholars’ earlier claims about body art from the 1970s and ’80s, which held body art to be the only form of art that guarantees the presence of the artist. Jones gives the example of Ira Licht, who states that the information delivered in performance is a direct transformation without any “intermediary” such as paint or the canvas. Other thinkers Jones mentions within this discourse include Rosemary Mayer, who claims that body art is a direct reflection of the artist’s life experiences, and Cindy Nemser, who speaks of bringing the subjective and objective self together as one entity projected to the audience. Chantal Pontbriand insists that body art presents, rather than represents, and Catherine Elwes calls it “direct unmediated access.” Jones herself rejects these earlier idealistic claims about body art and adds that art historian Kathy O’Dell suggests it is specifically the use of bodies as material that highlights the form’s “representational status.”

This notion of the subject in performance makes me wonder whether this theory matters to the students who attended the drawing class. It is a discussion that belongs within performance studies and is thus often picked up by those who study and/or practise performance art. In this particular case study, I recognised the kind of engagement at issue when I, the model, started telling a “personal” story, that is, whether this method helps a student to concentrate better on drawing or instead distracts them because they become too immersed in the story. Perhaps what happened in this case was that the model became more humanised and, because of that, broke the usual distance between the student and their object of study.

Case 6: Train
March 30, 2017
#17 Confrontation
Odun Orimolade

Location
Train from Malmö Triangeln
to Copenhagen Airport,
crossing the Øresund Bridge

The train is a semipublic space, as the bakery is. The difference is that the train moves, the surrounding environment changes, and the travellers have a destination. The train runs across the bridge from Malmö to Copenhagen Airport. I get on the train at Malmö Triangeln and choose a seat next to two women. I offer them a monologue before I sit down. One agrees and the other doesn’t know English and so focuses only on her phone while I recite the story. In this monologue, Odun Orimolade talks about a performance of hers that deals with her phobia of large expanses of water. As the title of the work, Confrontation, indicates, she confronted herself about her phobia by using a theory of confrontation she had read about in a neuroscience publication. She used the theory for a performance in the hopes she could cure herself of her phobia.
Case 5, Live Model Drawing Class, March 29, 2017, #27 Untitled—Julischka Stengele, with ieke Trinks at Arbetarnas Bildningsförbund in Malmö. ieke Trinks

“My experience was only positive with a speaking model. It affected me in a certain way because I thought that a mean person abused you. So I looked at you in that way that you were very vulnerable. That led to me looking at you with love and consideration. So I drew you with that in mind. It felt special that I was part of the performance. It led to a strong concentration, like time stood still. I was a bit surprised when the story wasn’t about you, but it was good not to know it from the start.”

—E-mail from Katarina Ek, drawing student.
For the work, Orimolade went to a beach in Lagos, Nigeria, where she invited her family to witness a performance in which she faced the ocean. She gave her sister instructions to drag her near to the water while her body was tightly bound, making it almost impossible for Orimolade to move. While I tell this story to the travellers on the train (I also address the people on the other side of the aisle), we are crossing the bridge and water appears on both sides through the windows. In the original performance, Orimolade’s sister dragged her all the way into the water instead of right next to it. For Orimolade this was extremely frightening. By the time we reached the next stop, at the airport, I had finished the monologue. The woman I addressed first said she realised that I couldn’t be the person in the story because she didn’t read the fear in my face when we were near the water. Another traveller mentioned other fears one might start to think about when listening to this story, such as fears one can experience here on the train, since there are border controls on this track. Looking back, I wonder whether the retelling of a traumatic event at the site where it occurred would make any difference to this process, and whether such decisions could positively contribute to recovery from trauma.

“Case 7: Art Space—Performing Traces
March 30, 2017
#6  Being Human Being
Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen

Location
Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen

What happens if the memory of a performance is brought back into the actual space where it occurred, and then one hears two versions of the same work? For this case, one speaker memorised the artist’s memory of the performance (me) and the second speaker was the artist herself (Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen), who recollected her performance after my monologue. In the upper gallery space of the Nikolaj Kunsthal, there is an exhibition featuring video works, which are turned off. A large video wall partly blocks the view of the space, which is a former church that makes the voice echo. Very bright construction lights are installed because there are no fixed lights overhead. I decide to have four rows of chairs for audience members. The setting is awkward for me, because I had something else in mind when Cuenca Rasmussen described the performance to me.

The narrative in the monologue is of the artist performing on seven consecutive days, for five hours each. In this performance she focuses on “prints of
the performative act,” which she invites the public to participate in, as well as her family, friends, and colleagues. In the monologue, Cuenca Rasmussen says that she was inspired to do this performance after visiting tribes in Ethiopia and noticing how they use earth mixed with clay for different purposes. She laid down in the gallery for five hours covered in two tonnes of wet clay and visitors were invited to play with the clay as well as light a candle. The performance looked very sacred because of the church environment. The next day, Cuenca Rasmussen made footprints with her brother and sister using clay on white banners. On a subsequent day, she invited her parents and daughter to make face prints and masks out of the clay, and on another day she made clay paintings with a colleague, using only their hands. I remember particularly the part in which she says she felt very cold as she lay in the clay.

In this institutional setting, there is an audience who are well informed about art in general, and some even specifically about performance art. The space has the function of displaying art, and in some cases also exhibits art documentation. I realised that while reciting this monologue in the actual space of the performance, my imagination clashed with my attempts to visualise the performance happening in this space. The performance that I described stayed, in my experience, disconnected from the space. Maybe it had to do with the set-up of the space with the chairs, bright construction lights, and this big wall blocking the view. It somehow made the space feel deactivated. After the first recitation, which is mine, I ask Cuenca Rasmussen to join us. She purposely was not present for my recitation, in order to prevent my performance influencing her memory or leading her to correct my version.

Cuenca Rasmussen sits down on a chair, which is already different than my recitation, because I was standing. Her story is different; she leaves out things and includes other details. She underlines the physical heaviness of the performance more than I had, and I can see that she engages us as listeners and anticipates our reactions. At the beginning, she loses track of time when she speaks in detail about her physical experience. There is an artist’s spontaneity in her presence that makes her comfortable recalling her performance. During her recounting, the space also doesn’t seem to contribute much to my experience of what she describes. An important difference is that Cuenca Rasmussen’s memory is susceptible to changing the story each time she tells it, whereas my version will likely stay more or less the same, since I can refresh my memory with the same unchangeable audio recording. It reminds me of the migration of colonies, where people maintain their language as it was when they first arrived to their new homes, while in their countries of origin the language undergoes changes.

“There is an atmosphere of departure, since the women want to get out of the train soon. The monologue is very intense. It’s about trust and fear, almost like a parable/fable. When the train crosses onto the bridge, and you can see the water, ieke says: ‘And then there was the water, the ocean,’ it’s quite a fitting coincidence, but seems to be staged somehow. One woman says: ‘if it was your story you wouldn’t take this train across the bridge.’ So she believes the narration and therefore believes that it is a lie at the same time.”

—Excerpt from Janneke Schoene’s observations.

Summary of the Seven Case Studies

During my lecture at Nikolaj Kunsthal in Copenhagen on March 30, 2017, I laid out the projects Performance Monologues and One Performance is Many Performances. Janneke Schoene and Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen joined me for a panel discussion, and the public also contributed to the conversation. In the following, I will give a short summary of what I have discovered through the seven cases studies and include a selection of the feedback offered during the panel discussion.

Reciting the monologues in specific locations, such as at the hairdresser, in my home, and on the train, can trigger a co-presence parallel to that of the narrator’s in the story. The intensities that some of the performances described in the monologues carry might have been more physically felt through the specific siting of the monologues. To draw out the consequences further, I wonder if this method of describing the memory of an intense physical performance that interacts with its location can have a therapeutic effect on the listener, who in return starts to experience the space around them differently. This might be compared to talking about a traumatic experience one has undergone, but in the case of the monologue, it is the trauma of someone else.
The specific locations remind me of site-specific theatre. In the third chapter of *The Empty Space*, Peter Brook says that regardless of the space of the theatre being a special place for him, it is always somewhat disconnected from everyday life. The theatre space narrows life down in order to focus on a single aspect of it. In another chapter of his book, Brook talks about his most striking theatre experience, which occurred when he attended a production of *Crime and Punishment* in an attic in Hamburg, Germany. While a storyteller told the story of Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s protagonist, Raskolnikov, a door creaked open and an actor playing Raskolnikov entered. This same door later turned into the door of the moneylender’s apartment, and then became the room of the old woman, Alyona Ivanovna, who is killed by the protagonist. The use of the door illustrates how a space can become activated by the means of a story. It reveals our capacity to use our surroundings to fill in the gaps of a story, regardless of whether the physical context matches the narrative or not.

In the case of the art space, Nikolaj Kunsthall, however, the theatre space seems to have had the opposite effect. In other words, one might say that the space was deactivated as a component of the narrative, even though in the text of the monologue the performance itself is described by Cuenca Rasmussen as a sacred and ritualistic experience. The performance took place in

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Case 7, Art Space, March 30, 2017, #6 Being Human Being—Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen, with Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen at Nikolaj Kunsthall in Copenhagen. Ieke Trinks
church’s interior, but my experience of the monologue seemed to have lost touch with the space of the action, both when I and when Cuenca Rasmussen described it before the same audience. Can we say that the space resonated with Brook’s point that the theatre space is disconnected from everyday life? Everyday life, in this case, would be the actual physical environment in which I concluded the project. In the home situation, where I recited a monologue in my apartment, Schoene searched for meaning between the life within one’s private home and the life of a prostitute selling her most private possession. Here the site of the monologue seemed to emphasise the location in which the recited story took place, but not in any physical respect.

The “I” in my performance functioned as part of the “performative” didactic method that I employed in this project. The “I” functioned in a way that allowed the listener to imagine my body undergoing the performances described in the monologues. In the case of the life drawing class, the body’s visible presence created affection towards the reciter. Of course, the “I” also caused confusion that could be addressed as a Brechtian verfremdungseffekt. Different “realities” seem to claim priority when multiple roles, identities, or subjectivities exist side by side, each one performed through the speech of a single body. It is a moment of shock or confusion when one realises that truth and fiction are difficult to distinguish. The “I” “subjectifies” the knowledge shared, which in a university classroom becomes something “out of place.” The monologue form also poses the danger that the listener becomes closed off from engaging in a dialogue, such as what happened in the university classroom, as I learned from e-mail correspondence with a student who didn’t feel able to question the content of my recitation.

Performance Art’s Displacement

Performance art is usually assumed to be a time-based practice that is tied to a particular time (zeitgeist) and place. Using performance studies researcher Richard Schechner’s concept of “restored behavior,”22 which I will explain further in the next section, I want to look at performance art’s potential for being detached from any particular time and geography. With this unfixedness and possibility for mobility, my aim is to uncover an “essence” in performance that is connected through time by actions undertaken by different people and in different places. This essence is constituted by what has been seen, heard, read, and experienced before. It is taken over, incorporated, embodied, appropriated, used, reused, repeated, and passed on, or it is taken up...
by someone else in a variation of the work. Such an essence is constructed by means of changing constellations, recontextualised and integrated in gestures, movements, and actions. This essence is like an object, a sculpture, but one that is intangible and immaterial. The artist Allan Kaprow considers certain common transactions like shaking hands, eating, and saying goodbye to be readymades, as if these basic social actions available to all, are fixed objects.23 The essence of performance is as an object, social actions available to all, are fixed objects.23 The essence is like constellations, recontextualised and integrated in an essence that isn’t owned by them, but is embodied by them.

The kissing of oneself brings up the notion of self-love. The kissing of oneself also occurs in a type of shamanic ritual that Marina Abramović witnessed in an attempt to cure herself of the mental pain caused by a broken heart. In 2013, she visited the shamans Rudá Iandé and Denise Maia in Curitiba, Brazil. After Iandé expelled Abramović’s pain, Maia taught Abramović how to enjoy her own body. While Abramović mourned the loss of her love, Maia took her own dress off and started to kiss herself wherever she could reach. Abramović says she observed the act with amazement.24

Another parallel to Stengele’s performance, but with obvious differences, is Vito Acconci’s Trademarks (1970). In this work, a series of photographs were taken of Acconci while he twisted his nude body to be able to bite himself deeply on his arms, legs, and shoulders.25 Acconci didn’t perform for a live audience, but to a camera that made it possible for him to control what was captured. For Untitled, Stengele had to move her body around to be able to reach different parts of it, in the process revealing every angle of her body to the viewer. She was able to look her audience members in the eye, whereas Acconci had control only over a gaze he could not see. Stengele “printed” onto the body, while Acconci made deep indentations and caused pain to his body. These indentations were then covered with ink, so he could print the bite marks onto various surfaces.26

The above details connect to Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen’s work, in which she focused on what she calls the “prints of the performative act.” In her Being Human Being, described in the monologue at Nikolaj Kunsthal, she made prints with clay from her own body and the bodies of others. These are like traces, traces of humanity. I think that for her, the traces made in the performance were an attempt to trace the origins of human beings. The origins of humanity are traced back by digging in the earth. In her monologue, Cuenca Rasmussen mentions Lucy, who is the earliest human ancestor ever discovered by archaeologists.27 The earth is also important in the work of Ana Mendieta’s Untitled (Silueta Series), made between 1973 and 1978. The work consists of a series of photographs that show silhouettes of her figure in various landscapes across the United States and Mexico. Mendieta used gunpowder and firecrackers to burn signs of herself into sand and soil and mud. Together with many other artists, Stengele, Acconci, Cuenca Rasmussen, and Mendieta have all contributed to an essence that isn’t owned by them, but is embodied by them.

—Ilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen, excerpt from the March 30, 2017, panel discussion.

“I found it interesting to hear the difference between the very subjective telling of the performance by Lilibeth and then the more objective—but actually also still subjective—telling of yours. Even though you tell it in the first person. If you are an art person and interested in art, I think you will always have this distance between you and the original performance. Maybe it was different for the people in the bakery who never experienced a performance, but for people who often go to performances, it becomes a different mindset. I think it was good to hear both [tellings] tonight, because there was a big difference just in the appearance and in our reception of your stories.”

—Helene Nyborg Bay, audience member at the March 30, 2017, panel discussion.

“People say you cannot copy a performance, you cannot document it because then it is not a performance, a performance is in the here and now. Which is true, and there are many theories about it, but performance still exists even though it’s just documentation or retold by the artist five times and every time it is different. It is still a piece that has happened.”

—Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen, excerpt from the March 30, 2017, panel discussion.
Restored Behaviour

This essence of a work of performance art is much like Schechner’s conception of “restored behaviour.” He makes a distinction between a “natural event,” which is unchangeable, and restored behaviour, which is “second nature” but subject to revision. As Schechner conceives it, any behaviour can be stored, transmitted, manipulated, and transformed, and so a performance is actually never performed for the first time. Restored behaviour is, then, rehearsed behaviour that can be compared to a musical score that everyone who is participating agrees to follow but that requires both individual and collective human choices. For Schechner, restored behaviour is a “strip of behaviour,” because it can be rearranged or reconstructed, and as such have a life of its own. The original might be lost or ignored, but these strips are things that can be recovered, “material” available for later action.28

“When you take the position of the ‘i’ the first person singular … it allowed me to use all the details of your persona to build the image of the story, which I think gives me more details than a documented photograph. And then I found that you also showed to us the act of remembering and remembering a story rather than a real memory. … But when I looked to you [ieke], it looked like you were really searching in your head for the words that you had heard, and this searching for words is different when you [Lilibeth] were searching for your own experience because you have more details, and I found this embodied remembrance quite touching and unique.

—Axel Berger, audience member at the March 30, 2017, panel discussion.
To explain how restored behaviour can be understood, Schechner gives the example of a ritualistic dance of the Shakers that has been turned into an art dance. The Shakers were a religious community who migrated from England to America in 1774. The Shakers’ ritual was traditionally performed for their own community and, according to dance researcher Suzanne Youngermann, became more disciplined when floor plans and choreography were introduced. The ritual became a fixed dance and of interest to tourists, who were invited to attend.

American choreographer Doris Humphrey\textsuperscript{29} choreographed a piece in 1931 called \textit{The Shakers} in a period when the Shakers no longer performed their ritual dance. She worked from pictures and research materials without ever having attended the dance. While the Shaker community was decreasing—by 1983 there were only six very aged members left who had stopped practising the dance long ago\textsuperscript{30}—Humphrey’s piece actualised some elements of their culture. According to dance scholar Dorothy Rubin, Humphrey’s art dance is a traditional dance that has been put together from historical documents. The information accessed was likely to have been incomplete, and the recreation of the dance is best described as “what this dance might have been.” In Rubin’s opinion, in such a case we should speak of “recreating” rather than “reconstructing” or “restoring.”

Schechner raises the question of whether or not performances that are based on previous ones and in the cultures where they are orally transmitted aren’t just like Humphrey’s reconstruction based on documentation. In the case of the oral tradition, the document would be equal to the reciters’ knowledge carried in their bodies. The performances at this point don’t depend on data or documents, but rather on people who carried the performance knowledge, including whatever we want to call the “original” as well as their own added idiosyncrasies of interpretation. And so it is really the totality of all previous performances together, passed on through the oral tradition, that could be called the “original.”\textsuperscript{31}

\begin{center}
\textbf{Storytelling: An Oral History, a Didactic Method}
\end{center}

“Performance knowledge belongs to oral traditions.” —Richard Schechner\textsuperscript{22}

The recitation of the monologues resembles the act of storytelling. In this section, I want to bring together two notions—the story in visual art and storytelling as an ancient Greek tradition—to understand how the monologues in the case studies of this project can be understood. Let me begin by mentioning Magnus Bärtås, who employs the term “work story” in his PhD dissertation, “You Told Me.”\textsuperscript{33} The “work story” is constructed when the artwork is completed and the artist can identify the series of sequences involved in its creation. The sequences Bärtås talks about contain three layers that together form the work story. The first layer is the motif, the second is the making of the work, and the last is the meta-layer, the account of the work’s making. This third layer is what the artist or others reconstruct through writing but also through the performance of talking.

The work story also contains considerations of the situation in which the act of creation took place. It is a construction in retrospect and has elements of self-interpretation and self-reflection. The mechanism of the work story is particularly interesting in the context of performance art, since a work of performance very much depends on this third meta-layer. A \textit{Performance Monologue}, for example, seems closely related to the third layer of Bärtås work story, because there is a memory of the live work that is shared with me by the artist that often includes the elements mentioned by Bärtås.

Bärtås says that the art world is a place for telling stories; it’s a talkative world where the work story is told and retold by the artist, but also by others. Through time, new elements are added and others dropped. The story is in constant transformation, and artist’s biographical elements are added to the story of a work they have made. Bärtås says that for many artworks he knows about, he lacks first-hand experience. That is, he knows about these works through images and printed text and even, in some cases, only through spoken conversations or lectures. Without ever having seen the works, they are in his mind, he has images of them, and sometimes those images are idealised or misunderstood.\textsuperscript{34}

This misunderstanding, or maybe rather differently interpreting a story that one is listening to, is what I understand to be troubling for Plato, who criticises both poets and rhetoricians for their deceptive influences. In an essay by rhetoric professor Ekaterina V. Haskins in which she describes this issue,\textsuperscript{35} she discusses a study by British classicist Eric A. Havelock on the oral preservation of the “Homeric encyclopedia.” Haskins contends that Plato goes against the Homeric heritage of reciters, that is, poets who imitate characters that move the audience through identification with various imitated subjects. Havelock calls this audience’s emotional identification “the submission to the spell” of a performance.\textsuperscript{36} For Plato, reciters (poets) impersonate people in different emotional states far too well when the listener creates sympathy for the character in the story. This kind of mimetic situation is disturbing for Plato because, for one, the poet/reciter lacks detailed knowledge of the subject in their story. Another reason Haskin identifies as even more troubling for Plato is that here is found an identification with the protagonist of the story. What happens here cannot be measured.
or controlled, and for this reason it doesn’t fit into the Platonic rational thinking pattern. Haskins writes that, according to Plato, the rhapsodic effect on the audience creates a hysteric condition and makes the identification with the subject irrational and thus useless as a didactic purpose.\textsuperscript{37} Are we dealing with the exchange of subjective oral material in a poet’s recitation? Such an idea would be dismissed in the Platonic world, where poetic education is condemned since it would be too difficult to trace what actually is transmitted through this mimetic didactic method. It is hard to grasp what meaning the listener creates out of what is heard.

For Havelock, emotional distance from a speaker that is created by means of a written record makes it possible to consider only in one’s reflective capacity.\textsuperscript{38} Such reflection seems not to be possible in the moment of a theatrical performance, because the poet and audience fuse with this person who is represented. To have a successful reflection, the written seems here to be preferred above the spoken. The distancing necessary for reflection on any kind of narrative event likewise requires the reception of information through reading. For the reading itself, in my opinion, allows for the necessary time to reflect.

Amelia Jones’s essay “Presence’ in Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation,” in which she makes a case for writing on performance art through documentation, takes an interesting position on the need to have distance from the actual event to be able to reflect upon it.\textsuperscript{39} Jones writes that the evaluation of performance takes place in retrospect, and this must be the case if we are to be able to fully comprehend the work. She states, “As I know from my own experience of ‘the real’ in general and, in particular, live performances in recent years, these often become more meaningful when reappraised in later years; it is hard to identify the patterns of history while one is embedded in them.”\textsuperscript{40}

When we are part of an event, we are participating in its construction, and in that moment we cannot necessarily designate meaning to it. It’s when we recognise the work to be finished that we are able to make sense of it. This need of distance to reflect is understandable, but to immerse oneself in an event in which one sees a face, has eye contact, and listens to a voice is just as important. It seems to me that what happens between bodies that are present in a live exchange of knowledge cannot be found when one encounters a written record or some other media such as photography or video. The latter doesn’t allow for the same capacity of understanding as the interaction between a listener who attends to a speaker who is in search of the right words.

Performance Art Documentation

There are two images from her performance Interior Scroll (1975) that Carolee Schneemann projected during a talk about her work. In the course of her remarks, she said that these are all that remain of the work and that they are what is constantly seen.\textsuperscript{41}

There are many such performances that I have never seen in real life but have gotten to know about through books, photographs, videos, and hearsay that is constantly being repeated or reproduced. In my own practice, I always have to deal with documentation, whether I have it carefully produced by making sure that a photographer or videographer has been arranged to shoot it or whether I choose not to have any, simply because recording changes the experience of the performance, for example by introducing a clicking sound. What do we document and what can we read from this documentation of the work? How does documentation affect the real-time event? And how can we use this documentation, since that’s what is able to be shared? The following is a brief overview of what several scholars have written on performance regarding the relationship between a work and its documentation.

Performance and feminist scholar Peggy Phelan has written on the ontology of works of performance art. Phelan claims that performance art is characterised by its disappearance, and when it is represented in a photograph or another medium, the work is no longer present. Performance’s only existence is during the moment of its disappearance, and all that is reproduced afterwards is something else. Performance avoids the status of an art object altogether, and in that way evades any risk of becoming a commodity of the art market. Performance in this way can be seen as a form of activism, a political gesture against consumerist society. There is documentation that helps us to bring past events to life, but in some cases performance documentation becomes an art piece in its own right and is thus like any other artwork that can be circulated and put on display. In such cases, the record is to be distinguished from the work itself. Phelan calls all that comes after a work something “other,” but it is the potential of this other that I’m interested in.\textsuperscript{42}

Amelia Jones refers to the photograph of a work of performance art (or of body art) as a “supplement” to the performance.\textsuperscript{43} She talks about experiencing performance art through its documentation, and for her the live event has no priority over documentation. Witnessing the work live is not necessary in order to write well about performance, or to understand it and give it meaning. The performance cannot exist without the document and vice versa. The body art\textsuperscript{44} event needs the photograph to confirm that it happened; the photograph needs the body art event as something to point at, as what the image is connected to or what it is an
image of. Jones was just a child when the performances she writes about took place. One needs to study the work, she argues, to find meaning in it, just as with any other art form. An audience member who experiences a live performance, according to Jones, is not necessarily in a better position to understand it, and this would be true of the artist as well. A performance requires time to be given meaning.45

In performance researcher Philip Auslander’s discussion on the photographic document of performance, I identify two concerns. One is that of the “authenticity” of the photographic document, and the second asks whether the document needs a performance at all in order to have it take place. Auslander makes a distinction between two categories, the documentary and the theatrical. The first is understood to be traditional, a record of evidence. The connection between the performance and the document is believed to be ontologically separate, where there is first the performance and then the document. The second category, the theatrical, can be understood as an event that didn’t take place in the same sense or as an event staged solely for the camera and not intended for a live audience. This applies to, for example, Cindy Sherman’s staged portraits of her impersonations of different female roles.46 There are also works that are harder to classify, according to Auslander. Yves Klein’s montaged photograph Leap into the Void (1960), for which two photographs were merged together to create the illusion of Klein in free-fall, is here mentioned. Another work that Auslander identifies as complicating the distinction between documentary and theatrical is Vito Acconci’s Photo-Piece from 1969. Acconci is not in the photographs he shot, but he is the one who took them. He walked down a street trying not to blink his eyes, and when he did blink, he shot a photo in a random direction. It is only through the “documentation,” the photographs with the text, that we know this performance exists at all.47 Auslander concludes by suggesting that it is rather the beholder’s experience of the “documentation” that counts, and it does not really matter whether the performance really took place. For Auslander, it may be that the document is what can be understood as the work and in which one can imagine the artistic intentions.48

Auslander stresses here an important dimension that also motivates me to think about the possibilities of performance art documentation as being detached from the original event. Documents “come alive” as soon as someone interacts with them, and maybe this comes close to the “essence” that I argued for earlier. This exchange between a document and an observer is a performative one. Admittedly, Phelan suggests that there is a performative way of writing about the underdocumentable event, and that such writing can alter the event itself: “the labor to write about performance (and thus to ‘preserve’ it) is also the labor that fundamentally alters the event.”49 She includes this idea alongside her ontological argument for performance as fleeting, and the challenge here is to remake the writing into something that is not writing to preserve it but writing as a means of disappearance. I would suggest writing as a means of searching for a work’s essence.

An Archive and Re-enactments

To continue thinking about “restored behaviour” and displacement in performance, I’d like to explore how this works in the context of the archive and re-enactments. In the next sections, I will talk about re-enactment in performance art, and then I will discuss two fairly recent books on innovations in this area. The first book lays out a project with a performance art archive and the second discusses re-enactments of historical events.

Flashbacks

In the dark basement of a theatre in Lausanne, Switzerland, in 2009, Tània Bruguera gives a talk about re-enactment.50 Now and then, a spotlight briefly lights the scene. We see short snippets of the space. One shows a woman and a man standing in the nude in a doorway facing each other. Bruguera speaks in the dark and says that doing re-enactments is a way to recover elements of a performance that cannot be articulated through traditional means of documentation such as video and photography. Re-enactment, she says, is not a matter of reproduction but a way of rethinking which elements can still come alive after many years. Then the spotlight reveals another image: a man opening the eye of a woman. It’s like a scene from Luis Buñuel’s film Un Chien Andalou (1929). Performance is an expression of the relationship between art and experience, and not between art and images, and that is what, according to Bruguera, makes re-enactment a critical matter when it’s based on one image that is taken out of context. Or, said differently, when the image has lost its connection with the real event. The next spotlight moment shows a person being dragged across the floor. The person is dressed, but nevertheless I am reminded of Yves Klein’s human female paintbrushes, the Anthropométries performed in 1960. Bruguera mentions re-enactments that artists do with the works of others and says that in this way, the artists make the work their own. Some artists also update their own work by means of re-enactment. Faith Wilding, for example, updated her Waiting of 1972, a work in which she had positioned herself as a waiting passive woman reading a monologue on waiting. In a 2009 exhibition, Wilding took the position of a waiting woman again, but in this case the waiting was an act of resistance against production, consumerism, violence, and acceleration and represented a moment that gave space for becoming.51 Bruguera ends her talk with the question of whether re-enactment is the death of performance. Whereas initially performance was
something that was going to be lost, as outlined by Phelan, re-enactment tries to turn a performance into something eternal.

Re.Act.Feminism, a Moving Archive
Just as re-enactment raises new questions about performance, novel uses of the archive put new pressure on pre-existing theories. The making of an archive that moves, for example, is unusual for archives in general, but such an archive exists: that of the project Re.Act. Feminism, which moved between 2011 and 2013 to different art institutions in Europe, where each time new performance art documents were added to it. The project includes a workstation with video, film, and photographic documents that are oriented towards feminist, gender, and queer performance art. As a visitor, you can request videos from a list and watch them at one of the viewing stations. Along with the workstations, the archive includes workshops and live performances that have included re-enactments.52

A book was recently published on the archive project featuring essays that span several subjects, including, to name just a few, feminist archives, Latin American performance art, gender-oriented performance practices, performance and actions in the GDR, the personal and the private in relation to the public, and strategies of appropriation. The Re.Act.Feminist archive was started in response to the growing interest in performance art and its history, the many exhibitions on this art form, and the dozens of re-enactments done in the last decade. For the initiators, this archive provides an approach to the history of work form the 1960s and '70s, when performances were being developed in the midst of turbulent change and often in response to social crises. But at the same time, the organisers want to point out the other historical narratives that are less fixed. According to Bettina Knaup and Ellen Stammer, the editors of a book on the Re.Act.Feminist archive, feminist, gender-based, and queer artistic positions have long played an important role in the development of performance. This helps to clarify the particular choice of material collected in the archive; that is, the editors' objective is to break with the primarily Western canon of performance art by including the work of less established and less well-known artists.

In their introduction, Knaup and Stammer come up with an interesting point regarding the fixedness of time and space. They discuss periodisation, which is something that can be disputed. The fixedness of any historical timeline, with its particular events and works, causes works to be excluded that don't contribute to this specific narrative and so remain unnoticed or become regarded as irrelevant. The same issue that Knaup and Stammer point out can be applied to feminist art history, which so easily adopts a Western genealogy. These two motivations—avoiding the fixedness of a specific timeline and opening up the canon to various alternatives—constitute what I believe to be the strongest concept behind this project. The project is developed in terms of a thematic cartography instead of any fixed chronology, geography, or history. In this manner, the Re.Act.Feminist archive manages to highlight connections that transcend the borders of time and space.53

History Will Repeat Itself, Artworks
The second book I'd like to discuss brings together works from the 2007 exhibition History Will Repeat Itself at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in Berlin. It presents re-enactments that focus on historical events, which are relived by means of the works of art, and examines different strategies of re-enacting historical events through artworks. The editors, Inke Arns and Gabriele Horn, write that the world is increasingly experienced indirectly through mediated images of historical events. History has always been communicated through popular media, but the main difference today is that there are now so many continuously available images, and each image seems to become its own representation. This has an effect on our feelings of uncertainty about whether an image is authentic or not.54

As a point of comparison, I want to bring to mind an example from body art that is mentioned by Amelia Jones. It concerns a mythical tale regarding Rudolf Schwarzkogler's mutilation of his penis, a myth that was made possible through the circulation of documents showing a male torso with a bandaged penis. However, as art historian Kristine Stiles has shown, the man pictured is not Schwarzkogler, but someone who posed for him.55 This example of a photographic document from the archive of body art demonstrates how an image can create a misleading account of an event that didn’t happen the way it has been represented to have.

Arns writes that artistic re-enactments make it possible to experience a historical event on a more personal level and take away the distance that a photographic image creates. At the same time, a re-enactment generates distance because of the privileged overview that is possible, which an audience member of an original event can never have. Moreover, an observer of a re-enactment can remain disinterested, as there aren’t any expectations to act upon what is being witnessed, which an audience member would certainly have felt during the original event. Of course, different levels of audience participation during re-enactments can nevertheless be distinguished; the passive observer would seem to experience greater distance than the active witness or participant.

Arns lays out six strategies of re-enactment, of which I will describe two. “Critical re-enactment” has a goal of instructing and informing. The Battle of Orgreave, which took place in South Yorkshire in 1984, was a
violent confrontation between police and picketing miners. The reconstruction by Jeremy Deller in 2001 was based on the personal memories of actual witnesses to the original event, and differed significantly to the reports published through mass media of the time. Here the re-enactment revealed how media stories start to distance themselves from witnesses’ personal accounts. The second strategy presented by Arns in *History Will Repeat Itself* is “propagandistic re-enactment,” which she illustrates with the example of *The Second Storming of the Winter Palace*. This storming of the palace, which took place in 1920 and was staged by Nikolai Evreinov, was, according to Arns, not a repetition of the first one, which happened in Petrograd during the October Revolution of 1917, but an interpretation that was used to promote the first one in order to bolster a revolutionary movement. Arns adds that it was ultimately the image of Sergei Eisenstein’s *October* (1927) that has become the image of the 1917 Russian Revolution, an image that is not of the real revolution, but one that has replaced the original. This comes back to the notion that history is more and more referred to through media images.56

**Conclusion**

The title *One Performance is Many Performances* stands in for the idea that performances aren’t sealed-off works that exist separately from documentation and appreciation, which changes as time goes on. They often exist physically for only a brief period of time, but can then survive in a dispersed form within different minds. For Peggy Phelan, performance is only in the present, and all that comes after is something other. This other, in particular, has held my interest. It can include the record of a performance, which for Amelia Jones is just as important as the event. For Philip Auslander, it may not even matter whether a performance took place in an actual space, as the document itself can, so to speak, still be witnessed as an experience of a live event. Tania Bruguera has even asked whether re-enactments are the death of performance.

The monologues resemble what Magnus Bärtås calls the “work story” of a work of art. Like a monologue, such a work story is in continuous transformation. The performative mode of storytelling used in the monologues also resembles an ancient Greek tradition of storytelling in which a mimetic and didactic method is adopted by a poet. However, knowledge transmitted through the poet’s imitation of a subject or character cannot be measured, and for this reason, such performance was dismissed outright by Plato. In addition, Eric A. Havelock argues that only a written document can create the emotional distance necessary to exercise a reader’s capacity for reflection.

For Richard Schechner, it is through the oral tradition that performances are passed on. In Schechner’s concept of “restored behaviour” and Allan Kaprow’s reference to an immaterial readymade, I recognize the existence of an “essence” in performance art that is not fixed to any time or location. The essence of a work is also separated from any performer’s body and intention. I elaborated on this idea by means of the works of Julischka Stengele, Vito Acconci, Lilibeth Cuenca Rasmussen, and Ana Mendieta. A performance isn’t owned by anyone, and everyone can use it because it consists of collective knowledge about behaviour that is immaterial. This way of thinking about performance is different from Phelan’s ontological claim, wherein performance art is an act of disappearance that cannot be saved. Thinking of performance instead in terms of an essence that continues over time and that is altered by contributions, made at different times, and in different places, by different bodies, has therefore proved to be useful in knowing there is always something left, a rich material that informs us about the past and at the same time about our present.

I refer here to Peggy Phelan’s writing in “The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction,” chap. 7 in Unmarked: The Politics of Performance (London: Routledge, 1993), 148. It’s the element of consumption that can be pointed to in performance, because there is nothing left over without a copy: it disappears into memory, it saves nothing, it only spends. Performance art is vulnerable to changes of valuelessness and emptiness. This oppositional edge is also its strong point.

Phelan, “The Ontology of Performance,” 146.

Angelika Richter writes in her essay “Self Directing; Women Artists from the GDR and the Expansion of Their Art in Performance and Actions” that the unofficial art scene of the GDR in the 1970s until the late 1980s included many illegal happenings and actions that existed alongside the official art doctrine of figurative realism, which was aligned with the regime of social realism ruling at the time. Published in Re.Act.Feminism: A Performing Archive, ed. Bettina Knapp and Ellen Stammer (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg; London: Live Art Development Agency, 2014), 49–56.

The archive course was conducted by Maj Hasager and Mats Leiderstam at Malmö Art Academy.

In the recitations I always use the first-person pronoun “I,” and end by giving the name of the artist and the title of the performance.

Janneke Schoene has a degree in comparative art from the University of Münster in Germany and wrote her PhD thesis on Joseph Beuys’s auto-fiction in art. She is the editor of the anthology The exhibition of the immaterial (forthcoming in 2017) and the conference of the same title, which took place in 2016.

The numeral (#31) in front of work’s title indicates which Performance Monologue it is, in consecutive order.

The Meaning of Life is number 31 in the series.

In Brecht’s verfremdungseffekt, an actor plays different roles at the same time. See Richard Schechner, “Restoration by Behavior,” chap. 2 in Between Theatre and Anthropology (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1985), 36.

The artist duo Diaz-Lewis is made up of Alejandro Figueredo Diaz-Perera and Cara Megan Lewis.

Heidrun Führer is the same person who received the haircut at the hair salon. In an earlier conversation with her, I expressed my wish to recite the monologues during a theory course on art history and performance. Führer likewise wanted to experiment by bringing in an artist who would share information about performance art.

I have reservations around whether we are dealing with performance art when I recite the artists’ memories of their performances, but in the situation of the classroom, it is particularly the sudden intervention that can be considered as a performative act.

Gert Biesta, a professor of education and Director of Research in the Department of Education at Brunel University in London, gave a lecture at the Malmö Art Academy on September 1, 2016, as part of the “Pedagogy Intensive” course.

This is an interpretation from my notes made during Biesta’s lecture.

The questions Anet van de Elzen asks in her monologue are raised because of doing a performance in the Red Light District, where she found herself confronted with a different kind of audience than is usually at her performances.

Anna Odell was a student at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm when she made what would become an infamous performance as her examination work in 2009. She simulated a mental breakdown on a bridge in Stockholm and was taken to the emergency psychiatric unit at Saint Göran’s Hospital, where they sedated her. The next day, Odell told staff that she had simulated the event and that it was part of an art project. Shortly afterwards, a staff member called the media and from there the story took on a life of its own. The full story I will not include here. For more, see Magnus Bärtås, “You Told Me: Work Stories and Video Essays” (PhD diss., Välands School of Fine Art, Gothenburg, 2010), http://hdl.handle.net/2077/22325.

“This performance was a very nice experience from a queer feminist perspective, negotiating consent and the struggle of self-love and how hard it is at times.”

Janneke Schoene and Cristina Gómez Barrio expressed this during the panel discussion at Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen, on March 30, 2017, held as part of my project. Note that both are versed in performance art theory.

Amelia Jones, Body Art: Performing the Subject (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 33.

Peter Brook The Empty Space (New York: Touchstone, 1968), 97, 120.

Here I’m taking the liberty of coining the word “subjectify,” vis-à-vis “objectify.”

Schechner explains his term “restored behaviour” from an anthropological viewpoint in his book Between Theatre and Anthropology.

Allan Kaprow, Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 188.


Kathy O’Dell, Contract with the Skin: Masochism, Performance Art and the 1970s (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1998), 17.
Vito Acconci’s Trademarks (1970) was published as a two-page layout in the fall 1972 issue of the magazine Avalanche.

Cuenca Rasmussen says in her monologue: “trying to go back to the origin of the human being. One of the most famous ancestors is actually from Ethiopia, she was the first walking woman, ... and she was called Lucy, and she was found in the late sixties in Ethiopia.”

Schechner, Between Theater and Anthropology, 35–37.

Humphrey is one of the pioneers of American modern dance.

The Shakers’ numbers dwindled because they do not marry.

Schechner, Between Theater and Anthropology, 45–49.

Schechner, Between Theater and Anthropology, 23.

Bártás, “About Methodology,” chap. 3 in “You Told Me.”

Bártás, About Methodology, 45–50.


The assumption would be that one had to be there to get the story right. According to Jones, neither watching a performance in the flesh nor experiencing it through viewing its documentation has a privileged relationship to the historical truth of the performance.


Carolee Schneemann, Remains to Be Seen, video documentation, 18:00, Performance Saga, DVD, Liveartwork Editions, 2008–09. This DVD set includes documentation from festivals in Bern, Lausanne, and Basel.


Phelan says that the documenting camera supplements the “now.”

Jones prefers to use the term “body art” over “performance art.”

Amelia Jones, “’Presence’ in Absentia.”

In the second category, “theatrical,” it is debatable whether these works can be called a performance, since it isn’t live art, and in some cases never took place in a “real” space.

There are rumours that Acconci never did the performance.


Tania Bruguera, Passing the Body, performance, Saga Festival, Lausanne, 2009, 20:00 (video edit 9:17), Performance Saga, DVD.


Author’s note: I would like to thank Bernard Roddy for proofreading this thesis.
Bachelor of Fine Arts

Year 3

Sergio Alvear
Andreas Amble
Axel Berger
Carl-Oskar Jonsson
Cecilia Kanthi Jonsson
Gabriel Karlsson
Stephan Møller
Carolina Sandvik
Ernst Skoog
Øystein Sølberg
Carl Østberg
Elisabeth Östin
Untitled, 2016. Bronze. Sergio Alvear
Then.

I was eight years old, and I was entering the Råsunda football stadium for the first time. I remember going through the turnstile and heading for the large entrance to the north stands, and how I was suddenly surrounded by the bustle of the crowd, the electric lights, the signs, the fences, and the worn old concrete. With the wide-eyed astonishment of an eight-year-old, I took in the novel impressions that were all around me. This wasn't just a place; it was a whole new world. What I saw before me then would end up staying with me. It was a powerful experience, and afterwards, I became curious to find out what had made this particular place so important to me from the very first time I saw it. Perhaps it had something to do with the smell there, or the way the light made me feel. I began to make drawings in an attempt to explain my experience to myself. I wanted to capture some of the magic I had experienced there and relive it over and over.

Drawing was great for my well-being, and its effect on me was almost magical. I began to take an interest in different kinds of arenas, and I was constantly drawing new versions of these places, with different compositions, colours, and structures. The drawings were based on my own imagination, impressions, and sensitivities, and while I was drawing, everything else faded, and I was transported to another world. At the same time, a longing to continue transforming emotional experiences into colour and shape was awakened in me. I wanted to pause in front of what I had experienced, to listen to its echo. Then and there, I think I acquired an eye for the beautiful, and a desire to make something of it.

What the eye saw.

I had a similar feeling another time, when I visited Moderna Museet in Stockholm. This was the first time I saw Dick Bengtsson's painting *Interiör från Kumlafängelset* (1971). I didn't arrive at it as the result of some intentional seeking, it was just a feeling that came over me at that moment in the museum. I wondered...
why this painting looks the way it
does, and what it is about it that had
me so curious about it in particular.
The surface of the painting has an
old, glossy sheen, and I stood there,
transfixed by it, longer than I ever
had in front of any other painting.

The image I saw before me was of
a couple of rows of chairs in front of
a stage. The interior is rustic and drab,
but this is broken up by a colourful
drapery. The imagery depicted by
the artist seemed familiar, as though
I was recognising this place and this
feeling from somewhere. It looked
worn, and old, and there was a certain
feeling from somewhere. It looked
I was recognising this place and this
image I saw before me was of
A few years later, when I was in
preparatory art school, I remembered
my encounter with Bengtsson's paint-
ing and wanted to make something
based on that. I wanted to reproduce
the surface and structure that I had
found so captivating, and so I began
to study his paintings. By seeking
out all the essential information they
contained, I was hoping to be able
to approximate that perfect surface.

After a few failed attempts, I realised
there was more to it than applying
a coat of varnish. Despite this, I never
felt that my attempts were a waste
of time; through them, I found the
courage to use my imagination more
and to approach that feeling I found
in Bengtsson's painting within my
own. Today, I don't feel as strongly
about Bengtsson's painting, but
I'm grateful that my encounter with
Interiör från Kumlafängelset led me to
seek a deeper understanding of the
artistic process and of painting.

Inside the studio, everything suddenly
seems significant: objects, my body,
what I'm wearing. This is an initiation
pattern that is repeated every time
I'm about to get started on a painting.

I seek a language to work from.
I consider how I will apply the paint,
how the surface communicates, and
how it flows through space. The
space and the atmosphere determine
the structure, colour, transparency,
and intensity that the painting will
have. An artist who speaks insight-
fully about painting and describes
how it communicates is Torsten
Andersson: "Painting is a language.
The painter assigns herself a role, and
forms the language around it. In the
same way that a theatre director
assigns an actor a role, and the actor
then shapes her language around it."

This initiation movement goes
back and forth through the space, in
figure eights or circles. I place things
around me, and put things away. In
the process before actually painting,
I might be working with an actualised
memory—it could be a place, or some
experience I've had. I reflect on how
to best depict my memory and my
experience. When I do begin to paint,
other issues arise, such as how I react
to the paint, the structure, and the
composition.

Seeing something and then bringing
that memory into the studio and
transforming it into a painting seems
almost like a spiritual act—from see-
ing, experiencing, and thinking to the
movements of the hand. I'm interested
in constructing a painting with many
thin layers of paint, which give the
painting an atmospheric spatiality.
This is a kind of infusion of paint into
the canvas, which allows me to create
and control the illusion of something
being hidden. An artist who some-
times works on her paintings in a
similar way is Cecilia Edefalk. In a
conversation with Bernhard Fibiicher,
she said about her painting process:

The physical contact in my works
is not limited to the physical aspect
as it reveals itself in the subjects;
it also includes the fact that I touch
the canvas when I paint, as well
as my relationship to surfaces in
general. I paint in many thin layers.
This means that covering the can-
vas with paint takes some time.

I adapt my way of painting to the
subject. I want to retain a certain
vulnerability; it provides both
integrity and openness, and guides
the viewer into the painting.

At Edefalk's exhibition Maskros/
Dandelion at Stockholm's Waldemars-
udde in 2016–17, I became fascinated
with the painting Venus Birch (2011).
The many thin layers of paint make
it shimmer beautifully, and its
construction is delicate, with distinct
brushstrokes sketching out the sub-
ject, direction, and structure of the
painting. It possesses an unexpected
mystique, and upon first glance it
was the fragile colours and the layers
that attracted my interest, but then
the Venus character took over my
attention, transporting me to another
place and time.

I experience the same sense of
wonder when I see Venus Birch as
I did in front of Bengtsson's Interiör
från Kumlafängelset. I think of how
I myself go about capturing the
viewer's attention and causing them
to experience emotion through
my paintings. I want to try to give
the viewer the experience of being
transported to another place, or
the experience of actually tasting
or smelling something.

I've often failed to achieve what
I set out to do, and destroyed my
paintings in various ways out of sheer
disappointment. At the same time,
is the part of painting that I like:
I haven't mastered it completely,
and I will always have more to learn.
I often don't know how to begin
a painting, but I always try to weave
in aspects both of the past and of
something occurring in the present,
which the viewer sees simultaneously
in the painting.
Past and present.

I make my way to the Bagdad Café at Medelhavsmuseet (the Museum of Mediterranean and Near Eastern Antiquities) in Stockholm. In a room full of ancient Greek and Italian ceramics and art objects, I sit at a table to write the last part of this text. A hesitant silence fills the beautiful room as I regard the ancient artefacts, which date back to long before the birth of Christ.

They depict animals and human beings and bear clear impressions of the artist’s hand and expression. Their colours are black, brown, and beige. Their subjects originated in the world of myth, and perhaps also in the deepest visions of an ancient human being. I walk through the various rooms of the museum, taking in the Egyptian and classical collections, fascinated by the idea that human beings have always tried to convert their life experiences and inner visions in one way or another.

My art is an extension of myself and of what interests me. Painting has become my way to reflect my own inner images and give my subconscious a voice. You could describe this as an intuitive experience. When I sense that I want to stick with something that seems significant and interesting to depict, it’s important for me to believe in it, and then make something of it. I don’t want to lose faith in that feeling.

I return to Råsunda Stadium, the site of that childhood memory that had such a strong effect on me, to the experience of entering it the same way as I did back then. To the turnstile, the north entrance, the electric lights, the signs, and the fences. With adult eyes this time, but the experience is the same. Because when I close my eyes and think back to that place, I see and experience the same thing over and over. What the eye sees is a place of hope, a longing. That place is inspiration, an emotion that will never run dry. Everybody has a place like this, and while its appearance and meaning may vary, it is always inspiring.

2 Torsten Andersson, Torsten Andersson (Stockholm: Torstens Anderssons stiftelse, 2008), 34. Translation by myself and Jan Salomonsson.
4 Cecilia Edefalk, interview by Bernhard Fibicher, in Cecilia Edefalk. (Bern: Kunsthalle Bern; Stockholm: Moderna Museet), 33.
6 Råsunda Stadium was demolished in 2013.
Andreas Amble

Mud maladies
From the pool we rose
smell the blossom,
ripe with

grown from mud, golems ourselves
who are we to judge)

A cage out of time. Just on the outside of my bounds, no matter how hard I try to escape I cannot reach, there is my happiness.

In the early fall of 2016, we ended up speaking about Kurt Schwitters, about his lifelong Merzbau project. I hadn't given Merzbau, or Schwitters himself, much consideration in recent years, despite it occasionally visiting the back of my head while discussing or working on a project that in a wider sense dealt with structures, spatial augmentation, architecture, and interiors. This time, however, I got this eerie feeling. I could not locate it, pinpoint it, or shake it off.

A week later, I remembered walking into Merzbau, convinced I at some point had entered one of these structures, as if a strong memory had risen up from oblivion. A distinct memory of exploration and a search through this interior structure, finding the corners, the materials meeting, the mirrors, contours, lines, and small odd spaces. This mesmerising disorienting space and its intriguing material and illusionistic qualities observed by a naive young mind.

I remember clearly this triangular piece of mirror embossed on the right-hand side in this shelf or ridge, which was not a shelf along the stairs leading to nowhere but to the point where it transformed into an illusion of disappearing stairs. In the following weeks I remained convinced of my memory of Merzbau, occasionally trying to search my memory, to match the walls and sights, and to remember where this encounter had taken place. In Bergen or in Oslo? When I was a child or just after college? Did Henie Onstad Kunstsenter have one version, or Stenersen samlingen in Bergen, maybe? Or did this take place when I went to visit my sister in London?

Two months later, it struck me that it might have been an image from my mother's large two-volume contemporary art book, a lexicon of sorts, really. That it could be a projection. If so, an image in a book has marked off a space in my mind, constructed a memory of being there, tangible and real in itself, despite it being mediated and constructed. Maybe I actually visited it; it certainly feels that way. Regardless, over the span of a few weeks, Merzbau emerged from my mind as a long-forgotten important memory. In both versions of my memory it has been transformed into my own nostalgic and poetic memory, detached from time. It has some of the same shade of colour as my memories from Bergen, just after beginning preschool there. This soft beautiful warm light and feeling: "Little by little it all disappeared into a yellow haze."

The Merzbau memory has the same "memory filter" as when I dared to battle my fear of ladders and followed my friend up to the roof of a large old structure close to my preparatory school. Such an immense feeling of place was to be found there, similar to the one I found in my memory of Merzbau. At that time, this site was the most important experience of place I had, partly because of its inaccessibility and my experience of it as a "no-place" within the city. I filled the moment and place myself, with warm sunlight and crisp air, and liberty. Later the structure was torn down and marked the passing of time, while the Merzbau memory remains free, portable, and projectable, that forever impossible Merzbau. Something in this has to do with intoxication, liberation, detachment, and escapism. And I fail to fully grasp it.
When thought propels in a direction, it grows and transforms. When works take on a life of their own, they still keep me company without fully separating from me. So I am left with a split, because works themselves also have embodiments in various mediums and forms: a split of personality, body, agenda, and desires.

It can escape my personal bounds, transcend my limitations. Maybe it’s also a trial for me to see who I am, where I can go, and how I can evolve, but hopefully not limited to that.

I cannot claim the full rights to this patchwork of tales, anecdotes, stories, symbols, words, rhythm, pace, punctuation, or the crooked, swirling, turning, bending, romantic, hopeful, flawed, undulating, and hopefully reverberating mass of shapes.

*Samuel no. 2, 2016. Oil, watercolor and acrylic, on sized cotton canvas, stapled to my studio wall. 104 x 89 cm. Andreas Amble*
I did not bring about syntax nor the break from it, deep in the mud, face deep, smelling the lilies that drowned.

A loan, one could say, straightforward and a little to the side, there something might rest, or shiver with spasms induced by the liberation from the calm sea of tranquility, where all the buoys float, never reaching each other, only hearing their ping when the ear is immersed in water, the vastness of sound creeping into your skull, only to finally escape your cavities accompanied with an “aaaah” of delight while resting your head on the pillow two days later.

The loan of sea water was not properly handed back, and the hand is usually the one that delivers, but water escapes me, to hold it is difficult. Is it better to take or absorb it? This I find much more difficult than counting the leaves that flicker and dance in the wind. Leaf in my hand, it is there. No doubt about it, the stick made a line and now it gets tricky.

I count my sins even though I do not believe. Then I remember to take a deep breath and contemplate the story, the tale that someone told that convinced me, so it must then be clear that I believe.

The liberty of escaping the beaten path is quickly replaced by panic. Followed by guilty delight. That sudden encounter not igniting all my fears, but rather blossoming with petals from my rosy shedding cheeks, skin curling into flesh-coloured orchids, and what is left to fear now?

Twelve long songs covered a distance dwindling next to the whole, yet I hum them still. Rolling as my legs still remember the change, the flat polished floor, brilliant as no other suddenly grows its fur, and spines lift up from the wild deep down. As the beating grows stronger, my feet start to dance, by the force of others they move along, erratic and drunk, the liquid flows free, my body and me. I have no choice but by choice I am here.
I am increasingly attracted to language with some sort of eloquence, because it opens up language, a way of getting familiar with it, more intimate than before, and therefore less restricted by its norms. The same goes for history, art, and materials, they all open up for modes of continuous association and investigation. The destabilised and open language gains fragility. It is so evident while reading Clarice Lispector, Samuel Beckett, and the diary and contradictory epics of Ludwig Wittgenstein. It is all there, in very different forms, but it is right there, in writing, in language.

I have always been a fan of stories, wherever I could find them. My parents reading to me was very important, in particular because I had trouble reading as a child. Something happened when I read Neil Gaiman's Sandman comic series, a step towards reading short stories and fiction books, such as Philip K. Dick or the daunting eighteen-month venture through Lord of the Rings. Most of my time was and is spent making my own stories through almost obsessive daydreaming. With Wittgenstein, I encountered types of stories I never knew existed, or had paid no attention to, some of which I couldn't even daydream of.

I don't know what it was, it could have been the cover photo. A blackboard struggling to keep up with its name and description, “RAW” and “we” written on it, one with chalk and the other through the removal of chalk. Placed in front of it, dressed in a tweed blazer and a shirt that looks soft and comfortable, Ludwig Wittgenstein doesn't even look into the camera but straight through me and into the world. Wrinkles in his face carry some gravity of what he never fully managed to carry himself. The small narrow tense lips. Samuel Beckett could be placed next to him and they would be a wonderful pair there in the image. But Beckett will rest for now. With Wittgenstein I found an image of a figure I could not reach, but nevertheless with a mysterious attraction. So I met him through writing intended for no audience.

01.05.1930: “It takes a very long time before I can see anything clearly. This is the case even in the most different fields and subjects. My relation to other people only becomes clear after a long time. It is like the cloud or the haze needs a great span of time before it withdraws, before the object or subject becomes visible. In the span of this time I'm not even aware of my ignorance. And then suddenly I see how it is or was. This is why I'm useless where immediate response or action is required. I am, so to speak, blinded for a while, before the shells falls from my eyes.”

Wittgenstein's diary, a book first published in German in 1997, acted as an entry to the philosopher I could dare to pick up and read. Through his own words and experiences from two relatively short time spans, I felt close to him somehow, and he immediately became an important influence at a point when I found myself having very little access to the concept of language, but was gripped strongly by its enchantment. Language became something I could observe for the first time.

I cannot claim to understand his two very different pillars of literature and philosophy. And I don't feel a need to understand them. Still, I gained an awareness of language and found a way to treat both language and fiction through structures, to introduce logic, and to allow myself to dig deeper, based on my own parameters. But this came a little later. At first I read of his despair, his self-destructive ways, his utter self-obliteration, and how he was lost between belief and lack of it. This slow and painful transformation, a life lived, but with so many restraints.

02.05.1930: “Because I am weak, I am also dependent on the opinion of other people. At least in the moment of action. The fact is that I require a long time before I can manage to make an effort. When somebody says something nice or simply smiles kindly at me, it has a long-lasting uplifting and reassuring effect on me, while an unpleasant reply or comment makes me depressed for a similar amount of time. The best is to stay alone, where I can maintain my equilibrium, find the balance. At least spiritually as long as my nerves continue to function.
That House is an Odd Fellow, 2016. Cork, MDF, acrylic paint, wood structures, light, four channel sound and video back projection. Dimensions variable. Eternal video loop constantly shifting sync. Installation view, Inter Arts Center, Malmö, 2016. Andreas Amble

That House is an Odd Fellow, 2016. Cork, MDF, acrylic paint, wood structures, and light. 244 x 248 x 40 cm. Installation view, Inter Arts Center, Malmö, 2016. Andreas Amble
“The best state of mind for me is delight, because it causes all the ridiculous thoughts to evaporate, and to render them harmless.

“Everything, or almost everything I do, including these notes, are marked by my vanity, and the best I can do is to separate it, isolate it, and try to act in spite of it, even though it never ceases to be a spectator. I cannot force it out. Only occasionally is it not present.”

Eventually an image arises of Ludwig Wittgenstein, someone who constructed a tautological structure for his synthetic product, which he later disowned, spending the rest of his life trying to fill this void with material and reflections from life, or at least material of a different sort, which ultimately could never fit and replace his Tractatus. An image of Wittgenstein that might reflect personal transformation and everlasting struggle, one he never managed to escape from. The transparent yet opaque words filling the pages of his diary, allowing me to see something behind the public historical figure. This feels naked and vulnerable and it captivates me; because it somehow reveals the self-contradictory reality of the human condition, possibly all the clearer with someone as edgy and ambitious as Wittgenstein, because the distance between the stage persona and the private reveals the daily battle.

05.02.1931: “We are trapped within our skin.”

That House is an Odd Fellow, 2016. MDF, shellac, acrylic paint, wood structures and five unique booklets. 105 x 244 x 36 cm. Installation view, Inter Arts Center, Malmö, 2016. Andreas Amble
The making of components, pieces of a bigger whole, of which I do not fully grasp yet. I cannot see how far I have moved or changed over the last few years, but I can see something, through a series of revisitations and reinvestigations. This sense of vagueness is annoying and in clear contradiction to the clearness of works and pieces coming to life. They are there. I guess some of this challenge arises since I am not bound by material or medium. The last three years I have aimed elsewhere. I could be a painter, but for some reason I try to fight it, to escape that definition because of my fear of it. I love painting, but I cannot abide by it. I do not accept its heightened value despite my attraction to the richness of the tradition and the medium itself. The last three years I have aimed elsewhere.

My relation to form and stage within the actual and metaphysical room has evolved, and barriers with text, video, and photography have been torn down. Finally I can accept them as works in and of themselves. No matter what material or medium I use, I tend to treat the objects or works I make as parts of a larger whole. But I still want to make these components strong enough to stand alone, to be their own autonomous composition without the need of a biospheric existence.

In order to speak of my practice, I will make reference to my exhibition at Inter Arts Center (IAC) in Malmö in the fall of 2016, along with some works from the spring of 2016 and to some extent my BFA exhibition at KHIM Gallery. The project exhibited at IAC, That House Is an Odd Fellow, started with parallel investigations into the specific traits of a found location and how I could use those spatial and interior characteristics to transform them into a character in a video, a sort of spatial protagonist, trying to create a projection where I restricted the link to my will, desire, and voice. Parallel to this I also wrote texts trying to animate these shapes, rooms, and qualities within the text itself, where the words describing it gave access to the magic of animation and transformation.

By removing the eye of the human and the human protagonist and replacing it with the fictitious eye of the structure itself, I no longer had to abide by the limitations of how we see or how we are. In general, a fundamental sort of rationale comes...
with and in relation to traditions of mediums as well as the various established modes of experiencing these, which often define borders, rules, or limitations. I could therefore attempt to investigate and allow for a free-form structure of association and reflection. This could only take place in fiction. A relevant comparison is Samuel Beckett’s novel Watt, which also contains a protagonist who is challenging to relate to. His surroundings, his image of himself, his role, and his chain of thought changes, and everything influences everything, including the language.

The House, or the structure, of That House grew to be the concept of a transformative, allegorical house, that is, the tangible representation or reflection of a transformative structure. The transformation of the allegorical house eventually led me to the sculptures that constituted the scenery within the exhibition. Fortunately, it did not contradict their role as structures or their role as a stage set, and I feel I succeeded in creating and maintaining this multiverse.

The final phase of this work was the actual construction of the scenery and the production of the five booklets, representing text and its relations to the surrounding structures. Many of the texts were hopelessly romantic in their treatment of the subject matter. I also added early sketches for the exhibition, video stills, photographs, and graphic components. The layout and the content of the five booklets varied, and the changing structure alternates and transforms throughout the booklets; however, I allowed the books to have more warmth, because it felt natural in this medium. Each addition, manifestation, and arrangement of content in any of the three structures had a direct influence on the others. An example of this is how Pythagoras\(^\text{11}\) went from a way of describing spatial relations between three different positions to becoming a physical structure within the exhibition and an emblem for the whole project.

In the spring of 2016, while preparing for the IAC show, I worked on three paintings and a text. The idea was to make a whole that allowed the four components to contribute to each other mutually while still having the strength to stand alone. A challenge of impossible translations, but not necessarily of impossible relations. To state the obvious, we do not read a painting or an object in the same way we do text, and vice versa. But I wanted to explore the capacity for relations and exchange beyond obvious descriptions and depictions.

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\(^{11}\) Pythagoras
In the work *Flattened field and three Samuels*, the text is the action, and the paintings are both the characters and the environment. I probed further into this relationship dependency at IAC a few months later. A form of co-existing interdependency and liberty.

Lastly, the BFA show. My exhibited project grew from the preparation for this very essay and attempt to reflect upon my art practice. It started with the idea for a film of my mother, or rather a video that includes my transforming mother, loosely based on the film *Rosa*, which Heimo Zobernig made of his mother in 1981. As in his film, my mother also sits in front of a camera in a blazer, and talks, or reads quotes of texts written by me. This format is taken from Zobernig's film, although I treated it freely. I changed the location, I changed the topics, I changed the colour of the blazer, and I made my film into a component of a larger whole.

In the final installation, I combined the footage of my mother with clichés and remembrances. The first of these is the reappearance of the House, then there is an almost generic presentation of Greek history, architecture, and mythology, followed by 8 mm footage from a family trip to Samos in 1987 filmed by my father. I also make use of traditional props from theatre: the mask, the stage set, and the curtain. Moving towards theatre, including the mask for its basic function of transformation, the layering of content attempted to give multiple readings, the intimacy of working with my mother and the distance I took in order to be able to handle it.

At IAC, the room and the project itself was the stage and the theatre. And the sculptures were the scenery and the stage curtain hung there behind them. The stage light grew with time, and became a character of its own. Theatrical arrangements containing curtains and light as props can also be found in Heimo Zobernig works, such as his exhibition at CAPC Bordeaux in 2012. The CAPC exhibition also included use of a chroma-key colour, which brings me to the Bachelor exhibition and the mask that transformed my mother: a Greek theatre mask in a modern digital-friendly version. It was built on my mother’s face, so it only fits her features, but the outside looks generic, and it steals her character. All of a sudden, Sigmund Freud is looming in the background, but I do not remove my beloved mother: she remains there and she survives the treatment. The hanging curtains had a soft formal play with the Greek columns that were placed in two different rooms. This treatment of architecture as both a prop and a sort of connective medium leads me to the painting painted in an almost Renaissance style and technique, while still maintaining and addressing the colliding subjects at hand: a combination of my childhood home and the Temple of Hera found on the island of Samos, the birthplace of Pythagoras. The composition of the painting was inspired by a painting by Francesco di Giorgio Martini. The physical wall construction at my Bachelor exhibition itself was built from repurposed materials from the IAC show.
In essence, what I’m trying to get at is: How can I combine and use the knowledge and tools I have, and how can I connect this and make something new and unknown? To produce is in itself not a noble act, although that illusion is tempting and soothing at times. A contextual note is that this query comes from a person who spent childhood weekends in encyclopedias, illustrated science and history books, and cartoons, while eating crackers with cheese after a day outside on skis, always looking for a new trail among the trees. A kid that built worlds every day and had a fantasy empire with ants as my protectors and friends, and who was often happy in solitude.

All these different narratives cannot be woven together as one whole, but this multitude of narratives could form a room for new narratives to take place. Maybe that was the idea behind Merzbau, the total utopic work, but this wholesome whole is a dangerous illusion, one I could never support or indulge in. Its isolation, its discrimination, and its aesthetic truth-like reality feels dangerous and repellent.

“For there seems to be two ways of behaving in the presence of wishes, the active and the contemplative.”

“But not knowing exactly what I was doing or avoiding, I did it and avoided it all unsuspecting that one day, much later, I would have to go back over all these acts and omissions, dimmed and mellowed by age, and drag them into the eudemonistic slop.”

Merzbau was an installation concept by Kurt Schwitters. He built the first edition in his family home in Hanover across fourteen years, before he fled to Norway in 1937 with the coming onset of World War II. This was later destroyed during a bomb raid in 1943. A second version was built in Lysaker, Norway, but abandoned in 1940 due to the Nazi invasion, and burned down in 1951. Some describe his hut outside Molde in Norway as a Merzbau too. After a stay in London, Schwitters permanently settled in Ambleside in England’s Lake District. In 1947, he received a grant from the Museum of Modern Art in New York to rebuild or recreate the Merz structures in Germany and Norway. Instead, he chose to use the funds on Merzbarn, a project he had just initiated. Less than a year later, he died due to acute sickness, two days after being granted British citizenship.

Henie Onstad Kunstsenter, which opened in 1968, is a large exhibition space and an art collection outside Oslo based around the donation of an art collection, a fund, and a building from Sonja Henie and Niels Onstad.

Stenersen samlingen is a collection that was given to Bergen by the collector Rolf Stenersen, now a part of KODE Art Museums of Bergen.

This is a paraphrase from Robert Bolano’s book 2666 and also refers to one of my texts from my exhibition That House Is an Odd Fellow.

In 2004 in Bergen, the remains of an old Nazi submarine bunker stood in the middle of this big open development area. This was later torn down in 2007.

Mud—a medium often located on the ground surrounded by dryer substances, not as fluid as water, nor as dry as soil, despite being related to both. Mud thus has the capacity to transcend mediums and be pandimensional. It can also be found as facial support for the unnamed protagonist of Beckett’s How It Is and a loose reference to the primordial soup that we all carry within us—and thus also referring to one of my texts from That House Is an Odd Fellow.


Wittgenstein, Den ukjente dagboken, 35. All quotes from this book are my translation from Norwegian.

Wittgenstein, Den ukjente dagboken, 36.

Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus was published in 1921.

Wittgenstein, Den ukjente dagboken, 52.

Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher and mathematician, born 570 BC at Samos.

This oil painting from 1500 is an architectural study found at Gemäldegalerie in Berlin. It’s a centre-perspective painting built as a hybrid between furniture and a painting.


Beckett, Molloy, 59. “Eudemonistic” refers to an ethical doctrine in which the value of morality lies in its capacity to produce happiness. In philosophical terms, this must then reach deeper than “fleeting moments of,” but rather “of life.” Personally I don’t mind that it is a cliché; I wade in those daily. I realise that clichés could be troublesome, but it is important to remind oneself that morality has to be for the sake of what is good.
Axel Berger

Hopeful Cascades of Headlessness

Study 1: The Body That Carries
I took a walk, and allowed myself to shift from the visual to the somatic—to the perception of my own body—and the coexistence of thought and motion. The lens of the eye is the most relaxed when it is focusing on something distant. My body swells up and shrinks down in time with my breathing: in—out. The somatic seems to already have a poetry of its own. Somebody said that walking turns into dancing when we become aware of how it is a cycle in which one falls and catches oneself repeatedly. I noticed how my shoulders had rotated forward and were fixed in relation to the movements of my legs. I noticed how the insides of my feet were supporting my weight, and how my knees and hips collapsed slightly inwards because of this. How my neck slumped forward. The pain I had felt in my hips made it necessary for me to try to figure out which of my postural habits might be sustainable in the long term. The pain makes the effort and the imbalance tangible.

A somatic poetry might suggest, highlight, and redefine meanings for everyday movements or odd personal gestures—things that have a special meaning for one person, but likely seem abstract to others. I breathed in and get up; the inhalation makes my body swell up a little, and raises me. In a dance workshop, I was instructed to find the least strenuous way of getting down on the floor and then getting back to my feet. This reminded me of the difficulty I experienced the first time I used a squatting toilet, how hard it was to squat down without losing my balance. I am used to sitting on a toilet seat, and not having to squat. It's comfortable, but it rotates the colon forward, which makes bowel movements more difficult. The workshops I take part in are often artworks in which the somatic (the body) and the exteroceptive (the environment) are perceived simultaneously. Furniture shapes and is shaped by the body. Furniture also leads and follows the shortened muscles. The furniture seems to turn into prosthetics. Getting down doesn't require much energy if I can let gravity take me there. But it's difficult if the tendons or muscles are short. The workshops I've participated in can be therapeutic and expressive. They're often energetic places, accessible to a few paying participants.

I breathe out. My exhalation rises through the air, warmer and larger. A disappearing art, fuelled by the energy that the body converts, would be economical, a way of preserving limited resources. It could be transmitted through verbal articulations or movements. It could be a work of art, where the audience fills the room with their warm exhalations as they watch somebody do something.

Study 2: Paranoia
Plants convert solar energy, water, and carbon dioxide into sugars and oxygen. The fibrils of their roots gather mineral sustenance from the soil. Humans convert food into heat. Being alive means to convert energy: “At the barest minimum, animals human in form but with no technology would have been converting in their own bodies about 2,000 to 3,000 kilocalories of chemical energy (from food) into heat in the course of a day's activities.” We are sworn into a pact of life with the nonliving, the land, and the other species. The land carries me, literally as well as metaphorically.

“Carrying capacity” is defined by environmental sociologist William R. Catton as follows: the number of a given kind of creature (following a given way of life) that an environment can support indefinitely. This number can be temporarily exceeded, although this will impact the future carrying capacity of the area. When this happens, the population must either use technological inventions to harness stored energy, decrease in number, or conquer more territory to maintain its life. This practice is fundamental to urban life and to industrial Western society. If we consider the interests of other species, as well as the history of colonialism, “conquering” seems like a reasonable choice of word: land is taken by force.

Through domestication, we adapt other species to convert energy/do work for us. The use of fire allows us to convert energy that has been stored in other organisms into heat. The advent of the steam engine allowed us to convert heat into mechanical energy. And then, when we began mining fossil fuels, we were able to convert energy that hit Earth millions of years ago. An art exhibition, like many other things in the world, is fuelled by energy from “elsewhere and elsewhen,” prehistoric plants and animals that have been subjected to tremendous pressure for millions of years. The amount of materials brought into the European market in 2014 through imports (as raw material equivalents) and domestic extraction equals to 18.8 tonnes per inhabitant. The official statistics agency of the
EU writes: “The EU imports about three times more goods by weight from the rest of the world than it exports in the period 2000–2015. Quantitatively the physical imports into the EU are dominated by fossil fuels and other raw products which typically have low values per kilogram. On the other hand, the EU exports high-value goods such as machinery and transport equipment.”

It’s very difficult to relate this material to the smallness of my own body. The figure of 2,000–3,000 kcal per day mentioned at the beginning of this section indicates the amount of energy that the human body converts in a day’s worth of food digestion. As early as 1982, Catton wrote that the average energy conversion per person and day in the US is eighty times greater than a human body’s metabolic conversion. This means that other land regions and worlds must be conquered and permanently altered to accommodate the increasing energy conversion.

In The Three Ecologies (2000), Félix Guattari writes that only an “ethico-political articulation” between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations, and human subjectivity) would be likely to clarify the intense transformations that the world is undergoing.

Study 3: Art in the Anthropocene and Integrated Global Capitalism

The growing demand for high-tech equipment like smartphones and LED lights (as well as wind turbines and solar cells) has also led to a huge demand for rare earth minerals. Ninety-five percent of the world’s mining for these takes place in China, and more than half of that is accounted for by a single mine in the town of Baotou in Inner Mongolia. In the last seventy years, the population of Baotou has increased from 100,000 to 2.5 million. A toxic artificial lake, with a surface area of 2 km², has appeared next to the city like a dystopic index of the global market. The acid
used in the extraction process to separate these desirable metals from the mud, and the radioactive thorium that accompanies the ore, is pumped away and fed into the lake.\textsuperscript{12}

To reinterpret and extend Marshall McLuhan's familiar phrase “the medium is the message,”\textsuperscript{13} I'd like to claim that media technology like LCD WLED screens, besides habituating us to new levels of retinal stimulation, also imply and reaffirm our dependence on imported minerals, exported pollution, and cheap labour.

Is it naive to think that art could be better than other things? And on the other hand, how nihilistic would it be to think it couldn't? The word “utopia” has a dual meaning: the good place, and the place that doesn't exist.\textsuperscript{14}

We have to eat other organisms to survive. This existential fact seems more parasitic than (if possible) symbiotic, because of the way that production is organised today. Exploitation seems to be a fundamental aspect of our lives ... but I can't believe that collective suicide could be the best way out of this moral quagmire. Because, at the same time, there might actually be something that justifies human existence (domination)?

You can treat it like a thought experiment and conclude that since humanity is already here, its existence requires no justification. I can't answer; words fail me here. Perhaps what I seek is rather the vehicle of hope. That which can carry our self-awareness. The thing human beings do that adds something to creation. Something small that shines through. The “buzz.”\textsuperscript{15} I can't explain it very well, but art can do this: offer a moment of something we've never seen before, which gives us a joy like a wound. I am searching for the point that nails this page “in our memory, the unforgettable stroke—the needle planted in the heart of eternity.”\textsuperscript{16}

It's everywhere. In that which shimmers, in every breath, in a gaze, or in a movement, if we're attentive enough to notice. I internalise it. I'm a romantic. Blessed by the beauty of the world.

But it's no simple matter: I'm thinking of Virginia Woolf and the fictitious sister of Shakespeare, whom Woolf writes about in A Room of One's Own (1929). The sister, who lacked the material assets her brother had, as well as the opportunity to sit undisturbed in a room of her own, would have been unable to write her brother's texts. And I think that even if she did have those things, her intellectual freedom would have been ... impaired by the way she would have been treated in her time. Perhaps this is my own personal interpretation. I write this from a position of privilege (white male, upper middle class, with academics for parents), and yet, as a child of my time, raised with the idea of the global crash,
I am unable, for better or for worse, to indulge in art in an uncritical way. In the fracture that exists between the ideal world and the experience of the real world’s flaws, I formulate an ethic, by which I mean the ambition to maintain the carrying capacity of bodies and land areas, and their diversity of life, in the long run.

However, when taken in isolation, “ethical consumerism” seems an untenable solution to the complex issues I’ve tried to describe here.

All the same, I’ve tried to abandon technologies and practices that involve potentially exploitative relations. This can be interpreted negatively, as a narcissistic over-estimation of the significance of my own actions and as disregarding the full complexity of the problems. Or, as Claire Bishop writes: “the logic is one of fetishistic disavowal: I know that society is all-exploitation, but all the same, I want artists to be an exception to this rule.”17 But where to begin?

Over a collage that includes a picture of Stalin, the following words are written: “Help me!! I find this picture beautiful but I know what Stalin did! What to do?”18 Art bridges the gap between the tiny, specific presence and the mysterious structures of the world. How can I question a system through the use of means that seem to both worsen and reinforce it?

Hal Foster seems to be addressing the same issue when he describes a tendency in contemporary art that
he calls “immanent in a caustic way.” “Caustic” as in corrosive or satirical, and “immanent” as in within the given order. An avant-garde that isn’t heroic, that doesn’t believe it can overthrow the given order, that uses a strategy of distance through “excess” rather than through “withdrawal,” and that Foster claims is able to prove that this order is a failure, or at least weak. I admire many of the artists whom Foster identifies as using this kind of strategy. One example is Thomas Hirschhorn, whose works I have only seen reproduced in photographs but still admire. His materials are excessively accessible: cardboard, aluminum foil, packaging tape, material from the “capitalist garbage bucket.” His materials are also excessively presented in his installations, for example when he fills whole rooms with empty drink cans, car tires, cardboard, and so on. His works are based on the idea that the artist is the first to give and be present, and nobody else’s participation can be assumed, however welcome it may be. He initiates a kind of forum in which different groups can exchange ideas. The input and the extension from one person to another in his work is hopeful. In this way, in terms of input, I love art. Artists put something into the work and put the artwork to work. I relate and feel attracted to Hirschhorn’s work on a theoretical level: he promotes “headlessness” and “uncynicism” with slogans like: “Energy: Yes, Quality: No.”
Before I encountered this nexus of ideas related to the concept of caustic immanence, an approach like this would have seemed too nihilistic to me. I don’t have a clear opinion at the moment, but it seems doubtful to me that we really need more proof that the given order is a failure or weak. And if we do, to whom should this proof be addressed? In the end, there are no conclusive answers. All I can conclude is that my own practice turned to the human body and to a movement in art between ethics and hope. A movement sparked by the sting of joy over something’s being and by the desire for the imaginary to be materialised.

Study 4: The Politics of Spectatorship

I went to see a work by Tino Sehgal at the Leopold Museum in Vienna.21 The dancer lay down, sat, and stood in a room in the museum. I was squatting by the wall, about seven feet away from the dancer, watching. The floor was supporting the dancer, who seemed to be absorbed by his own slow movements. The dancer was clearly distinct from the visitors, on account of his slow, mindful progression through various positions. He pressed his face against the museum floor, and raised his butt. His arm was dragged along the floor, from the side of his head, and back towards the knee. A guard told me I wasn’t allowed to sit on the floor and that I had to sit on a bench along the far wall, rather than be in the better vantage point on the floor.

The ethical dimension of Sehgal’s work resides in the utopian idea that the human body and its metabolic energy conversion are all that is required to mediate and carry art. At least if I may ignore for the moment the magnificent museum building that the dancer is in. On a more immediate level, the abrupt meeting between speed and focus in this piece had a strong impact on me. It was exciting, a little uncomfortable.

Something about the discrepancy of being in the same place, but having completely different... attitudes. One person is dancing slowly, and the other is watching. The dancer persists in his incomprehensible dance.

I’d like to borrow an expression from Jérôme Bel: “I want the spectators to act, as they should act. We have to do our job. As we do our job in the performance. So we dance, we are dancers. And they expect dance. There is light, music, some people dancing, so I did my job. If they dance there is no more theatre, no more representation. They need to be passive, physically passive. Not intellectually, of course.”22

The fundamental principle of the stage is spectatorial. It dictates that the various people involved adopt different attitudes or do different jobs: one as actor, and the others as spectators. There is a fairly deep-rooted agreement that if you take the initiative, I will wait and watch. This agreement seems to be the default mode we adopt in encounters with living art. However, many alternative options are available to us in our staging of spectatorship: the guard moves me from my squatting position on the floor to a seated position on the bench, and in so doing reshapes the mobile spectator of the museum into the fixed spectator of theatre. The institution’s censure of certain postures and positions reshapes the tendons and muscles from a potential extension to a gradual shortening. Squatting is an act of autonomy; deciding for myself where to wait and watch.

Study 5: The Psychology of the Gaze and Desire

Spectatorial situations sometimes occur spontaneously in everyday life. For example, when a demonstration goes by on the street, and others stop to watch. When people sit on a bench and watch children play in a playground. In “Notes on the Elimination of the Audience” (1966), Allan Kaprow suggests that

a happening may be scored for just watching. Persons will do nothing else. They will watch things, each other or a bus stopping to pick up commuters. It could be meditative or just “cute” when done indifferently. It could be contrasted with periods of action. Both normal tendencies to watch and act would now be engaged in a responsible way.23

In everyday life, the agreement is more spontaneous and fleeting than it is in the theatre. It is controlled by social convention rather than by theatrical convention; I speak, and you respond. I look at somebody in the metro, and they eventually look back at me. In this situation, the normal thing to do is to look away. This is also the inherent limitation of everyday life. The critical moment when convention will either prevail or crumble. Long gazes—eye to eye—are mostly limited to family, and to lovers in particular. They trust each other’s gaze. But I have always wondered why looking at and being looked at by others can be so unforgivable. Do I not trust your gaze? Small children seem to be able to look without inhibition. This is also the advantage of spectatorial art: there is no expectation that we look away. We can look without inhibition, and this is generous.

Between everyday life and spectatorial art, we find the following: the dressing room, the theatre curtain and the applause, and the meeting of our gazes between us. Have you ever seen an actor enter into or come out of a role? I don’t mean from a distance; I mean up close. Isn’t the best moment of any theatrical performance the one when the actor’s face relaxes and returns to its everyday expression? I mean: I think it is. Like a fracture in both the logic of everyday life and the logic of the stage. The vibrating
border between them, where the manifestation of the imaginary seeps in like an itch or a pinprick, at once familiar and secretive.

One's practice effectively alters desires and mental images. I desire to see particular constellations of human beings or bodily gestures manifested in the world. A boy's singing, which simultaneously reminds us of air-raid sirens from history. A moment when humanity's potential to become something other (pretend to be something other) than itself is put into the work. We take pleasure in sucking our tongues and pretending that they are cigarettes. My own personal ecology of ideas changes. After the global crash, we use the heat of our bodies to keep each other warm. And we carry ourselves, and others, with great awareness. The myth of the world that is, the worlds that will be, and the worlds that are presumed to exist is all around us, mediated by and in the form of drawings and dances. Within us, like dreams, fantasies, and desires shaped by—and in response to—the channels of capitalism.

Bernd Knappe said this during the improvisation workshop “Improve IMPROVISATION—‘spices’ for the next jam” during the 2015 Contact Improvisation Meets Contemporary Festival, Göttingen.


This was a somatic movement workshop by Eva Karczag, Independent Dance, London, 2016.


Catton, Overshoot, 4–5.

Derrick Jensen, Endgame (New York: Seven Stories, 2006), 103.

Jensen, Endgame, 103.


“The fan can seem kopfflos [stupid or silly], but at the same time he can resist because he is committed to something without arguments, it's a personal commitment.” Thomas Hirschhorn, interview by Allison M. Gingeras, in Thomas Hirschhorn (London: Phaidon, 2004), 35.


Tino Sehgal, Instead of allowing some thing to rise up to your face dancing bruce and dan and other things... 2016, performance, Leopold Museum, Vienna.

Jérôme Bel and Jan Ritsema, “Their job is not to dance, but to watch other people dancing—if they dance,” in It Takes Place When It Doesn't: On Dance and Performance Since 1989, ed. Martina Hochmuth (Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2006), 346.

Carl-Oskar Jonsson

Painting light, 2017. Painting light, cable channel, electrical tape. 240 x 40 x 10 cm. Carl-Oskar Jonsson
Presence of a Viewer

I often wake up with my head full of questions.

“On Wednesday mornings early there is always a racket out there on the road. It wakes me up and I always wonder what it is. It is always the trash collection truck picking up the trash. The truck comes every Wednesday morning early. It always wakes me up. I always wonder what it is.”
—Lydia Davis, *Can’t and Won’t* ¹

The studio is full of things and problems that I need to solve or embrace. The mood here shifts from day to day, from hour to hour, and from minute to minute. One day, everything feels great; on another day, everything feels terrible. The space and the things don't change on the outside, but on the inside, they seem to do so as often as I change my clothes.

These last few years, I’ve had to change and rethink my practice, because the way I was working was heading in a direction that I wasn’t entirely comfortable with. I was having doubts about the communicative force of my objects, and hiding behind concepts, which were becoming excuses rather than sources of motivation. I began to take up a greater interest in how something was created rather than what was being created, while showing things that were about something else entirely. The gap between what I was talking about, what I was interested in, and what I was showing was growing far too wide. The difference between what was seen and what was said grew more and more interesting to me.

How could an object serve as a container and communicator of thoughts and ideas without me? Could I communicate thoughts and ideas without any objects? I decided to try to find proof and a working method that would align with these thoughts, and so I began to add theatrical elements to my studio visits.

I tried out different roles and characters, conversations and strategies. It went so far that for one studio visit, with a new teacher at Malmö Art Academy, I borrowed the studio of a friend of mine who is a painter. The conversation started out hesitant and uncertain, but after a while, I noticed that the things I was saying actually matched the paintings in the room quite well. After this talk with the new teacher, I thought about what had really happened.

Had I projected my own thoughts and ideas onto the paintings, or had the paintings projected thoughts and ideas onto me? This meeting interested me, and I wish I could remember what the paintings looked like.

Dutch artist Falke Pisano has a work she calls *Sculpture Turning into a Conversation* (2006), which is a video lecture in which she describes the transformation of a sculpture into a conversation. The sculpture she’s describing isn’t actually real; it’s a sculpture that’s being described in order to be turned into a conversation.

“Things can sometimes turn into other things, this matter we know. Friendship can turn into love and the other way around. Situations transform into completely different situations regularly. A book can be turned into a film. Solid material can turn into liquid in many cases and sometimes into gas.” ²

—Carl-Oskar Jonsson
Talking sculpture

You might be wondering who you're listening to.

The artist has decided that the sculpture has come alive. That it talks and communicates with you.

That I talk and communicate with you.

Me, the sculpture.

Anyway, I would like to start by introducing myself, even if I don't have a name yet. However, that it is something I will have quite soon.

Well, I'm pretty sure I will. I know that it is something that the artist puts a lot of time and effort into.

Anyway, here I am!

I am made out of clay and placed on a chair. I really wanted to be placed on a podium, but the artist has decided that I am not ready yet. He likes to play with gestures that somehow show that things are not definite or finished, that things are still part of the process.

He also likes to twist and turn me in simple ways.

In the moment of time when I was made, I stood on a modelling stand and in many ways, this office chair is working in the same way. It's possible to both raise and lower it and it's easy to spin it around and too see me from different angles.

A funny detail is that the chair is from the artist's own studio.

It's the one he usually sits on while working.

In fact, it was on this chair that he sat while he was working on me.

But I do not know how interesting you think that is. I mean, that was then.

As I said, I am made out of clay, though I was supposed to be made in a more exclusive material, but then it was as if the artist was not sure if I was even worth that kind of effort.

Anyway, I'm pretty satisfied with how my shape and figure looks now. But who knows, maybe I will be changed.

Not that I will have anything to do with it. I mean, the artist can decide at any time to continue the work on me.

The first time the artist was thinking of me, he was at home sitting at his kitchen table eating an omelette.

It's pretty funny. The way he makes omelettes is so uncertain that he is super nervous every time he prepares to loosen the omelette from the pan.

This day he succeeded. Perhaps that was the reason he was in such an unusually happy mood. He sat skimming through a book as he usually does when he eats alone. He reads almost nothing, it's more like he's browsing through viewing photos.

In the margin of page thirty-two, someone had scribbled something (the book was borrowed from the library).

He claims that this was the first time he thought of me.

I trust him, but I don't think that the story about the scribble in the margin is that important. I know that he has done similar projects before and I think that they have much more to do with me than that scribble in the margin.

Anyway, that is what he talks about when he talks about me. Perhaps it's in the same way that I describe him based on how he is making an omelette. I mean, it might not be the most important thing, but it is something, an explanation, something that happens, something that has happened. Something to stick to.
Fingering, 2017. Watercolour, ink pen. 68 x 52 cm. Carl-Oskar Jonsson
In his 1957 text “The Creative Act,” Marcel Duchamp writes that the artistic action is not solely performed by the artist but also by the viewer, who connects the work to the outside world by interpreting it and its internal characteristics. Duchamp claims that the viewer fills the void that arises in any finished work’s loss of what he calls the artist’s personal “art coefficient.” This could be interpreted as the failure of the artist to completely and fully communicate their intentions.

I began to take a greater interest in the role of the viewer, which meant that visits to other artists’ studios and conversations became important aspects of my work. I wanted to try to understand, and explore, the operations of different practices. However, eventually, this resulted in my placing myself under the microscope, and trying to understand how my own practice had worked.

As an exercise, I wrote down the events that took place during the creation of one of my works. This would eventually result in four pages of text, most of which related to how I had seen a home-made drying rack on a beach in Kobarid, Slovenia, and how I had gradually attempted to transform this event, and this sight, into a sculpture.

I reported on all the efforts, troubles, pleasures, doubts, and decisions that had gone into the process.

Writing had loosened something up, and I chose to keep writing.
The landlord stopped me in the stairwell. He said that there was an extra storage room in the basement and asked me if I was interested. It had been empty for a long time and he thought it was a shame that it was not used.
He had me in mind, since I was the owner of the smallest apartment in the house.
The funny thing was, only a few days earlier I had cleared out my already existing storage room, therefore I did not have the need for more space. But since I now had been told that I deserved more space I accepted it. I also thought that I would sooner or later make use of it.

Back in my apartment I searched for something I could place in the storage room.
Something I rarely used and wouldn't miss.
Eventually, I decided to take down a lamp and a chair standing in my hall. The lamp I use infrequently and the chair makes me feel old since I only sit on it when I have to put on or take off my shoes. I place the lamp and the chair in the storage room. It now looks cozy but empty and that is what triggers me to fill it with more, so I sit down on the chair and start to write.
I begin to write a story about someone who writes an increasingly detailed diary. About someone who writes about Monday all Tuesday and spends all Wednesday writing about Tuesday's writing about Monday. About someone who disappears further into the text.
I get inspired by my own writing to the point that I decide to write about the room enclosing me. I write about how empty it is and how it differs from the rest of the world.
How it becomes an inspiring lockup where nothing I've mentioned or thought of before can be said or done without turning into something completely new.
The analogue nature of the text helped me to understand my own process, and what it was that interested me.

Now, for the first time, I could approach issues of transformation, and how something could be created in the context of my own person and my own doubts.

In writing, I could communicate many of the topics and ideas that seemed to be lacking in my sculptural work.

The written word could serve as method, source, and material, all in one.

I was able to use my analysis of the process to bring about a new kind of creative moment, which would once again produce meaning, function, an intuitive activity versus the self-conscious. I relate this process to an analytic kind of journaling, and a kind of fiction within the context of actual objects.

Josef Strau says that he is an artist who writes and a writer who makes art. He defines his work as an ongoing story, sweeping up everything in its path. In his publication *Dreaming Turtle* (2015), he describes everything from the way flowers speak and give him advice to how he helps Isa Genzken make a Lawrence Weiner piece. His texts are about everything and nothing while being transparent enough to become general texts about the creative process.

**Presentation**

The first way I chose to present text was by reading it out loud in the presence of the objects discussed in the text. That seemed to me to be the most natural way. It allowed me to submit the text to others while remaining in absolute control of it.

I noticed that the texts weren't necessarily interpreted as being based on my personal experiences, but rather as stories used to activate objects and spaces. Reading became an active act that carried the meaning of the work.

Franz West's *Adaptives* (1978), a series of sculptures, functions similarly in that the viewer is expected to carry the sculptures or use them as a kind of dance partner. He's also made a specific *Adaptive* with a handle, which is associated with seventeen podiums that the sculpture is supposed to be moved around between. Or, in his own words:

> The handle on the mass that he/she will identify as a sculpture will suffice to make him/her grasp the work's third dimension, indeed it openly invites one to lay one's hand on it. Grab the object and carry it from pedestal to pedestal. Without this active reception, the work would remain somehow waiting, unfulfilled. Without this tender gesture—whose theatricality, boldness or elegance you will modulate at your own discretion—it would remain the equivalent of lack. So go ahead and grab.

No stranger's eye is secretly spying on you. The fulfillment of Being is in your hands and one with seventeen—because my studio is in Vienna's third district, but I sleep in the seventeenth.5

After giving a few readings, when I had become more certain what the text was actually doing, I moved on to printing it as posters. The text, and the letters, became objects in their own right. Objects that could be placed, spread out, combined, and even read as images. In “Language to Be Looked At and/or Things to Be Read” from 1967, Robert Smithson writes: “My sense of language is that it is matter and not ideas.”6 So, perhaps it's all just a matter of expression, and how something can become something else? A personal matter, as matter of fact.

My practice and I both seem to pass through various shapes and characters; the work turns into stories, which in turn become works. It's as though there was a need for continuous rephrasing, and all the while I'm considering whether the yogurt I buy7 has anything to do with my artistic practice or not.

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7. Arla Ko Mild Yoghurt, vanilla flavoured, 1,000 g, a yogurt with 2 percent fat content and natural vanilla flavour.
If I Fall Asleep Someone May Die, 2017. Video still. HD video, 4:22 min. Cecilia Kanthi Jonsson
It is a strange and intriguing thought that there should be a water planet like the one in Solaris, where the ocean has the ability to communicate with our memories. But even if that movie is fiction, I myself have experienced the power of the ocean. A force that destroyed everything in its path and left only ruins upon ruins of memories and human traces. Images from that day are always present in my mind.

Searching for building blocks to recreate a sort of (lost) reality is something I often do. There is also a longing to bring time to a halt, in a world that moves faster than ever. My work Someday (2017) was inspired by this moment, and perhaps also by my desire to create art. A longing for the now and eternity. The art theorist Rosalind Krauss describes sculpture as a medium peculiarly located at the juncture between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing. I like her description, and find it strangely similar to my own near-death experience.

The realisation that we will disappear, that someone will regard us from a future, elicits the desire to be the object that is viewed while also being the viewer. But where do memories reside? In the objects or in ourselves? The philosopher Hans Ruin says that the concept of memory traverses consciousness and the object, since it is connected to the world, where memories exist both within and outside ourselves. Souvenirs (a word originally meaning “memento”) are often available in museums, albeit without an aura, and without authenticity. Their purpose is to offer visitors “a memory to take home.” Perhaps some memories need a material existence in order to become memories. Thoughts about souvenirs were the origin of my work Post Art Card Shop (2016), in which I applied a dialectic approach.
By using my imagination, I conjured the idea that the school building during Malmö Art Academy’s Annual Exhibition in 2016 (with all the open studios) was transformed into a museum, where my studio served as a museum shop but nevertheless remained a work of art. Juxtaposing the inherent opposites of the objects or concepts in the search for something true is nothing new, and has been used by philosophers such as Plato and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

II

Many of the objects in the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm are fragments of human beings and handmade or industrial objects. They are the traces we leave behind, artefacts. According to the philosopher Johan Redin, however, one object is missing from the historical collections, namely the human being.1 (I believe Redin is referring to the impossibility of collecting live humans, their anima.)

Another kind of life nevertheless lies hidden within the non-human, mute material. A life I listen for in my creative practice. A silence that gives me ideas, a silence whose company I appreciate. A couple of artists who have successfully documented material and captured a form of human activity are Bernd and Hilla Becher. Their documentation project the Pennsylvania Coal Mine Tipples (1974–77) is one of my favourites. In these photographs, I perceive a longing and wondering similar to that described by the philosopher Jacques Derrida in relation to the archive, namely that even if the archive has the capacity to preserve traces, it can never encompass the entire event, and that we will always be deprived of the knowledge that was “burned” in the archiving process, a process that leaves no ashes.2

In his video work The Bell (2014–15), the artist Hiwa K uses ashes and fragments to recreate something lost in an admirable way. Here, I see a beautiful dialogue between materials, history, and memory, into our own time.

My own search for fragments is like an illogical game. A bit like building up only to tear down, but the search gives meaning, perhaps because truth is in motion.

III

The museum has power over our memories. But what happens to those of us who create other memories?

I believe many artists, including myself, wish to part and create their own culture. A will to keep culture alive, so that it doesn’t become static and homogeneous or transform solely into capital. And perhaps that is the gift of being an artist? Having this potential to think and shape in a different way. Not just in examples, and maybe not necessarily something new either, just different. As the filmmaker and artist Chris Marker writes, advertisers betray themselves by calling themselves “creatives” rather than “creators.”3 We could also express this in the terms of artist James Turrell, who writes that mankind is not merely a recipient but also a “creator or co-creator,” that is, a creative participant in what is seen.4 The photographer Jeff Wall describes artistic creation beautifully, I think: if a work of art moves the viewer emotionally, then the artist has created something genuine. In other words, the work becomes a reality not just for the artist but also for the viewer, a world beyond our world.5 He also links his art to the viewer through the power of memories: “You are writing the story. You may not consciously be writing it in a literary way, but you are sensing the before and the after and you are probably connecting it to your own memories.”6

With the emphasis on creating a world of one’s own, I don’t mean to evade history (if that is even possible). For it could be somewhat hazardous to create an entirely new beginning in a cultural context—at least if we take the Sweden Democrats’ definition of Swedishness into consideration.7 What I mean is more along the lines of the idea the religious philosopher Jayne Svenungsson expresses in her article “Historiska brott: Walter Benjamin och utanförskapets förlösande kraft” (History crime: Walter Benjamin and the liberating power of exclusion): “To stand outside this history by calling upon fragments from another history, other memories, is not a crime … an acute sensitivity to the present; to condemn history before history condemns mankind.”8

An older work of mine, Vernissage Moderna Museet (2011), was probably an attempt to wedge an alternative narrative into the institutional and academic world. A happening where I sneaked sculptures into Moderna Museet in Stockholm without the staff’s knowledge or consent and organised an opening for friends and acquaintances.

IV

“I find the whole idea of the mausoleum very humorous,” says Robert Smithson in a dialogue with Allan Kaprow.9 He further responds to Kaprow’s assertion that the museum looks like a mausoleum by saying that there is something positive about museums nullifying life, because museums create gaps and can make room for emptiness.10 I don’t exactly see the museum as a mausoleum or a void, but more as being a highly remarkable essence, which, by virtue of being a receptacle for our memories, comes alive through repetition.

My sculpture series Going Back to Find Something New (2015) revolves around Sigmund Freud’s ideas of the past as unmarked territory that moves through time and space. In his book Archive Fever, Derrida
"Post Art Cardshop", 2017. Mixed media. 4 x 5 m. Installation view, Annual Exhibition, Malmo Art Academy, 2017. Cecilia Kanthi Jonsson
Inventory for installation Post Art Cardshop, 2017: 1 Postcard display, 2 Souvenir Finally Land, 3 Shelf, 4 Souvenir Parallel, 5 Postcards Untitled (3 Flip cards), 6–8 Souvenir Can You think the Unthinkable?, 9 Posters (Archive X), 10 Movie-loop Orphan files, 11 Postcards Fly, 12 Close-up Fly, 13 Close-up Poster Noah's Ark, 14 Close-up Orphan Files, 15 Ruined Ceiling, 16 Empty archive drawers, 17 Souvenir (Hologram Cone).

Cecilia Kanthi Jonsson
If I Fall Asleep Someone May Die, 2017. Video still. HD video, 4:22 min. Cecilia Kanthi Jonsson
examines Freud's life and oeuvre as though they were an archive. An intriguing hypothesis in the book is that archives do not actually express a desire to preserve or mammify, but are a question of the future itself; that is to say, archiving is about recording, say, a thought, feeling, idea, or moment, addressed to the future. For even if the archive consists of the past, it is always reassembled in the future (at the risk of retroactive bias).

The archive is like a time capsule sent to the future, to enable a correspondence between the future and the past.

V
In the mind the starry sky expands.

Philosophy gives me keys to visual archives, personal and collective. Images that I abandoned long ago, but where questions still remain. The artist Joseph Kosuth writes in “Art after Philosophy”. “The twentieth century brought in a time which could be called the end of philosophy and the beginning of art.”

I see my art as a mutual creation between art and philosophy rather than as a passage from philosophy to art. However, I share Kosuth’s interest in working with art as an analytical issue and exploring the nature of art. Kosuth used language as his artistic medium and tried to erase human craftsmanship, so as to achieve the purest possible idea. Nevertheless, the visual is my main medium, and I find the very idea of preserving the traces of the human hand to be meaningful. Kosuth writes that even if art does not strive to be “useful,” “we can say that it operates on logic.”

I believe, on the contrary, that art has more in common with the place Plato called Khôra in his dialogue in Timaeus. Derrida’s interpretation of Khôra is as follows:

“Hence it might perhaps derive from that ‘logic’ other than the logic of logos.” The Khôra which is neither “sensible” nor “intelligible” belongs to a “third genus.” … The oscillation of which we have just spoken is not an oscillation among others, an oscillation between two poles. It oscillates between two types of oscillation: the double exclusion (neither/nor) and the participation (both this and that).

And it is probably in this unmarked territory (third genus/space) that my creating takes place. For me, the best indication of whether an unborn work has potential is the unexpected. The unexpected, together with chance and mistake, forms the idea into something material (outside myself). As Wall says, however, we don’t need to go around looking for surprises: since life is going on all the time, something unforeseen is always bound to happen.

Especially if you have a lively little three-year-old and a Siberian husky at home.

VI
An unwritten visual narrative with traits of magic realism is often inscribed in my works. I like the contradiction of the concept itself. The art critic Franz Roh, who coined this term in the 1920s to describe the paintings of the Weimar Republic, claimed that the magical aspect was neither religious nor “witchcraft,” but rather the magic of being, the monstrous and wonderful eeriness that exists in human nature and is an innate part of our modern technological environment.

Hito Steyerl’s oeuvre, I believe, can be seen as an elaboration on magic realism, in that there is something magical about the internet. I would say that this new realism could be called a “parallel realism.” One of Steyerl’s main theses is that the internet has the capacity to stay alive even in offline mode, that immaterial information can seep out from the screen and become real in our material world. In her description, networks evolve into a post-human medium for a form of life (and death) that archives all previous media forms. Living and dead matter are increasingly integrated as the capacity of the cloud improves.

In some sense, I can see similarities between the internet and human memory, where fragments are linked and perpetually edited. Information that abides by its own rules and loops, over which we humans often lose control. The internet as the century’s largest archive — museum. Longing that surfs out on an infinite ocean of information. It is along these ideas that I am currently working on my sculpture Homesick. This piece also references the symptom that Derrida calls “archive fever”: an irrepresible homesickness, a desire to return to the absolute beginning. This longing may be related to the philosopher Julia Kristeva’s theory of mankind’s repressed desire to reunite with the mother. A chance to live a second life for all those dreams that never came to be.

My homesickness probably stems from having a silent past.

There is something alien about Steyerl’s description of how images circulate. That images are reformulated to the extent that they become unfamiliar to us. According to Freud, the most titillating and uncanny thing there is is that which is neither dead nor alive. Perhaps this is why we are so attracted to the internet’s half-living, half-dead image world?

Steyerl encourages us to short-circuit this circulation. She even inspires us to retire from the monitored internet and instead build new, parallel networks!
VIII
End Note
The art critic and philosopher Walter Benjamin refers to how art lost its aura when released from the museum by technical progress, which made it possible to reproduce art for the masses. In his film *Statues Also Die* (1953), Chris Marker, on the other hand, relates how African sculpture died when removed from its context and placed in museums. The film begins: “When men die, they enter into history. When statues die they enter into art. This botany of death is what we call culture.”

Perhaps all art acts as “scenography”? Extracted from its dream and, thus, its context. Is that why art is often so enigmatic?

But what, then, is the purpose of my art? Personally, I can only answer with Friedrich Nietzsche’s aphorism #626, which also ends this tour of my thought images and memories.

“The best is the profound stillness towards the world in which I live and grow, and win for myself what they cannot take from me with fire and sword.”

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1 Solaris, featured film, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky (USSR: Play, 1972).
4 Lotten, Redin, and Ruin, “Det undflyende minnet.”
10 Wall, “Pictures Like Poems.”
14 Smithson and Kaprow, “What Is a Museum?” 44.
19 Wall, “Pictures Like Poems.”
24 Steyerl, “Too Much World.”
26 *Statues Also Die*, documentary, directed by Ghislain Cloquet, Chris Marker, and Alain Resnais (Cannes: Présence Africaine Tadié Cinéma, 1953).
Everybody Keeps Moving through Each Other’s Bodies

“Everything is seed.”
—Novalis, “Logological Fragments I”¹

“The object looks back at the person who observes it. In this sense, any encounter with an object is a kind of microcosmic revolution, a Copernican U-turn that consciousness cannot possibly distance itself from.¹ The human being's relationship to the object is just as significant as the relationships between celestial bodies, particularly the earth’s relationship to the sun. Anything we orbit also orbits us, in the opposite direction. The same is true of a picture that produces ghost images in the subconscious. Whatever we see in front of us also exists inside us at that very same moment. This is the fundamental principle of everything.

• The encounter with the object is an encounter with a surface. The surface is there to keep something from leaking out, to separate the inside from the outside. The skin is the surface of a human being. The encounter with the artwork activates the space between the skin and the surface, and this causes movement. This is the movement that can carry meaning. The earth and the sun are uninteresting if taken individually; it’s the relationship between them that is meaningful. The surface is secondary, movement through the surface is primary.

• The surface of the object exists every bit as much in its negative form, in whatever surrounds it, as it does in its material form. The sculptural shape corresponds to space the same way that a developed photograph corresponds to a negative. No negative, no photograph. No space, no object. It is the negative shape (the space, the negative, the cast) that carries the reality of the object.

From the autumn of 1993 until January 1994, Rachel Whiteread’s work House (1993) is shown to the public, before being torn down. I turned five during that period. The sculpture is a cast of the interior of a Victorian-style house. Whiteread herself explains it as a house inside a house,⁴ but in the pictures documenting the work, it looks more like an architectural ghost. A grotesque yet sensitive colossus. The stairs are still there in front of the house, like an invitation to step inside the concrete. The room at the top left, as seen from the street, is my childhood bedroom. I know exactly how the wall joins the ceiling, and how the weave of the wallpaper feels under the thick blue paint. I know how the bed slides away from the wall, letting the cold air in under the covers. I remember when Whiteread’s sculpture was being made, during my childhood. Today, the place where the sculpture once stood has been turned into a lawn, with a pair of facing benches.

The Bookshelf
“The function of inhabiting constitutes the link between full and empty.”
—Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space ⁵

When we enter a room we’ve never visited before, our eyes and bodies scan the surroundings to find something we recognise, something familiar. This occurs automatically.
It's as though consciousness requires a familiar shape of this kind to anchor its own position in the room. We see a table, a bed, a window, and inside us, the concepts of table, bed, and window are automatically invoked. The objects we surround ourselves with every day exist as obvious truths.

If we approach the bookshelf in a furnished room, the first things our gaze will scan are the books and other objects on the shelf. It seems to be looking for bearers of meaning, the signs on the spines of books, or framed photographs. The bookshelf itself is an empty shape, an anatomical model exposing its internal organs, designed to be filled and emptied of content. Its shape and function are predetermined, containing neither more nor less than you put into them; the contents always reflect their owner. Human beings have created systems for categorising objects, books in particular. You can find books sorted in alphabetical, chronological, chaotic, or hierarchical order, or by colour or size. We seek ways to make the otherwise unsurveyable contents more tangible, and being systematised turns the books into empty entities in a larger context. Once they have been placed on the shelves, we regard them as external shapes, whose contents appear to be hidden. The text, through ink and sheets of paper, is turned into the building blocks of something greater. Vertical and horizontal lines create a spatial system for the non-spatial. But if we were to empty the bookshelf instead of filling it, we would turn it into something else. An empty
The spatial system is clear, but its intended function and is either forgotten in some half-empty open-plan office or chipped, left standing next to a waste container. The bookshelf as a shell.

When we step back into the same furnished room as in the preceding paragraph and approach the now empty bookshelf, it is the geometrically structured shape that is detected by the gaze. The bookshelf is now a cross section of a vertical, extended cube, and all its parts follow the same steady rhythm. The exposed surfaces, which normally serve the purpose of stopping objects from falling out, now seem rather to be intended to keep the air inside, and whatever is outside out. Like a barrier between inside and outside, miniatures and rooms. Because the compartments of the shelf have turned into just that: tiny miniatures of the rooms outside. The empty shelf compartment is a tiny doll’s house or a small stage. A small theatre stage where the light seems to be delivering a monologue. Because even though the shape of the bookshelf is determined by geometry, this would never reveal itself without the play of shadows that is produced by the light. The object, visible to humans, is modelled by the light.

We continue undressing the bookshelf, removing separating walls and shelves, and now we’re standing in front of a spatial line drawing. All that remains of the object are its outlines, and if we remove them, the object will cease to exist. The outlines look like blueprints, occupying a three-dimensional area in space. The spatial system is clear, but its function has been removed. You can neither place something in it or on it. When we view the structure, we look through it. Space. Its function has shifted from serving as storage space to the non-function of storing space. Space. Gaps. Gaps to fill. Or empty.

Compartments.

A three-dimensional grid.

Drawing.

A grid:

“The grid’s mythic power is that it makes us able to think we are dealing with materialism (or sometimes science, or logic) while at the same time it provides us with a release into belief (or illusion, or fiction).”

Sculpture.

Frames within frames.

Space within space.

Fiction within space.

Appearance.

In the Studio
When I am in the studio, my body is always situated in the gaps between the objects. All the objects, whether they be rolls of tape or drawings, invite me to move. I can either orbit them, or move them from one place to another. It is in this movement that new connections are made, the objects give each other new life, and give me new perspectives on things. The longer you spend with an object, the more complex your relationship to it becomes. Some objects give me energy, while others drain me of it. Two years ago, I took part in an exhibition in Riga, where I exhibited a dehumidifier that was so heavy I couldn’t afford to fly with it. This resulted in a twenty-eight-hour journey on trains, ferries, and buses. When I finally arrived, my relationship to the object had changed: we had become travelling companions.

Don Quixote
Don Quixote is a madman. He is the fictional character who has read so many epics about knights that he has deluded himself into thinking that he is the noble knight, destined to save the world from all evil. During his first adventure, he gets into a fight and is unable to defend himself from a scornful mule farmer’s punches. Badly beaten, he is carried home to his bed to recuperate. Outside the bedroom, the village priest and barber stand in front of Don Quixote’s bookshelf, deciding which of the books have warped his mind and must be burned. The following dialogue occurs in chapter six:

“But what book is that next to it?”—“The Galatea of Michael de Cervantes,” said the barber. That Cervantes has been an intimate friend of mine these many years, and I know that he is more versed in misfortunes than in poetry. There is a good vein of invention in his book, which proposes something, though nothing is concluded: we must wait for the second part, which he has promised; perhaps, on his amendment, he may obtain that entire pardon which is now denied him; in the meantime, neighbour, keep him a recluse in your chamber.”

The novel Don Quixote has plenty of sections in which the narrator enters the text to comment on his own role (and non-role) as author. In a metafiction of sorts, Cervantes creates a space for his commentary on the form of the novel and the role of the narrator, without ever stepping outside the bounds of fiction. In the quote above, Cervantes himself suddenly appears in the hands of his own fictional characters, and Galatea, his first novel, is also inscribed in a mirror play between fiction and reality. He goes so far as to give his characters the opportunity to review his own novel. The reader is confronted with a conflict between the author, the narrator, and the text. A conflict between the spaces of fiction and reality. The role of author dissolves itself. A hierarchy is revealed, in which the narrator seems to exert power over
the writer. In a later chapter, the writer appears to lose all control of the progression of the text, as he (because we must assume that the novel was written by Cervantes) suddenly has to recall the origin of the text. In the middle of the duel between Don Quixote and the valiant Biscainer, just as they are about to cut each other to pieces, the narrator falls out of contact with the story:

But the misfortune is that the author of the history, at that very crisis, leaves the combat unfinished, pleading, in excuse, that he could find no more written of the exploits of Don Quixote than what he has already related. The only way to continue the story seems to be to let the narrator remember how he originally discovered the novel. The voice takes the reader back through time, remembering how a boy sold him the original manuscript at a market. It had been kept with some other worn old tomes and was written in Arabic by the historian Hamet Benengeli. The next problem, of course, is that the voice is unable to read Arabic, and the story of Don Quixote cannot continue until the text has been translated to Catalan (a process requiring “just over a month and a half”). Cervantes credits everybody but himself with writing the work, and the origin of the text appears to be the origin of fiction itself. The text is placed inside a plait that seems to contain everything but the writer’s own voice.

This discussion of the origins of the text is touched on by Jorge Luis Borges in his short story “Pierre Menard, the Author of the Quixote,” which was published in 1939. It has the form of a book review (which in turn is published in 1918), and discusses the question of whether author Pierre Menard has succeeded in his project of writing the novel Don Quixote more perfectly than Cervantes, even though the work is a word-for-word copy of the original. Borges writes:

“The initial method he conceived was relatively simple: to know Spanish well, to re-embrace the Catholic faith, to fight against Moors and Turks, to forget European history between 1602 and 1918, and to be Miguel de Cervantes.”

The book reviewer (the narrator of this text) goes on to explain how the new work by Menard differs from the older version, and soon concludes that it is more complex and rich than the original: “The text of Cervantes and that of Menard are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer.” What separates these works from one another seems to be the time that has passed between the first and second versions. As Cervantes was stuck in his own time when he wrote his text, Menard’s version becomes more complex, owing to the fact that it also covers the historical events of 1602–1918. All of this experienced and recorded history becomes a natural part of the text. The context has been renewed, and complicated, and to a reader it will naturally seem more interesting to partake of the later “renewed” version. The text behaves exactly as the reader, time, and society expect it to behave. Borges’s short story treats a literary theme and focuses on the function of the text. When artist Elaine Sturtevant takes on the role of Pierre Menard in the book Sturtevant, Author of the Quixote (2008), the discussion naturally moves on to the domain of the art object. Her publication is a copy of Borges’s short story, but differs in that she has substituted herself in for the fictional character Menard. She plants herself deep inside the fiction, even in the title. Unlike Borges’s short story, she doesn’t comment on the text; the artwork discusses the book in its totality, as an object. Her interest does not lie in describing or commenting on a text that has already been written. Sturtevant instead uses the object to look beyond the surface of the artwork: “What is the understructure of art? What is the silent power of art?” For Sturtevant, the design of the cover and the choice of font face are just as important as the actual text. The fiction of Don Quixote, Pierre Menard, and Sturtevant is granted physical form by Sturtevant, who places it before us like a work of art. All bodies seem to be looking for a way into one another, into a communal self.

Self

“It’s wrong to say: I think. Better to say: I am thought.”

—Arthur Rimbaud, letter to Georges Izambard

Note


Visually, language and drawing share the same components, or lines. But conceptually, we fill a text with more meaning than a drawing, even though the latter seems to have just as much to communicate, if not more. Interest in cave paintings hasn’t died down, even though they were made several thousand years ago; perhaps this is because of their inherent refusal to explain themselves. Expressing a function. Language has a function, and when we see a letter, we think we know what it represents. But all letters and words have one thing in common: they are lost for all time whenever taken out of their context. In a text, there is often a self to identify, if you think of what the self is in the context of the studio, answers will be forthcoming. The work in the studio is a slow wrestling match with whatever you’ve put in front of you. The questions you ask materialise,
and the work isn't done until your opponent has taken you down or pushed you out of the ring. The question is the core issue. Even the answers are questions. The inherent self is what formulates the questions.

In the Studio
Over the last few weeks, I've made a cast of my own head. My original idea was for my head to somehow switch places with the copy, I wanted to position my consciousness inside the plaster head, and let the consciousness of the plaster head take my place. An attempt to experience how I felt as plaster, and how I would experience myself if I were plaster. A transcendence of the ego. I placed the plaster head in front of me, sat down with my eyes closed, and pressed my consciousness against the plaster. For a time, I could experience how the boundaries between my body and space and the plaster head began to dissolve. But when I lost my focus, I automatically shifted back into my body. When I accepted that this action was undoable, I reopened my eyes. The head was right there in front of me, with its eyes closed.

Carl Andre made sculptures that, you're allowed to walk on, or, rather, Carl Andre made sculptures you can walk on. You can walk on them because Andre allows it, but also because the will of the sculptures themselves allows it. The sculptures offer you a place to ask the question from. Don Quixote would have asked, "Where will I find the next adventure?" I would have asked, "What am I when I stand on a sculpture?" Somebody else would have asked, "Why am I allowed to stand on Carl Andre's sculptures?" The exhibition space staff would have answered, "Because it's allowed." But perhaps the most relevant question would have been, "Why can I stand on this sculpture?" And the answer would have been: "Because the inherent self of the material allows it."

The self is always tied to its medium. At the moment when the paint contacts the canvas, it creates a paint self, and in the moment when a key is pressed on the keyboard, it creates a text self. The self is, in this way, independent of the figuration or the underlying intentions: the text self is part of the text, and the paint self is part of the paint. Each medium carries its own materiality, and thus its own history. The artwork makes this self visible. Or rather, it makes the voice of this self visible. The voice that communicates constantly, without limitations, without the influence of time, space, and causality. (An example of this is how an artwork continues to speak to us even when it is no longer present before us. The artwork might usefully be carried around as a memory by the viewer, where the voice carries on speaking —this is how you get truly close to an artwork.) The self of the artwork, in whatever form it is bound to, seems to carry its own you and mainly address itself within an inner space of sorts. It is within the human subject that parts of these inner monologues can be reformulated and granted parallel life. The artist and the viewer have this in common: they both allow this voice to speak to them.

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3 “Doubtless there are deeper roots of humanity’s clinging to the Ptolemaic vision. When Freud speaks of narcissistic wounding in this connection, he is referring to the humiliation of man as flesh and blood, as an empirical individual. But one must go further: it is not only that man in his concrete existence is humbled to find himself nowhere, in the midst of the immensity of the universe; the Copernican revolution is perhaps still more radical in that it suggests that man, even as subject of knowledge, is not the central reference-point of what he knows. No more than they orbit around him do the stars recognize the primacy of man’s knowledge. Conversely, if the Copernican revolution sets in motion an open-ended progress of knowledge (even through crises), it is no doubt because it affirms implicitly that man is in no way the measure of all things, thus the decentering and the infinity of the universe would herald an infinity of knowledge, as well as an epistemological decentering much harder to accept.” Jean Laplanche, “The Unfinished Copernican Revolution,” in Essays on Otherness, ed. John Fletcher (London: Routledge, 1999), 57–58.
5 Gaston Bachelard, The Poetics of Space (Boston: Beacon, 1994), 140.
6 Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” October, no. 9 (Summer 1979), 54.
7 Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Don Quixote de la Mancha (New York: D. Appleton, 1866), 56.
8 Cervantes, Don Quixote, 63.
9 Cervantes, Don Quixote, 64.
10 Jorge Luis Borges, “Pierre Menard, the Author of the Quixote,” in Ficciones (New York: Grove, 1962), 49.
11 Borges, “Pierre Menard,” 52.
14 An entry from my notebook. This is untranslatable, but an English paraphrase could be: “S-E-I-F S: a worm that has slipped off a fish hook. E: a sparse tooth comb. L: a corner. F: half of a key. A monosyllabic verse of metre, an inhabited nest, or a pillow for a resting head.”
Towards the conclusion of Laurence Sterne's novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, the narrator, Tristram, tries to account for the digressive structure of the novel. He illustrates the course of action in the book with a series of lines that zigzag, curl, bulge, and make flourishes. On the very next page, he draws a straight line, a line that follows a writing teacher's ruler: the straight line that, for Christians, is the righteous road; for Archimedes, the shortest distance between two points; for farmers, the optimum line for arranging one's cabbages; and for philosophers, the emblem of moral righteousness.\(^2\)

For Tristram, this straight line describes a useless plan, seeing as life flows forth in a capricious fashion, while thought moves sideways and back and forth. Tristram tries to recall the entire course of his life, from the moment of conception to the moment of writing. He's constantly being interrupted, getting distracted, or feeling restless. His memory moves in explosive fits or circles in on itself. The digressions that rupture a linear narrative boil over with knowledge and wind up becoming the very theme of the book, where postponement and omission drive the reader forward in an obviously engaging way.

Aside from the fact that the present text will, in all likelihood, come to share the bulging lines' course and will leap (maybe abruptly) from one theme to another, Tristram Shandy's life and opinions mean a lot to me, and it is possible to draw certain connecting threads that lead from Sterne's book to my own practice. Penned between 1759 and 1767 and released as a serial publication, *Tristram Shandy* was written during the Enlightenment, an era characterised by rationality, having been influenced by the growing scientific field. An era that was partially shaped by a locus on cause, effect, and logic. An era that could encompass the notion of logically being able to account for the mind as a mechanism.\(^3\)

In addition to Sterne's satirical musings on different philosophers, politicians, and English self-esteem, the novel reflects and exploits a human paradox. This paradox, which becomes comical in the novel, is something that I have experienced as deeply tragic, and Tristram's project has my deepest sympathy.

An object can never be described exhaustively. You can never completely account for a sensory perception. Sterne is conscious that language, in this way, falls short and that he will never be able to determine a reader's response. Nor will he ever be able to determine a picture through language. He waves this realisation before the reader, again and again.

When Sterne makes use, in a certain passage, of a logical mathematical language, where one person's posture comes to be described according to angles and the placement of weight, he is clearly aware that the more precise the language becomes in this aspect, the more abstract becomes the person, who then disappears in a fog of angles and quavers. In this same passage, he pairs this description with a more poetically laden language, which takes hold of the scene from another side. The result is a rather incongruent passage, which elucidates the space that exists between the language and what is being described: the effect elicited here is highly comical, but when lifted from the text, to a wider linguistic perspective, the displacement is exhausting and frustrating.\(^4\)

The passage mentioned above reverberates in one possible reading of Tristram's moment of conception as a satirical comment on what is planned, programmed, and mechanical, as opposed to flighty emotional life.

In the copies of *Book III* printed by Dodsley in 1769, each and every example had an individually mottled page, with the consequence that each and every reader experienced a unique sign or symbol that interrupted the text. The reader was further encouraged to draw their own interpretation of a character on a blank page, that is, was asked to represent their own version. Sterne knew there can be as many readings as there are readers, and he does not claim any rights to a privileged opinion.

Now, I am not interested in advancing an argument advocating a split between the logical/rational on the one side and the intuitive/emotional on the other; rather, my interest lies in Sterne's interrogation of language's relation to reality and in the different juxtapositions of ideas from his time, which play a part in shaping this amazing book.

Before I read *Tristram Shandy*, I made an attempt to put the whole of my
I Grew Up In This House, 2017. Detail. Dimensions variable. Stephan Møller
remembered course of life into written form. A form of authoritative action: claiming the rights to oneself. I wanted to own the rights to all my perceptions, and I was hoping that life would come to appear as a plot with a goal. I believed that I could excavate this through the act of committing my life to paper. Sterne, however, shows that this is impossible: the straight pathway through the forest, Archimedes's straight line, does not exist. An impossible action.

Another author who makes use of various technical aspects of language, juxtaposes ideas from his own day, and who, in certain aspects of his authorship, displays a similar paradox as Sterne, is David Foster Wallace. Both Wallace and Sterne have meant a lot to me, both personally and in my visual art practice.

In Wallace’s posthumously published novel, *The Pale King* (2011), there is a chapter dedicated to the story of a little boy who decides to kiss all the places on his own body. The motivation for doing so is somewhat mystical:

> Insights into or conceptions of his own physical “inaccessibility” to himself (as we are all of us self-inaccessible and can, for example, touch parts of one another in ways that we could not even dream of touching our own bodies) or of his complete determination, apparently, to pierce that veil of inaccessibility—to be, in some childish way, self-contained and sufficient—these were beyond his conscious awareness. He was, after all, just a little boy.³

The chapter in question unfolds in a language that displays great affection for technical, anatomical vocabulary, which is juxtaposed with journalistic accounts of mystical events, especially stigmata. Through the chain of events experienced by the boy, wherein he suffers various injuries and both his physique and his mind undergo changes, his suffering is compared to that of different saints. In addition to manifesting a possible analogy with Tristram’s project (confering meaning on moments of one’s life), Wallace makes use of different linguistic niches. Technical precision is put to use here in relation to the body, which makes the boy more and more abstract to a reader who does not have in-depth anatomical knowledge.

The mystical accounts are communicated journalistically, and the boy’s condition (or project) is contextualised in two ways: the accounts of mystical incidents, which point towards a certain spirituality; and the profoundly technical anatomical account of the boy’s development and injuries.

What is reflected in *Infinite Jest*, the massive novel by Wallace published in 1996, is a world that, in the author’s own words, has been affected by a certain sadness. The book mirrors a fragmented era, where inner reality can be replaced by cynical cliché, where whatever is noble and beautiful about mankind’s efforts can be replaced by temporary pleasure’s release (this summary does not do justice to the book).

In May 1993, Michael Pietsch wrote, after reading the seven hundred-fifty-page long draft of *Infinite Jest*:

> It’s a novel made up of shards, almost as if the story was something broken that someone is picking up the pieces of. ... Occasionally there surfaces through the story an “I” who may be the one trying to put everything together.⁵

Reading *Infinite Jest* had a profound effect on me, and I find myself revisiting this novel and *Tristram Shandy* again and again. The linguistic styles that position different forms of language and that render, through intertextuality and comparison, varying degrees of determination visible in language are elements that, for my own part, I regard as being comparable in many ways to certain aspects of my installation projects. There is often an impulse within me that is coaxed forth into exposure whenever I’m researching a new project. It is this impulse that propelled me to write my autobiography at the age of twelve or thirteen, the impulse that Sterne pokes fun at: the urge to fashion a narrative that makes sense. Ironically enough, just like the boy comes to be for the reader of *The Pale King*, the further I managed to get in making the description, the more and more abstract I became. In one facet of my practice, I try to temporarily generate meaning through different conceptual structures. I see them as burst narratives, which, filled with digressions, assail a reality through the means of different languages and specific objects. Something that both authors mentioned above do in exemplary fashion.

My ways of grabbing hold of a project, the direction of which I have tried to point out and the inspiration for which I have partially disclosed, are specified in this passage taken from *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* by Hal Foster:

> First, [archival art] not only draws on informal archives but also produces them, and does so in a way that underscores the hybrid condition of such materials as found and constructed, factual and fictive, public and private. Then, too, this art often arranges these materials according to a matrix of citation and juxtaposition, and sometimes presents them in an architecture that can be called archival; a complex of text, images and objects.⁷
The way I set up my projects largely falls under Foster’s definition of archival art. My projects often wind up in a complex of text, images, and objects. In Layman’s dilemma, (Why?) Is the Limit (2016), and I Grew Up in This House (2017), I juxtaposed different forms of language, as aspects of the overall narrative, as digressions that the viewer can pick up and maybe piece together and create some form of meaning from.

Pietsch’s description of Infinite Jest captures something that I think is incredibly beautiful, something that runs transverse to context and any particular professional discipline: when an “I” appears, and is picking up and collecting pieces of the world, it shares something that enriches you.

“...i.e. The most positive dadaist...”

The German artist Kurt Schwitters (1887–1948) appears to me to be an “I” who, as in Pietsch’s quote, picks up the pieces of a broken story. In an entirely concrete sense, what Schwitters was piecing together in his collages were different parts that were immediately gathered into an aesthetic sense. Schwitters was living through a turbulent era, and he created works that bear a certain kind of realism, works that convey an aspect of the impulse to gather and to understand a reality and a society that appears to be bent on destroying itself. An impulse to collect fragments of this destruction, and transpose them into something whole. He was part of Dada, a movement that reacted violently to its contemporary time and pitted itself against a culture that showed itself as being capable of triggering the most destructive war in mankind’s history.

This reading of Schwitters’s practice might conceivably be coloured by the many biographical descriptions I have read. But to me, the comparisons that have just been drawn — among Schwitters, Wallace, and Sterne — are more than vague similarities. What can be found in Schwitters’s Merzbau (1923-37) is an almost Shandy-esque obsession: a total installation that is constantly changing, with the result that the objects or “relics” become swallowed up and come to exist as inherent memories. Schwitters called himself a “Merz artist,” and his works, the “Merz paintings” and “Merz drawings,” his studio, and his home, accordingly became, of course, a “Merzbau.” Early on, he came up with this strange little word, which had profound significance for him: “I gave to my new manner of work, based on the use of these materials, the name of Merz. This is the second syllable of KOMMERZ. This name was born out of one of my pictures: an image on which one reads the word MERZ, cut out of the KOMMERZ UND PRIVATBANK advertisement and stuck among abstract shapes.”

Schwitters gathered and stole things from his friends and incorporated them into his installation.

A spatial collage, like a grotto, that grew and swallowed up space, initially inside his apartment in Hanover, from approximately 1923 to 1937. Later on, he fled to Norway and from there to England, where he built a new grotto called Merzbarn. Merzbau was living, and was growing, with new sections and new dedications. A plastic concrete memory with an aesthetic unity, a movement that I read as an example of a temporarily generated and expanded synthetic meaning. Merzbau (or, the story, the documentation, and recreation of it) has, in some ways, been a model for my installations.

Another model is to be found in Hanne Darboven’s gigantic encyclopedic installations. In her Cultural History 1880–1983 (1986), which consists of 1,590 works on paper and nineteen sculptural objects, an archive was created that Hal Foster could have been speaking about in the quotation from earlier. It includes found, private, factual, and public materials. Unlike her other works that are based on calendars, graphs, and other temporal structures, this massive archive reveals no immediate system. As a viewer, you’ve got to move through this complex and discover the various idiosyncratic contexts, narratives, repeating visual patterns, and juxtapositions:

As such Darboven’s materials are situated in a fashion that critically strays from linear notions of temporality, which are traditionally conceived according to the ideologies of predetermined and automatic progress and expressed as monumentalising displays which exude the illusion of permanence and the promise of social innovation. In contrast, Darboven displays material culture according to the Brechtian notion of putting reality on a stage as “hieroglyphic clues” or as fetishistic activity in fossilised form.

Finding oneself inside Darboven’s gigantic installation is tantamount to finding oneself in a particular gaze or a certain attitude. I was placed in a certain mood while the installation revealed more and more of its internal connections:

These oppositional elements are brought together in a manner that alternately suggests the retrospective context of self-summation and an enterprise of historical reflection in a broader sense. ... In my opinion this competition allows the work to do what it was designed to do: to make unexpected connections among, for example (in a German magazine article), meat workers, slave figurines and a baker and a doctor in white uniforms.
All elements can contribute to a new meaning, or can be added to a discourse that is continuously being formed through the installation. Through the staging, through the fixation, what art historian Dan Adler calls a “semantic levelling effect” is established; the effect that, as a consequence, creates a discursive foundation, wherein all parts potentially generate meaning. Seeing Darboven’s installation has greatly influenced my inclination to form meaning through my installations; it has affected the way I work.

One can presumably sense that my projects always start out, much like this essay does, with some kind of reading. Reading is a part of my practice, as is writing. In some projects, this is not so distinct and might be more indirect, but in any case, the projects have almost always started out with some form of text-based research. When I read what Albert Mertz writes about Asger Jorn, I can sense that what Mertz is saying is also suggestive of my projects: “but also because he understood that visual art does not come into being out of thin air but is rather an offshoot of—and a consequence of—the artist’s contact with other areas of thought.”
Perhaps I am relating this to my practice in a way that’s more concrete than is beneficial, but I often include other areas of thought directly in my finished projects.

A Standpoint
“Give me a place to stand and with a lever I will move the whole world.” —Archimedes

It is a delightful feeling of happiness, every now and then, to become engaged in an activity that is so inane and absurd that there’s no other purpose to it than, precisely, that it is inane and absurd. This can be a means towards a kind of provisional freedom. When I spent a weekend with my two-year-old nephew, Herman, I discovered that one of the greatest things about being with him and his parents is our shared ability to take part in absurd activities, together.

We can invent games like “death-rod tennis” or call all the animals that we meet on a walk “Smaug,” and of course, we enunciate this name with great empathy and drama, so that all dog owners look nervously at us and cross over to the other side of the street. In this way, an otherwise very boring morning can turn into an amusing game.

When I play with Herman, here is what we sometimes do: We invented a game that makes a toy—or whatever we decide is a toy—relevant. We create a system where whatever is at hand fits in, in an invented logical way. A book suddenly becomes a flapping machine that can land unfolded, on its head, with its wings folded out or can blow air into somebody’s face. It can also eat cars and small dinosaurs, and when it turns itself back into a book again, the only possible way to read from it aloud is “etto etto etto ettoo” (one-two, one-two, one-two, one-twooo). Me and Herman’s Dadaist capturing of the world.

However, there are limits to what the chosen object can do. In order for the game to be sustained, the book cannot transgress the limits set by the condition we have assigned. This game is dependent on a form of associations that have their own inherent logic, which transform the “book” into something living, that has to eat, a composite conception where one meaning becomes paired with another.

Often, the spectrum is defined in terms of placing “learning” and “work” at one extreme pole and placing “play” in the contrary position.

Now I’ve chosen a line and a direction for my essay, where I am again and again dipping my foot in this dualism; though I do not really think it is particularly productive to think of this as a dualism at all. From my point of view, the difference between artistic activity and scientific activity is, fundamentally, not particularly great, and not at all such that they should be placed at their respective opposing poles. With respect for the differences that there are, I am aware that this will appear to be a superficial rumination, which it very well may be. Nevertheless, it is curiously relevant to the direction that my practice has taken, since I have been incorporating my fictional texts into my visual arts practice to have an opinion about this distinction. In a way, it’s a bit ironic that whenever I incorporate some subjective literary material, I refer more and more to a factually defined professional content. In many ways, the methodological differences are also exciting to think about: how one, working within one context, is supposed to formulate reproducible general results, whereas, when working in another context, one enjoys the opportunity to present the most individualised subjective experience. I do not want to argue for the placement of an “equal” sign between art and play, and I am not interested in positioning one activity relative to another: what I do want to point out here is that, for me, the game I play with my nephew is very much about systematics. A form of systematics that I see mirrored in my projects. The properties that we instil into a toy lead logically on to the next one and define a field of activity in our game. In this way, we paint a context, which it is our task to fit in. Art is, in many ways, an opportunity for me. Within art, I can establish fields of activity, and I can work with a systematics that can take the liberty of being slightly absurd. In art, a book can eat!

Between the factual and the fictive, there is a narrow intermediate space into which I am trying to wedge my practice. A difference that comes to light in the language when one tries, precisely, to define something: the difference there is in one person’s amygdala and the formulation of the amygdala’s mathematical proportions. This is the interval between a poetic and a factual description, where they both, in a certain way, could exchange places. Here, it is possible for me to pick something up and piece it together with something else. It is a form of absurd systematics that would readily wind up in a proposal.

Perhaps there is an inherent appetite for knowledge within us that drives us forward in a favourably curious way, an appetite that I believe (and maybe hope) is not propelled by angst, and I agree with Albert Mertz when he defines art as a field of investigations.

In the game I play with Herman, we exploit language’s possibilities for defining something falsely. A book cannot eat, but we defined it as though it could. Sterne exploited the impossibility of ensnaring a life in a linguistic narrative. There is a preliminary condition for everything
that we do, which Wittgenstein helped Wallace to talk about.

In one interview, Wallace talks about W's (as Wallace liked to call Wittgenstein) tragic fall, about how the early Wittgenstein's conclusions consequently write off the validity of your experiences in relation to mine and postulate, furthermore, that the reality of “you” depends on my subjective experience, and perhaps only this, and postulate still further that everybody other than myself does not exist. Later on, Wittgenstein turned his back on these conclusions and drew new and revised ones, which render it more difficult for solipsism to appear genuine; this is something that led Wallace to call him a “real artist.”

I would like to lean up against a description of Wittgenstein made by Wallace, because I have arrived at a point where I cannot talk about method anymore but feel a need to fight back the fear of descending into cliché, and I readily admit that much of the present text revolves around an intention towards—and a hope for the relationship with—the viewer. I’ve also feared solipsism:

There's a kind of tragic fall Wittgenstein's obsessed with all the way from the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus in 1922 to the philosophical investigations in his last years. I mean a real book-of-genesis-type tragic fall. The loss of the whole external world. The Tractatus's picture theory of meaning presumes that the only possible relation between language and the world is denotative, referential. If you buy such a metaphysical schism, you're left with only two options. One is that the individual person with her language is trapped in here, with the world out there, and never the twain shall meet. Which, even if you think language's pictures really are mimetic, is an awful lonely proposition. And there's no iron guarantee the pictures truly “are” mimetic, which means you're looking at solipsism. One of the things that makes Wittgenstein a real artist to me is that he realized that no conclusion could be more horrible than solipsism. And so he trashed everything he'd been lauded for in the Tractatus and wrote the Investigations, which is the single most comprehensive and beautiful argument against solipsism that's ever been made. Wittgenstein argues that for language even to be possible, it must always be a function of relationships between persons. So he makes language dependent on human community, but unfortunately we're still stuck with the idea that there is this world of referents out there that we can never really join or know because we're stuck in here, in language, even if we're at least all in here together. Oh yeah, the other original option is to expand the linguistic subject. Expand the self.

While I have been writing this text, this section from Albert Mertz's text “A.M OM A.M” (1984) has constantly been echoing in the back of my mind, and maybe the choice of references owes more to a wish formulated by this particular quote than it does to pure relevance:

But the very act of writing about oneself—that's not something one can just do? ... The only thing one can do is to attempt to come up with an explanation for the way one has been working as one has, about what the starting point and the intention have been, and then hope that such an account will make it possible for the viewer to gain a more spacious insight into one's work.

A large part of Wallace's authorship is influenced by a sense of dread about the impossibility of meaningful interhuman relationships. He is often described as a cerebral writer who was so scared of submitting to cliché that he didn't dare touch emotions in his characters. But to me, he's just the opposite: so afraid that human interaction will wither away that he dedicates a large part of his project to fighting against solipsism, which he regards as a genuine preliminary condition in postmodern society. Wallace and Sterne have helped me to formulate aspects about my practice, as many other artists have helped me in formulating all kinds of other things, and here, I want to point back to the Pietsch quote about Infinite Jest, which I believe is a very fervent one.
“I am now beginning to get fairly into my work; and by the help of a vegetable diet, with a few of the cold seeds, I make no doubt but shall be able to go on with my uncle Toby's story, and my own, in a tolerable straight line. Now,” Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 1999), 318. First published 1767.


Albert Mertz, *Døren er åben* [The door is open] (København: emancipa (t/ss)ionsfrugten, 2013), 10.

Peter Theilst, *Det Sande* [The true] (Frederiksberg: Det lille forlag, 1999), 38. Here, Peter Thielst is using a quote from Archimedes found in Diodorus Siculus: *Library of History*, Volume IX.

When I read this passage, I laughed out loud because I believe it shares a form of comic effect with passages in *Tristram Shandy*. With all due respect for the rather dramatic break from contextual coherence, it stands as a fine example of how the precise description of something like the human amygdala can have a profound comic effect:

“One widely accepted description has been provided by a 2005 histological study of brains by Amunts et al. Their study took several factors into consideration for a better quantification, following the equation: \( V = s \times T \times x \times y \times \sum A_i \times F \), where \( V \) is the volume of the cortical region (mm\(^3\)); \( s \) the distance between two measured amygdala sections; \( T \) the thickness of a histological section (0.020 mm); \( x \) and \( y \) are the width and height of a pixel (0.02116 mm.); \( \sum A_i \) is the sum of areas across sections; and \( F \) constitutes the individual shrinkage factor. Following this equation, the left amygdala showed an average volume of 1536 ± 286 mm\(^3\) and the total right amygdala, 1506 ± 272 mm\(^3\).” Eugenia Solano-Castiella, *In Vivo Anatomical Segmentation of the Human Amygdala and Parcellation of Emotional Processing* (Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Human Cognitive and Brain Sciences, 2011), 135.

There are conflicting views on how to interpret the remarks on solipsism in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Wallace’s reading of the *Tractatus* may be overemphasising the importance of solipsism in the work, but it serves as an example of how Wallace has influenced my thoughts about intentions and starting points for projects (my foundation, so to speak), and, moreover, how Wallace has influenced my readings of Wittgenstein. In the present text, I have referred to solipsism a number of times, and have done so in a generalised and impoverished way. The term “solipsism” is deserving of space and time that are not available here, as it is a complex notion with an interesting history.


Carolina Sandvik

Slow Motions

In his study, my grandfather keeps a model of his parental home, as it looked back in the '30s. As a child, I would stare at it and the other faithfully rendered models of real places and houses in wide-eyed awe whenever I saw them in their carefully selected positions in his home and in various other locations around the town. In a serious voice, and in great detail, my grandfather would explain about the intricate tricks he used to create some component or other while I studied all the little trees, roof tiles, and lights. Everything done impeccably to scale. I was beside myself with joy when I was told he would help me create my own miniature landscape. Unlike his meticulous replicas of real places, I wanted to create an original dinosaur landscape of my very own. This was an undertaking that merited the utmost sincerity, far removed as it was from the various imaginative little homes, made from stones and moss, that would expand at a violent pace at the edge of the woods, spilling onto the gravel path and making it impossible to park a car there. I got to work with a determined, rational enthusiasm, and when the result of my efforts was ready to be viewed some time later, I was quite satisfied, even though I did feel that my creation looked hopelessly childish in comparison with my grandfather’s. The green was a little too green, and the styrofoam hills were not as gracefully carved. But all the same, it was certainly an accomplishment.

Many years later, I would return to these miniature worlds, although with a far less respectful attitude, nothing like the pedantic focus that had reigned in my grandfather’s workshop. I discovered a way to combine cinematic storytelling with sculptural craft in clay animation. It would be far too much to call what followed an instant love affair, but I took a strange satisfaction in having taken on a very tangible challenge, an almost embarrassing sense of achievement. This was something wild and alien, something that was already a little removed from me, and which moved whenever I gave it a gentle poke.

You can learn most of what there is to know about life from film. Film claims that life is a story to be told and that you can chart the dramatic progression of events along a plotted curve. It analyses its way to a logic that elevates itself above the formless chaos. In film, time isn’t infinite; it is limited, in both its factual and its fictive aspects. Phenomena can be evaluated and sorted by function. Events have to take place in order for one thing to lead to another. The life-changing forward motion is initiated, and even if its nature does shift, it remains goal-oriented, loyally sticking with the plan regardless of whether it intends to present a melodrama, an alien invasion, or a heart-warming drama providing live-affirming insight into the nature of things. Film frees life from its indifferent randomness and insists that all actions are meaningful. It enthusiastically claims that every experience is a good experience. What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger. It begins here, it ends here. In the presence of a creator, or a god, everything seems, if not quite understandable, then at least necessary.

“My craft involves taking the viewer by the hand and seeing how close to the edge of the abyss I can get him to go. To what extent I can eliminate the story, and still have him experience it as reality,” says Lars von Trier. The creation of stories is more or less dependent on the ability to engender trust and manipulate the viewer. The moving image is an effective medium, which, perhaps more than any other, attracts attention in a fully natural way, by virtue of its mere existence. Structure and narrative are best regarded as mathematical, and because of this, they are involved in a fine-tuned play between the nonsensical and the deadly serious. The part that catches the filmmaker’s interest is how a story is told. What it tells is, to some extent, a secondary matter. The film becomes a game that you play with the audience, who agree to be seduced, affected, and misled. As long as you can hold the audience by the hand, you can keep slowly raising the temperature. How far can you take something before it will be perceived as unsophisticated and sensationalistic, or even immoral?

The particular attraction that clay animation holds probably resides in its romantic analogue quality, which heightens its materiality. It seems to express something primal and primitive under a sheen of nostalgia. The inevitably strained expression bears witness to the work that goes into creating the movement. There is a literal weight to it that produces a far more somatic experience in me as a viewer than CGI, for example. In anything from the monster in King Kong (1933)? which is adorable by today’s standards, to Jan Švankmajer’s visceral surrealism, to Nathalie Djurberg’s burlesque reflections of society, you always sense the presence of a human hand. This human touch adds a lopsidedness, which reminds me of and draws my attention to my own body. Clay animation has an immediate appeal that is deceptively accessible, something that attracts you to it with an instant sense of wonder. Something enchantingly
grotesque lurks within the contrast between the cute and the deformed. This is highly present in the works of Djurberg. The childish expression automatically brings along a kind of comedy, and all of this combines to produce a shaky, anxious balancing act between levity and discomfort.

Since the aesthetic of animation can be warped until it is far removed from any naturalistic appearance and, to put it mildly, violates the laws of physics, a kind of moral free zone is established in which the most brutal and sadistic desires can be given free reign. The violence is all make-believe. Not even the nudity is real. It’s like artificially grown meat, a treat to be relished in the absence of any pangs of conscience. Stop-motion offers a way to study movement in minute detail, but to me it’s less a method for understanding what the world is like than a method for feeling like a participant in the world. Paradoxically enough, my practice revolves mainly around working in isolation, and spending most of my waking hours in total separation from the world around me, for days or even months on end. So, it seems fair to wonder which world it is I’m actually taking part in.

Djurberg doesn’t like to elaborate on her films too much, and when I see them, I’m not primarily interested in her as their creator, because the films themselves have such an immediate impact on me as a viewer. I share that restrictiveness when it comes to discussing my own artistic work. I get the impression that she, like myself, mostly thinks of these discussions as necessary evils, and that what really matters is the intense work in the studio. This is, first and foremost, a job, something to approach from a results-oriented and disciplined mind set. Animating is an attempt to gain manual control of something while remaining aware of the fact that complete control is, and should be, impossible. It is a constant juggling of cleverness and liberation. An exhausting struggle between chaos and discipline.

In my studio, I have something to hold on to, matter that won’t slip through my fingers, something to confirm my existence and stand next to me on the ground.

There is a distinct stability to flesh. Fragile, but very much present. The body, with all its inherent rules, possibilities, and impossibilities, does not extend infinitely or deliberately over which way to go next. It is a rugged and clearly delimited entity, a precisely carved statue of bone, fat, and muscle. For all its vulnerability, it follows a predetermined path through rise and decline, and time moves painfully quickly for mortals.

Each pitiful human being arrives in the world without a script, left to the mercy of their own amateurish decisions. In a creative process, instead, I can have my decisions affect others—fictional others. As an active, social being, I can pause, refuse to contribute, or to speak, or to act, and choose instead to channel all my power into the creation of fiction. Humanoid or animal bodies take shape and are equipped with a variety of characteristics and accessories, constituting a Noah’s ark of my favourite things. I hand out restrictions. There are rules to follow here. Rules for everybody. I can make the whole world dance to my tune. As long as I don’t leave the studio.

Inside this artificial free zone, I manage to convince myself that I’m doing something meaningful. I produce meaning by solving problems of my own invention. I dance around, putting out fires inside my own self-sufficient ecosystem. If I just subject myself to the work, I will be able to breathe out afterwards. So, I hold my breath and focus my gaze, preparing myself for a state of temporary ennui and absolute intellectual emptiness. Reality contacts, shrinks, and complies. Stripped down, naked, it is sucked into the rectangular frame, where it allows itself to be viewed for a moment, as if through a magnifying glass. Each colour, each speck of dust or hair, will reveal itself, in a moment of concentrated clarity. I will summon the illusion of motion; motion that is not quite mine, but almost. Being responsible, if not entirely, I possess the ability to make bodies move. I can make anything move. As long as I don’t leave my studio.

During the mechanical, monotonous work, my body makes itself known, a familiar shudder that eventually turns into pain. A vibrating sense of absolute presence, neither good nor evil, merely acknowledged. Sore knees, cold feet, numb feet, maintaining unnatural postures for prolonged periods of time, an eye tearing up from hours of staring at a needle as it moves along a measuring rod. A shaking hand. My hand is far too big. A drop in my blood sugar level. Blood on my fingers. Blood on the set. Coffee on the set. Sugary stickiness on all the wires. Warm lights, plastic melting, minor burns. I fumble around, hissing to myself, half-speaking. I try to bend and stretch my figures into uncomfortable poses and wish they were real people, who are easier to shape. But real people are as large as me, usually larger.

In some of his films, artist Reynolds uses stop-motion animation with actors who perform at an extremely slow pace to produce a choppy animated effect. People and objects are treated equally, as things to be put into motion, and granted life on equal terms. It’s a roundabout way of doing things, but this detour is an end in itself. The camera acts as a magnifying glass, a catalyst of events. The microcosm only comes alive when you direct your gaze at it. A tiny object looks very large through the lens of the camera. In Reynolds’s films, the camera might linger on a decomposing fish or a plant that may
seem immobile to the naked eye, but can still act out a strikingly vivid drama through the use of time-lapse technology. This breathless moment contrasts with the process itself, which is slow and calculating.

In the animated world, the line between life and death is not fixed. The very essence of animation is to grant mobility to the immobile. Life and death are arbitrary states. Everything is possible, nothing is definite, and not even death is an ending. Perhaps this is because of an inability, or a refusal, to accept the ending as a phenomenon. Beginnings are simple, because anything at all could serve as a starting point. But what is an ending? An ending says what is an ending? An ending says violent forces of nature cut down vivid drama through the use of time-lapse technology. This breathless lapse technology. This breathless moment contrasts with the process itself, which is slow and calculating. Have to live, have to die. When this phase grows all too paralysing, it is more likely to be expressed as the fear that whatever has been good or tolerable in the past is about to collapse. This is a fear that keeps demanding your attention, and which you can always find justification for if you look hard enough. Perhaps the apocalypse is already underway? Surely what we’re hearing right now are the dying gasps of the world? We’re hurtling towards the abyss, and however true it may be that some of us are doing so in our tap-dance shoes, the inevitability of the end is an absolute certainty.

A fully natural, logical, and not at all unique fear of death and decay brings me to force my characters into eternal loops. They are rarely free, and they all seem to inhabit some more or less limited space. Their undoing is breathing down their necks, but not even being undone would properly tie up all of their loose ends. They are restless Nosferatu-like beings, with no pure-hearted virgin to lure them into the light to be destroyed for their own, and everyone else’s, best interest.

They are silent. I shudder at the thought of what they would say if they had the chance. They would probably yelp miserably, in pathetic voices that would disappoint everybody who listened, just like when the true singing voice of the silent movie actress Lina Lamont is brutally revealed in Singin’ in the Rain (1952).

Behind the scenes, of course, she’s an old-school shrew, but as long as none of that comes to light, appearances can be kept up. Remaining silent is so much more dignified. As long as you're silent, your potential for complexity is unlimited. The non-verbal world is a luxury to afford yourself as an artist. This world is made of flesh, matter, and function. It’s not quiet, but it is wordless. It’s also a world seeped in an indefinable sadness, indefinable perhaps because of how all-encompassing it is. It mourns the transient. The irreversible loss. Life and memory slip away, become diluted, and disappear, for the simple reason that this is the nature of life and memory. Consciousness appears fragile, as though held together by thin threads that have, miraculously, not yet snapped. In states of extreme fatigue, the gradual dissolution of a thought can appear clearly and distinctly to your inner eye. It is literally disassembled, piece by piece, as though its various components were physical objects that could be put together and taken apart, like IKEA furniture. This is probably something that happens at lightning speed, but in the borderlands between sleep and wakefulness, our ordinary concept of time is lost and our thoughts resemble films being played back in reverse, in slow motion, until they are completely gone, leaving nothing behind but the certainty that something has been lost. I fall backwards into soft darkness.

The inexorable loss of memories seems to me to be a prominent theme in Jonas Dahlberg’s video piece Three Rooms (2008). The camera records the gradual disintegration of objects in a room until the room is completely empty. Everything crumbles, but slowly enough to make the process seem beautiful rather than violent. This experiment with time and motion reminds me of the logic of dreams, where everything is in a constant state of flux. There is no single moment where anything happens. Instead, everything is part of a slow chain of invisible movements. Film is all individual frames. It’s not magical, but it is romantic. Dahlberg’s miniatures are almost perfect illusions, and they are desolately vacant. The spaces do all of the acting. This turns the viewer into a participant, who is alone in these dim milieus, moving as if in a dream, in time with the swaying of the camera. The slow tracking shots are like a restrained celebration of the set. This isn’t just a matter of watching, it is a matter of watching for a long time. That’s why I could never work without the camera. It locks the viewer down, ideally without allowing them to break free. As a creator of narrative moving pictures, I think that I will always be striving
Violence as entertainment is a tried-and-true phenomenon that has been hugely popular since the dawn of time. It has been a savoury and appreciated spice in civilisations boiling with hard-earned dignity and bloodlust. Film has been able to channel the darkest of fantasies in a more or less harmless way. Horror film as a concept is perhaps, on paper, the simplest of all genres, if you think of it as primarily fulfilling its purpose by provoking discomfort and fear in the viewer. It is free to shamelessly disregard any plot holes or lacking character development. Most of all, it never needs to worry about unmotivated violence, as that is actually a virtue under the standards by which it is judged.

I am prepared to generalise and say that horror film is an attempt to stimulate a desire, making the genre’s dramatic structure similar to that of pornography. It touches on something universal and timeless in its repetitive slaughtering of fictional bodies, which offers equal parts fascination and revulsion and, importantly, the tickling experience of fear in a controlled setting. Horror film deals with both the familiar and the surprising. A twist is the rule rather than the exception these days. In order to truly startle the audience, you need to turn something up higher each time, or twist it just a little. Long before the surprise consisted in the amount of graphic violence one was willing to show, Hitchcock shocked the audience by killing the protagonist a third of the way through Psycho (1960). In doing this, he broke with all conventions that had applied up until that point. This was a transgression that gave both an unexpected fright and a playful wink to the audience, making them immediately aware of the mechanics of film.

In my work producing Dreams from the Ocean (2017), I’ve extracted the core components of the tropes and aesthetics of the horror genre. The story has been pared down as much as possible, to the point where there is no longer any hint of a plot, in the traditional sense of the word. Everything but the escalation and the eventual murder is irrelevant.

Dario Argento’s murder scenes, and their hyperstylised expression, are obvious examples of the extent to which violence and death can be fetishised in film. As this genre tends to be far from realistic, it can be enjoyed without any excessive discomfort, instead giving rise to a sense of admiration for the creative slayings and the clever composition of the images. Thick, bright-red blood, beautiful women, and weapons that glisten in the dark. The director himself often stood in for the killer when all that was shown on screen was the villain’s characteristic gloved hands, thereby giving himself the privilege of dispatching these attractive ladies. A deranged or psychopathic mind, whose physical presence is half-concealed and secretly masked, as opposed to the vulnerable, sexualised bodies that appear in so many crime stories, thrillers, and horror stories.

I have my chosen victim walk through her home, from room to room, being reborn over and over—an attribute we often find in the classic slasher killer, in part because there can be no sequel unless he rises again, but also because he is a manifestation of something immortal. The monster can never die, that is part of its nature. However, this killer never needs to go to all that trouble, as he never even comes close to being killed himself. This secretive shade makes his entrances at the precise moments when you most expect. He is much less visible than his co-star, but his weapons are highly prominent, constituting as they do his claim to existence. This masked assailant, with his black hands and his array of weaponry, comes across as a voyeur, the faceless subject of the pornographic gaze.

The female protagonist is made to compulsively relive the repeated violence, stuck in a repetitive world that is constantly reclaiming itself. The woman on the television looks suspiciously similar to her. The walls are hung with pictures of animals and birds, and if you look closer, you can see that they have all been more or less expertly stuffed. Like the protagonist, they are frozen in a state of unnatural imitation. The living dead, acting out a macabre play. This heroine is no von Trierian self-sacrificing woman with a heart of gold. She’s not a character in the sense of having some personality and backstory. She’s an instrument,
a stereotype, nothing but a doll pretending to be an actress pretending to be a murder victim. Perhaps she attracts a certain sympathy, because of her human face and the fact that she bleeds when she is cut. She is the ghost of so many previous characters, reduced to their simplest form, forced to play out her role in an almost ritual fashion. She’s not a woman; she’s a make-believe woman, a screaming fantasy. A symbol in a nightgown and a wig, with a cat and an empty home, who drinks, smokes, gets undressed, and then gets dressed again.

This is what exists; everything beyond it is negligible. Outside the house there is only dark wilderness. What goes on inside the house may be terrifying, but at least it follows a pattern. The rooms are homey and inviting. The darkness outside might be much more menacing than what happens inside the walls, because you can’t rule out the possibility that what is out there is a vast, formless emptiness, a black nothing that might swallow you up. What we’re seeing is not some fragment of a larger reality. It’s not a snapshot of a never-ending story. What we’re seeing is all there to see.

I realise that the stories that strike me as the most successful tend to be those that take place in a closed universe, which can still seem coherent in all its exaggeration. Reality is best described through distortion. In his films \textit{Burn} (2002)\textsuperscript{9} and \textit{Drowning Room} (2000),\textsuperscript{10} which take place in houses or flats that are on fire or completely submerged in water, Reynold Reynolds has created entire worlds that somehow manage to block themselves off from everything outside them. These claustrophobic environments serve as parallel realities, in which anything at all might seem normal. They’re not escapism, they’re something else entirely, more like blasphemous reflections of what we call reality. They could take place in some post-apocalyptic dimension, where humans are both victims and offenders, desperately clinging to their own dignity. It seems to me that there is something incredibly attractive about this depiction of states that seem to be teetering on the brink, where there is some ambiguity as to whether there is even anything left to hope for, or whether all that remains is to spend your last trembling hours in a state of surrender, or even indulging in degeneration and embracing your time of reckoning.

The discovery—or rather, the invention of a language that offers escapism and spectacle while seeming to remain deeply anchored in something as vague as the universal human experience—is something I’d like to witness, and possibly strive for.

I consider my work to be finished when I can regard what I’ve done as something obvious. It’s as though I were trying to depict something and was satisfied once the resemblance seemed strong enough. I’m not going to question it any more than I can question my own existence. The only agenda I can discern is to further my own entertainment, with some degree of hope that I’m not the only person who will be entertained. When I look at what I’ve done, it’s completely different than the idea I started out with. The experience of something big being transformed into something material and clear by my own coarse hands. I look at my cephalopod, and think to myself that it’s not too bad. This transformation allows me to study the results with some degree of fascination; a small, unpredictable churning with caricaturesque features. It seems to have shed its skin, ignoring its origins. It’s like regarding that dissolving thought again. I seem to have forgotten something. It might not have been important. What I’m seeing is familiar enough to remain lovable, and exotic enough to seem exciting. It’s as though I had asked a monkey or a child to make a self-portrait. The product, which I can only look at, and no longer attempt to influence or communicate with, seems extreme to me, almost alien. It fills me with elation, because it represents a successful escape from myself. The story goes on and on, hunting for its ending. A treacherous experience of moving forward.

Further references


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\text{Broken Mirrors/Broken Minds: The Dark Dreams of Dario Argento (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 242.}

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\text{King Kong, feature film, directed by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B Schoedsack (USA: RKO Radio Pictures, 1933).}

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\text{Jonas Dahlberg, \textit{Three Rooms}, 2008, three channel installation, HD video, 26:58 min. loop.}

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\text{Psycho, feature film, directed by Alfred Hitchcock (USA: Shamley Productions, 1960).}

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\text{Reynold Reynolds and Patrick Jolley, \textit{Burn}, 2002, HD video transferred from 16 mm, 10 min.}

\text{Carolina Sandvik, 2008, three-channel installation, HD video, 26:58 min. loop.}

\text{Lars von Trier and Patrick Jolley, \textit{Movie Partners In Motion Film, 2011).}
Scry Baby Scry, 2017. Still image. HD video, 23:30 min. Ernst Skoog
Ernst Skoog

The Importance of Storytelling and Scavenging

My artistic practice begins and ends with the story. Taking the story as my opening, I try to use the language of art to portray and create narratives. Stories where the line between fiction and reality is blurred and where there is no line between storyteller and listener.

In 2006, the book *1001 Movies You Must See Before You Die* was published. This chronological inventory of cinematic history lists the movies that are a must-see for various reasons. The book was given to me and my brothers for Christmas, and we started going through the movies chronologically, together and on our own. It was my initiation to film as an artistic language, but above all an introduction to visual storytelling. Storytelling is a concept that can be associated to most artistic media with some form of narrative, including literature, drama, music, film, and visual arts. In this text, I will focus on the concept of storytelling as a tool for freely exploring and developing my artistic practice, where stories are the protagonist.

I use storytelling as a matrix that I impose on my practice. I draw the outlines of the shape in order to then move freely inside and outside these contours. Applying the storytelling format to my practice, with a structure that has inherent characteristics, creates a surface that I can reflect myself in and relate to. The reflection that arises enables a self-awareness that clarifies the differences and similarities between the concept of storytelling and my practice, which I can then relate to. In other words, storytelling could be defined as a technique for exploring and developing my artistic narrations.

Storytelling requires the storyteller to relate to the surrounding world, in order to retell and use it in stories. It is in relation to the surrounding...
Scry Baby Scry, 2017. Still image. HD video, 23:30 min. Ernst Skoog
world and my curiosity about it that the need to tell stories arises. Art has become a way to relate to my surroundings and myself, and the artistic language enables me to portray my relation to it.

I fantasise about art as a ritual, a ritual where the story allows the listener to enter a state where fiction and reality are no longer necessarily separated, and where the rules of the game can remain unwritten. A situation where it is not the storyteller’s duty to explain or fill in the gaps in the story with explanations and meaning, but a situation where this is left to the receiver and listener. In “The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov,” Walter Benjamin defines the concept of storytelling and clarifies the difference between information and story:

Every morning brings us the news of the globe, and yet we are poor in noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it.  

As Benjamin mentions above, storytelling is not about filling the story with explanation. By applying a format in my practice that intentionally allows the viewer’s own perception to fill in the contours of my art, a dialogue arises. The relationship between viewer, work, and originator is necessary and becomes the work’s virtual format. Umberto Eco explains the relationship between storyteller and listener as follows:

The poetics of the “work in movement” (and partly that of the “open” work) sets in motion a new cycle of relations between the artist and his audience, a new mechanics of aesthetic perception, a different status for the artistic product in contemporary society. It opens a new page in sociology and in pedagogy, as well as a new chapter in the history of art. It poses new practical problems by organising new communicative situations. In short, it installs a new relationship between the contemplation and the utilisation of a work of art.3

Thus, according to Eco, it is through the open format of the work that the work expands, that it is the story’s recipients who create it and fill in the blanks according to themselves and their own experiences. In Mette Edvardsen’s performance *Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine* (2010–17), a memorised book is read to listeners by an actor. This is how Edvardsen describes the actor’s process: “To memorise a book, or more poetically ‘to learn a book by heart’, is in a way a rewriting of that book. In the process of memorising, the reader for a moment steps into the place of the writer, or rather he/she is becoming the book.”4 Edvardsen describes a process where our own experience, in this case our cognitive memory, manifests itself and begins to fill in the fragmentary contours. The story is then retold to a listener, and the memory process is repeated. A similar process is what I seek in my artistic practice. A story where the collective and subjective memories play a key role in how the story evolves and develops in the listener. In an interview, the author W. G. Sebald described memory in this way: “Memory, even if you repress it, will come back at you and it will shape your life. Without memories there wouldn’t be any writing; the specific weight an image or phrase needs to get across to the reader can only come from things remembered—not from yesterday but from a long time ago.”

II

“Everything that the big city threw away, everything it lost, everything it despised, everything it crushed underfoot, he catalogues and collects. He collates the annals of intemperance, the ephahnaum (stockpile) of waste. He sorts things out and makes a wise choice; he collects, like a miser guarding a treasure, the refuse which will assume the shape of useful or gratifying objects between the jaws of the goddess of industry.” —Charles Baudelaire⁵

There is a famous photograph by Eugène Atget titled *Chiffonier* (1899–1901). It shows a man hunched forward and pulling a heavy cart that is stacked high with sacks of cloth. A *chiffonier* is a person who makes a living collecting refuse from the streets and selling it on to be recycled. The English equivalent would be a rag-and-bone man or ragpicker.⁶ My work and process are not that different to those of a *chiffonier*, a constant collecting of material through which observations and objects are gathered and stored to perhaps be used in my practice. In my search for objects, as in storytelling, a relationship is established to the surroundings in which I move.

This collecting does not necessarily involve a physical collecting, where I move between actual places; it...
can also be a mental process, where I move between then and now, the imaginary and the real. In The Exform, Nicolas Bourriaud refers to a historical materialism and draws parallels between the chiffonier and Benjamin’s writing: “The materialist historian picks up fallen memories in the form of quotations; for Benjamin, they are so many photographs of the past—what we would now call readymades or found objects.” He continues:

If one follows Benjamin’s lead, History provides the stuff of art in a form that necessarily proves accidental. The photographs of the past employed by the artist (and the materialist historian) belong either to the world of the conquered—that is, they are mutilated or buried—or to the reigning ideological sphere. The full significance of the universe of the dysfunctional—rejected ideas, objects that have been cast off, and degraded ways of living—appears only to an aleatory vision of History affirming that everything could have happened differently.

What Bourriaud describes here is going back in time and exploring ideas and thoughts that can then be applied in a contemporary and artistic context. In the same way the quote describes, I want to permit my practice to examine and explore our history, which in turn entails the potential to create a non-linear way of thinking, where the path from A to B is allowed to take detours. Collecting enables me as an artist to explore an approach to the concept where the past, present, and future are allowed to reformulate each other and to adopt a new, timeless format.

It is impossible for me to discuss collecting without reverting briefly to memory. As mentioned, my process involves collecting a vast amount of disparate material, but in order to organise the material I need to categorise it. One way of doing this is to examine how the material is linked to memory. To start with, memory can be divided into two categories: subjective and collective memory. When I then begin to combine different materials in my stories, the third and final type arises: fragmentary memory. In fragmentary memory, we find traces from subjective and collective memory, but when they are combined, gaps arise that generate a transient form, a puzzle where some pieces are missing. The video work The Third Memory (2000) exemplifies my ideas on fragmentary memory. Here, Pierre Huyghe combines the real bank robber John Wojtowicz’s memory with a collective memory based on Sidney Lumet’s film Dog Day Afternoon from 1975. When the subjective and collective memories are combined, a third, fragmentary memory arises. Art allows me to explore and use this fragmentary memory by collecting and putting together what I find and see into new combinations and contexts.

In his description of the chiffonier, Charles Baudelaire refers to industry, conjuring a very vivid image in which I see factories spewing out their products. Material production is relevant to my collecting, but I relate primarily to the flow and production of information. It is impossible not to feel lost and become paralysed by the infinite (at the time of writing, three browser windows are open, along with a total of six-eight tabs). By collecting, I try to relate and create a method for collecting the assets that the machinery leaves behind, to salvage and preserve them. In Agnès Varda’s documentary Les Glaneurs et la glaneuse (2000), people go around collecting the crops that the harvesters leave behind in the fields. In Zapatos Magnéticos (1994), Francis Alÿs walked through the city of Havana wearing a pair of magnetic shoes. The shoes created a magnetic field that attracted various metal objects on his walks, including coins, screws and other scraps. Like the people in Varda’s film and like Alÿs’s shoes, I follow in the wake of a tsunami of information. I collect material that was left behind or disappeared in the chaos, things that were forgotten or somehow feel relevant to retrieve and once again highlight.

“Any elements, no matter where they are taken from, can serve in making new combinations... Anything can be used.

“It goes without say that one is not limited to correcting a work or to integrating diverse fragments of out-of-date works into a new one; one can also alter the meaning of those fragments in any appropriate way, leaving the imbeciles to their slavish preservation of citations.”

If storytelling serves as a metaphor for my artistic practice, then the chiffonier is a metaphor for my role as an artist and for my artistic process. By using my practice as a tool for creating and storytelling, I strive to generate a dialogue through which fiction and reality are allowed to reformulate and develop one another. A dialogue that presents what I want art to be, a forum where stories can communicate with the world and vice versa.
Scry Baby Scry, 2017. Still image. HD video, 23:30 min. Ernst Skoog
Scry Baby Scry, 2017. Still image. HD video, 23:30 min. Ernst Skoog


In Sweden, *chiffoniers*, or ragpickers, were employed by paper mills to collect textile waste that was used as raw material in paper production before wood pulp.


I’ve always thought the double bind had to do with the strengthening and deepening of emotion through overlapping layers of fiction, that it describes how meaning bounces back and forth between two or more realities, somewhat similar to the effect that occurs when two mirrors face each other.

By chance I come across the Kierkegaardian Third Remove, in Chris Kraus’s *I Love Dick*, and realise I must be wrong. Kraus writes: “The Ramones give Needles & Pins the possibility of irony, but the irony doesn’t undercut the song’s emotion, it makes it stronger and more true. Søren Kierkegaard called this ‘the Third Remove.’ In his book *The Crisis of the Intellect in the Life of an Actress*, he claims no actress can play 14-year-old Juliette before she’s at least 32. Because acting’s art, and art involves reaching through some distance.”

Reading this I am confused. What Kraus describes is what I thought was the double bind, and the Third Remove seemed only vaguely familiar. They sound like they can’t be the same, although, at the same time, they seem somewhat related. Maybe it is just the sound of the words. Double bind. Third Remove. Like two sides of a coin. What they share, I think, is the bouncing back and forth of meaning. The moving through-another. The difference being that one opens up and another closes.

The title *I Love Dick* is intentionally misleading, but refers in actuality to a man named Dick, whom the protagonist of the story, Chris, loves. The book has had a major impact on art writing and is considered to have created a whole new genre of writing when it was published in 1997. This genre is called by some “fictocriticism,” by others “theoretical fiction,” by Kraus herself “Lonely Girl Phenomenology.” What is integral to this writing is the merging of private and public, fiction and reality, and, as pointed out by Joan Hawkins, the way in which theory becomes an acting force in the story, “a mover and shaker in the fictional universe.”

The book follows Chris as she simultaneously acts out and intellectually

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Doubles and Halves

A splitting image, also called a fiddleback, consists of two pieces of wood cut from the same tree fused together to form an almost, but not quite, symmetrical pattern. The two sides mirror each other because they once belonged to one another: each curve on this side remembers its twin on the other.

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analyses a straight female crush, her crush on Dick.

The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress was written by Kierkegaard during the summer of 1847, as a series of four articles published in the Copenhagen newspaper Fædrelandet. In these articles he traces the life of a Copenhagen actress from the beginning of her career through fourteen years of performing and, finally, through what he calls her metamorphosis. Searching through these articles to find some clue to the understanding of the term “the Third Remove,” I found this example, which was deleted from the final copy: “Some years ago a ram was on exhibition on Vesterbro; the price of entry was eight shillings. It was exhibited only in the afternoon; in the morning the same ram grazed in a field out on Gammel Kongevej—there was not a soul who paid any attention to it, but in the afternoon when it cost eight shillings and the exhibition lasted only a few hours—then they gazed at the ram with amazement.”

As I understand the Third Remove through Kraus and Kierkegaard, it describes the deepening of emotion through distance and possibly a form of irony. But they seem to be talking about slightly different phenomena.

The anthropologist Gregory Bateson and his colleagues were the first to use the term “double bind,” in the 1956 article “Toward a Theory of Schizophrenia.” They describe how the double bind can come into being because human communication involves multiple logical types; that is, it functions on different levels of abstraction. Simply put, the double bind consists of a primary negative injunction, a secondary injunction conflicting with the first at a more abstract level, and a tertiary negative injunction prohibiting the victim from escaping the situation. The hypothesis presented is that repeated double bind situations leave the victim unable to partake in metacommunication and lead to schizophrenic disorders. Schizophrenia functions as an escape from the unresolvable dilemma: “It is not only safer for the victim of a double bind to shift to a metaphorical order of message, but in an impossible situation it is better to shift and become somebody else.”

After looking up the two terms in books, articles, dictionaries, and online, I still struggle to grasp their full meanings. As the double bind seems to become more clear, I lose grip on the Third Remove. I start to think that there must be something wrong—in the descriptions, or in the terms themselves, or maybe just in my own thinking. My thinking around these two terms, my struggle to grasp them, leaves me thoroughly confused. It’s a state of confusion that I somewhat enjoy. In my notebook, I have scribbled and underlined that the word “confusion” can be traced back to the Latin “confundere,” “to pour together.”

Fortunately, a few days later, I remember a performance of Henrik Ibsen’s A Doll’s House (1879). The severely ill Dr. Rank arrives to the costume party, on what shall be the night of

'raster (KHM Gallery), 2017. Aluminium. Dimensions variable. Annual Exhibition, Malmö Art Academy, 2017. Øystein Solberg

his death, dressed as an angel. This moment is for me unending and indescribable. Is it not a perfect example of the Third Remove? Already before dying, he is an image of his own death. (In a way then, it is also a double bind, like that of the punctum Roland Barthes identifies in the picture of Lewis Payne; he is dead and he is going to die.)" It is in a way a collapse of linear time, the one body (that of the actor) signifying both the living, costumed Rank and the dead one. It is more complicated than the play within the play, because the relations between the different layers of fiction are somehow unstable; they do not allow for one single allegory.

As there are characters belonging to multiple layers of fiction connected in the one physical body of the actor, the angel becomes a signifier that belongs both to the sign of the living Rank and the already dead Rank. In the way these two signs are fused into one signifier, the two fictions also collapse into each other, the lines separating them blurred. The oscillation between these two creates an infinity that reaches far beyond the layer of the actor and the audience.

Kraus writes, "I agreed with Kierkegaard, that the sign will always triumph through the screen of an ironic signifier." This might be why I, for a long time, completely misunderstood Brecht and his epic theatre. Epic theatre aims to, through techniques of verfremdung (alienation), deny the audience the opportunity to simply sympathise with the characters on stage and follow the developments emotionally. Rather, the audience should follow the play intellectually, and they should be aware that what they are being presented is precisely a presentation. Techniques of verfremdung, all common to stagings of Brecht plays, like The Threepenny Opera, include actors changing in and out of costume on stage, unrealistic props like stick-horses, single actors standing in for a group of characters by simply wearing a sign that says, for instance, "Beggars," and so on. For me, this did not result in an emotional disconnect, but rather a strengthening and deepening of emotion. The characters of The Threepenny Opera are the ones I have cared for the most, by far.

II
This play between the two, the moving through another, draws my thoughts towards Roni Horn, maybe especially Paired Gold Mats, for Ross and Felix (1994–95). The work consists of two thin mats of pure gold, one placed directly on the floor, the other on top of the first. Both mats have wrinkles and folds that create an uneven void between them and allow each to mirror itself in the uneven yet reflecting surface of the other. The work creates an (illusion of) infinity, a space that reaches far beyond that in which we move. There is also a strong thread of love running through the work, of being two, the way the two mats face each other, rejecting the gaze of the viewer, reducing it to the gaze of a spy. Of one who spies on a pair of lovers. The artist herself states, in Roni Horn aka Roni Horn:

Pairing them brought a firelike glow—a literal explosion of intimacy between two things. I would talk about these works in terms of mythology, in terms of symbolism and metaphor, and that is what allowed me to take the material and lay it out. Essentially, it reveals the physical reality of what had become an abstraction. It is Marilyn Monroe's Norma Jean.

During large parts of the Marguerite Duras film India Song (1975), the characters move around a large mirror: towards it, away from it, entering and leaving the room where it stands. The placement and angling of the camera allows us to see a different part of the room in the mirror than we do in front of the mirror. As if the mirror were a doorway, leading to an adjacent room. The characters, however, move in such a way that we can see both the reflection and its source. Here, we see differing layers of fiction visually manifested. One layer is that of the audience, another that of the characters in the room, and a third that of the characters in the room behind the mirror.

Duras not only plays with the transition between the third and the second, but also the second and the first. The film has a beginning, a mid part, an end, and then another end, followed by a series of endings. The work closes itself again and again, only to open itself up and continue once more. It pushes the viewer out from its world, before opening itself up again. In the same way the characters cross the border of the mirror, the viewer crosses, or longs to cross, the border of the medium.

There are political implications connected to this desire to cross the border. Chantal Mouffe describes consumer culture as constantly setting up opportunities of crossing this border, through purchases. In this way, every purchase is an attempt at crossing a border into an imagined world, the one depicted in advertisements for consumer goods, and in doing so also escaping this material world, escaping the world of the body. The success of the use of this desire in advertising in a consumerist society depends on the impossibility of crossing this border—every attempt, every purchase, is a failed attempt.

Jan-Werner Müller talks of populism as a "moralistic imagination of politics." The we, the people, this homogenous group populists claim to represent, can exist only in fiction. The populist people is an invented, non-existing people. So maybe part of the appeal of populist politics lies in the fact that it allows the individual
to enter into an imagined world and at the same time escape the world of the body. A way of crossing the border, entering the realm of symbols. Müller writes: “While it can sound as if they espouse a notion of the popular will, they actually rely on a symbolic representation of the ‘real People.’”

When I saw India Song for the first time, it felt strangely familiar to me. As if I knew what was going to happen precisely before it happened. Everything happened with a matter-of-factness about it. The story unfolded according to my expectations. (The Arabic term “maktub” came to mind: “it is written.”) The feeling kept getting stronger until at one point, an image of a tennis court appeared on the screen—this I knew I remembered. I experienced my own memories exposed on the screen of the TV. It was truly horrifying, as if there had been spies in the unconscious, a rift in reality. It took me some time to understand what had happened. I had read five years earlier Le Vice-Consul. This is the 1966 novel that Duras adapted into a play that was never staged—India Song—which she again adapted into the film India Song. What had happened was a mistaking of fiction for memory.

I can’t say that I believe there is a strict division between fiction and memory, though. Obviously the fictions we consume become part of our memory, and the other way around, sometimes we fictionalise our own memories. Thinking of my experience with India Song, the term “sedimentation” comes to mind. A sedimentation of fiction/memory. The term came to me by way of Mouffe, who uses it to describe the sedimentation of political realities. That is, how radical new policies, which may seem utterly unnatural, with time will become part of our perception of the political reality. In this way we become blind to parts of what constitutes our political and social realities, as we view them as “givens.” The more everyday use of the word is as a description of how dirt sinks in water, to become part of the ocean floor.

So, can we see a border between the bodily (or the embodied) world and the world of fiction? Something like the border of the mirror or that of the medium? It seems to me a fundamental part of populism, the staging of a crossing of this border, a crossing into a world of idea(l)s, and at the same time an escape from the complications of the world of the body. Mouffe can be understood as saying that the success of consumerism lies in the impossibility of the crossing of such a border; in populism, the crossing is, at least seemingly, possible.

III

Relating first to the novel then to the film is like talking to two witnesses with slightly differing stories. Recognising the main narrative, noting the discrepancies. In the essay “Can Witnesses Speak?,” Hito Steyerl investigates the ambiguity of truth. She points out how witnesses ultimately rely on being more than one to come close to what we call objective truth: “a distrust of witnesses is chronic. For a witness can indeed speak the truth, but he or she can also lie. To insure against these imponderabilities, legal systems have again and again invented new systems of testing. An old Roman rule of law stated: testis unus, testis nullus—one witness is no witness.” Following this logic, the real is always created by more than one perspective. Therefore, as discrepancies between the statements of two individuals are unavoidable, the real is always partially true, always unstable. No definite truth is possible. Or if it is possible, it exists somewhere between the two accounts.

In an interview, Kraus pointed out the importance of the Third Remove in relation to I Love Dick: “In the book I talked over and over again about operating at a Third Remove, using a Kierkegaardian sense of irony when dealing with the banal facts that compromise straight female life: the Crush, when will he call me?” This was part of her answer to Selah Saterstrom’s question, which I think nicely sums up the problem Kraus is responding to with I Love Dick, that is, how the female “I” is so often deemed confessional and rarely seen as a cultural intervention (whereas the male “I” has the possibility of reaching the “universal”). This brings the problem, the double bind, identified in Saterstrom’s question: “A lot of women writing today sense the conundrum, a kind of: ‘damned if you do/damned if you don’t.’ If you leave the body out you are promoting the continuation of the Cartesian split, and if you include it you’re held in suspicion.”

The Ross and Felix mentioned in the title of Horn’s Gold Mats are Felix González-Torres and his lover, Ross Laycock. In the work of González-Torres, like in that of Horn, the pair is a recurring motif. There are the obvious examples—the two clocks, the two mirrors, the two bird baths—but then there are also stranger doubles. Take for example the blue semi-transparent curtain Untitled (Loverboy) (1989). I have seen images of this work over and over again, and the work has become strangely familiar to me. The most exhilarating sight of it though was not from exhibition documentation. On the very last page of A Selection of Snapshots Taken by Felix González-Torres, behind a bed where four cats lie sleeping, next to a commode over-filled with Mickey Mouse figurines, it hangs in front of the open window, casually: the blue curtain. Here in the everyday setting of the artist’s apartment, instead of that of the white cube. In a way more real this time, as the white cube often coats...
the objects it houses with a fine layer of non-reality. I wonder which one was first, the blue curtain artwork or the blue bedroom curtain. If I'm looking at the original, the source of so many twins, or if it is itself a twin of the art object curtains. In any case, it has this vibrating energy to it, as if promising the possibility of a direct contact. If I allow myself to borrow Horn's terms: the Norma to the Marilyn.

I see a clear difference, though, in the way the two artists work with pairs. Horn's pairs are the result of a doubling, of one becoming two, or of revealing itself as two. González-Torres's pairs are two unifying to become one. A pour together. In a 1988 exhibition statement, the artist writes, "I tend to visualize information, to see panoramas in which the fictional, the important, the banal, and the historical are collapsed into a single caption."16

When Horn talks about the intimacy between two things, is it so appealing precisely because it is impossible? What does it do to this doubling of Horn and González-Torres? It might be similar to what happens when you fall between Le Vice-Consul and India Song, between Norma and Marilyn. It opens up a discrepancy, or underlines one that has always been there. As if to say that you cannot experience the whole, because the whole includes you.

Horn states: "I discovered quite early on that ... a single object would not give me the kind of relationship I was interested in having with the viewer. Because singularity leads more toward a separation from the viewer. So I arrived at the idea of a paired object, which diffused that possibility. The idea was to create a space in which the viewer would inhabit the work, or at least be a part of it."17

There is something about art objects that makes me think of them as doubles to themselves, as they are in a way both sign and signifier. I recently received an e-mail about an exhibition and was thrilled by the title: Like Itself. I thought maybe this was it, where the Third Remove and the double bind intermingle, in the object that both is and is not, and reaches itself by way of remove from itself. As I continued reading, it became clear that I had misread the title; it was not Like Itself, but rather Life Itself.18 This misread title has been taking up a lot of my mind space recently; somehow it suits this exhibition perfectly that it never existed. (Or: Somehow it is perfect in its never having been.)

IV
Final Notes
The connection between the Third Remove and the double bind seems to be hiding still, but often when one shows up, I can quickly identify the presence of the other. We know that the double bind, from the beginning of its use, is connected to the fact that humans communicate on several levels of abstraction. The Third Remove relies on the same kind of communication, as it connects multiple signs in one signifier. One possible connection: the double bind ends ultimately in a remove from the self; the Third Remove describes multiple selves bound in the same body.

When Kraus in 2006 published what can be seen as both a prequel and a sequel to I Love Dick, Torpor, the names of the characters had changed: Chris had become Sylvie, and her husband, Sylvère, had become Jerome. (Kierkegaard performs a similar blurring of his identity through the use of pseudonyms: The Crisis and a Crisis in the Life of an Actress.)

In the Horn title mentioned earlier in this essay: Roni Horn aka Roni Horn. My thoughts stop themselves as I try to identify which is behind the mirror and which is in front, which is the Norma and which is the Marilyn. In a notebook written before the filming of India Song, Duras wrote about the characters of the film: "In reality everything is empty, it is in the mirror that they appear."19

I should make clear that the angel costume of Dr. Rank mentioned in Part I was not part of the Ibsen manuscript, but something incorporated in this particular staging that I saw.20 The other characters also had their own costumes: Helmer was Elvis Presley. And Nora? She was Marilyn Monroe.

In the original script, however, we find this exchange of words between Helmer and Rank, as Rank is leaving the costume party:

HELMER ... But can't you tell us what you will be?
RANK Yes, my dear friend, I have quite made up my mind about that.
HELMER Well?
RANK At the next costume party I shall be invisible.21

7. *Roni Horn, Roni Horn aka Roni Horn* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), 60.
13. Steyerl, “Can Witnesses Speak?”
15. Selah Saterstrom, *Kraus, interview by Saterstrom*.
17. *Roni Horn, Roni Horn aka Roni Horn* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2009), 111.
Carl Østberg

2323, 2017. Inkjet-print. 116 x 154 cm. Carl Østberg
I'm new here. I'm new here in this city I know so little about, a seaside city with a bridge over to Denmark. My sister lives there, in Copenhagen, and it's reassuring to have my family nearby so far from home. After living a few weeks in this new city, in Malmö, I notice how well-suited it is for biking. I bought my bicycle, a Fuji fixed-gear bike, a few years ago in Oslo. It wasn't so easy to ride it there, because the streets in Oslo go either uphill or downhill, though they do give you a good overview. Down here in Southern Sweden, the streets are flat and the cycle lanes are wide. I ride my bike to school along the same route every day, from Rönneholm to Malmö Art Academy. It takes around ten minutes, or perhaps even quicker every now and then. Some evenings I get lost when riding home. I'll ride around in opposite directions and wind up in unknown places. Suddenly I'll be outside of Folkets Park, and then I know where I am. I meet two friends and tell them that I managed to lose my way on my bike again. I say goodbye and ride towards the Academy and then further along on my normal route. In the distance I see the towering blue Kronprinsen high-rise. When I see it, I know that my flat is not far off. Kronprinsen, the Scandic Triangeln hotel, the water tower at Södervärnsplan, the Turning Torso—these are the landmarks I look for in order to get my bearings and find out which direction to ride in. This city is like a labyrinth, one that I need to map. I want to get to know it better. I'll be living here for a while, after all.

“If you look very intensely … and slowly … things will happen that you never dreamed of before.”

One late autumn day, I rode my bike to Drewex to buy blue masking tape and some new pens. I glanced at the walls of the houses along the way, when suddenly an interesting pattern on one of them caught my eye, and I stopped for a closer look. The pattern on the wall stemmed from a piece of graffiti that used to be there. Now it was just a varicoloured arrangement of pigments that stood out against the wall, the traces of a one-time act of self-expression. Someone had in turn disliked the message and had tried to remove it with solvents. I have seen such graffiti before, but this was the first time I realised why traces of them always remain. Meanwhile, people were walking by at their own pace, en route to their various destinations. While I stood there observing it all, I saw other shapes and chromatic schemes emerge in the pattern, which now resembled a figure. What message had the graffiti once expressed? Its meaning remained hidden and mysterious, the inscrutable outcome of a disagreement between the various parties who had expressed their opinion on this wall. I took out my camera and pressed the shutter button.

This past autumn I stayed for two weeks at the Academy's flat in Berlin. This was a city I had visited on a class trip when I was a teenager, but it still felt like the first time. In a bookstore right by the river Spree, I bought a Walter Benjamin anthology titled On Photography, a handy little volume that fit nicely in my jacket pocket. On my way home, I sat down at a café right around the corner from the flat and began reading the book. One of the essays is about the sculptor and photographer Karl Blossfeldt's pictures of plants. According to Benjamin, “These photographs disclose a whole unsuspected treasury of analogies and forms within the plants' being. Only photography is able to do this.” Blossfeldt's richly detailed negatives, magnified up to forty times...
their original size, depict plants as mystical beings from alien worlds. When I see Blossfeldt’s photographs in his book *The Alphabet of Plants*, I think about when I was young, about how I liked to look closely at plants, surfaces, and other things in order to understand how the world works. But as a child I could also dream myself away to other landscapes and worlds. It is as though Blossfeldt saw the world around him through the eyes of a curious child and became fascinated by it, allowing him to see an entirely new world through the camera lens. In this childlike gaze I recognise things I have unknowingly done myself because of my childhood fascination with the world. This made me think of previous projects I have carried out, such as close-up photographs of surfaces, which I blew up to highly detailed, painting-like prints.

Blossfeldt took part in an era-defining exhibition of modern photography in Stuttgart in 1929, called *Film und Foto* (*FiFo*). The featured artists included Edward Weston from the American “straight photography” movement, which consisted of painters and sculptors who had transitioned to photography in the 1910s. Blossfeldt himself was regarded as belonging to the German Neue Sachlichkeit, or new objectivity, movement, an austere style of photography that used sharply focused images and high contrast to present the material world in a dispassionate, matter-of-fact way. Indeed, almost all of the exhibition’s practitioners of photography, then a new trend in art, depicted sculptural images in their photographs.

Finally, I put the anthology down, drank up my coffee, and left the café, heading down the Auguststrasse towards the Hamburger Bahnhof.

Back in Malmö I thought about how I prefer to work outside, in nature. The studio may sometimes feel like a hindrance, since I like to go outside and search for new images or events that take place in the spur of the moment or that convey a past narrative. This makes me think of Weston, who was an equally adept photographer both inside and outside the studio. He had the ability to see recognisable bodily poses in everyday objects, such as a bell pepper: when lit in a studio against a dark background, the pepper resembled an organic sculpture from the Renaissance, and Weston could create and modify an array of figures by making small adjustments and varying the lighting.

“I was always interested [in], and always found fascinating, how a picture could transform the object you’re taking, without doing anything, almost.”

The above quotation makes me think back on my teenage years, when I was given the chance to work as a photographer and take part in various photo shoots, including at my local ski resort in Hemsedal, Norway. Large-scale snowboard obstacles were created with snow groomers, which pushed tonnes of snow around in order to create mega-sculptures consisting of straight lines and arches, so that the snowboarders could jump and do tricks across a thirty-metre-long surface. After the photographer finds the angle that makes the trick look as spectacular as possible, the right timing of the trick’s rotation, the lighting, and the composition represent the obstacle’s sculptural qualities. You walk in a circle around the obstacle in order to find a composition, as though you’re looking at a sculpture, with the shape and landscape providing you with the imagery you’re looking for.

On one of my expeditions to find inspiration in Malmö’s urban landscape, I rode my bike down to Västra Hamnen. Not far from the final stop for bus routes 2 and 5, there is a large, paved area, where skid marks of burnt rubber speckle what appear to be an abandoned car park. I have always been fascinated with people who frequent such car parks, people who go there in their cars so they can distance themselves from their everyday lives. The skid marks have varying depths, which show that they have been created over time and by different people. They made me think of Richard Prince’s photograph *Untitled (Upstate)* (1995–99), which depicts a country road surrounded by green vegetation on either side and with tyre marks from a car that drifted on the asphalt. It also reminds me of when I was younger and I looked at tyre marks along the roads between the towns outside of Oslo on my way to visit my grandparents. At the car park, I took out my camera and began experimenting with various compositions. Through the viewfinder, the black marks looked like the scratch marks that skates make on ice, as though made from an aggressive dance of velocity and mass. I imagined the sound of high RPMs, the smell of burnt rubber, the smoke from the tyres, and the playful joy the drivers and passengers felt. Clouds drifted in front of the sun and cast the area in soft lighting. I measured the light and pressed the shutter button.

While biking home through the flat landscape, I began to notice how I missed the mountains. The feeling had only increased while living in Malmö. My trips to Oslo became more regular and made me feel uncertain about where I wanted to spend my time. It was especially when winter came and I saw the snow-sprayed faces of my friends on social media that my longing for snow-covered mountains became extra intense. At this crossroads, I still found it meaningful to live in Malmö, where the winter climate is unpredictable and relatively mild and where it is possible to skateboard outdoors in the city the whole year through.
2123 and Derive Solo #1, 2017. Installation view, BFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2017. Carl Østberg
Dérive Solo #1, 2017. Silver gelatin prints. 92 x 123,5 cm. Carl Østberg
Riding on a skateboard lets you decide for yourself how you want to make your way through the paved urban grid that stretches out between the buildings and open surfaces. You can use pavements, streets, cycle lanes, and so forth as you like, as when my friends and I used to skateboard haphazardly about the streets of Oslo in order to find new skate spots. Sometimes we came across places where traces from the coloured imprints of other boards were smeared across the obstacle. I could imagine what sort of tricks they had performed at the spot, in particular if the obstacle was a bit too much for me. When you skateboard, you feel you're very much in the moment. Everyday problems and chores are forgotten when you hang with your friends, as though a microworld comes into being where the spot and its immediate surroundings are the only things that matter. I had my camera with me, which I used to take pictures of the others while they performed tricks. Magnus and Nikolai had a video camera with them, so we also made skateboard videos. This micro-world or bubble that surrounded us while we gleefully and speedily skateboarded our way from one paved area to the next gave us an intensely euphoric feeling, a physical sensation where you feel it in your bones that you've traversed a landmass.6

"I'm interested in the relationship between an individual's existence and the community of larger social entities."7

My sister in Copenhagen told me about the rules of the road for cycle lanes there. Copenhagen is known for its well-functioning cycle lanes, which extend to all the outer environs of the city. I knew of Copenhagen's Kødbyen district, where I often go to party, and of Frederiksberg, where my sister lives. That was the Copenhagen that I knew. Thomas Struth's beautiful photos of city streets from around the world make me feel like jumping into each work and exploring the streets there in order to see what is around the next corner. His Streets of New York City photo series reminds me of the streets of Copenhagen, for example, Istedgade, which seems to continue into infinity. I was curious about exploring such urban spaces in Copenhagen, so that I could become better acquainted with the city, by randomly skateboarding around on the asphalt, surrounded by the architecture, in the hope of learning something about the people living there, about their neighbourhoods, about myself.

Rather than using my bike, which costs more to bring along with me when I travel, I take my skateboard. It's a playful mode of transportation and one I had used a few weeks before in Berlin. I skateboarded down to Triangle and took the train to Kastrup, where I changed to the metro and got off at the station in Frederiksberg. I rode over to the street where my sister lives. Just along the way is a street I'd never been on before, so I decided to skateboard down it. My camera was hanging around my neck, and as I pushed on my skateboard into a new street, I snapped a picture without looking through the viewfinder. Cars were coming towards me, and some drivers slowed down as we passed each other. Further on, I turned on to the first street to the right, because the asphalt there looked good. A woman with a walker showed up in front of me, and I snapped a new picture.

"Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals."8

The French philosopher Guy Debord, a leading member of the Situationist International movement of the 1950s, wrote an essay about the critical study of urban geography, which he later dubbed “psychogeography.” One of the main principles underlying this discipline is that of the dérive, or “drift,” which is the act of noticing how certain areas, streets, and buildings appeal to certain states of mind, tendencies, and yearnings, and of moving about for reasons other than those designed by the given environment.9 Practitioners accomplished this by playfully and arbitrarily wandering about through city streets. But the idea behind such drifting can be traced further back to the surrealists of the 1930s and to the notion of the flâneur. I like how Charles Baudelaire describes the essence of the flâneur as strolling around in order “to be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world.”10 The flâneur is someone who explores the modern cityscape, someone who, in Benjamin's phrasing, "goes botanizing on the asphalt."11 For me, the flâneur is also someone who investigates the urban environment. In another vein, I also find Benjamin's reading of Edgar Allan Poe's “The Man of the Crowd” interesting. For Poe, Benjamin writes, “the flâneur was, above all, someone who does not feel comfortable in his own company.”12 This is someone who seeks out a crowd in order to take a break from his personal problems.

The late 1960s saw the emergence of proto-conceptual forms of art such as body art, performance, happenings, and street art. One of these experiments was that of “performance situations,” which tried to support human subjects by surveying their activities in time and space, demonstrating the tendency for measurement that was common in conceptual art.13

"Holding a camera, aimed away from me and ready to shoot, while walking a continuous line down a city street. Try not to blink. Each time I blink: snap a photo."14
When I had used up all my rolls of film, I called my sister, and she asked me where I was. “By the sea,” I replied, not entirely sure where I found myself. I felt tired in my entire body. We agreed on when and where to meet, and then I skateboarded there.

There were three things I knew about Malmö before moving here: the Art Academy, the proximity to Copenhagen, and the Rosengård district. A Norwegian newspaper once described Rosengård as “the roughest ghetto in the Nordic countries.” I wanted to take a closer look for myself. During my first trip there, I was on tenterhooks a little bit, but the feeling soon passed when I found the area to be harmless. After having explored quite a few areas in Malmö, including some in Rosengård, I no longer felt any fear. Tyre marks over lawns here and there and an Audi driving the wrong way down the cycle lane below the Inre Ringvägen motorway were the closest it came to feeling like a dangerous neighbourhood.

Then one night, after I had gone to bed, I heard a violent explosion. I jumped out of bed and looked out into the street to see what had happened. It was completely quiet outside; not a single person could be seen, nor was there any sign that an explosion had just taken place in the street. The explosion must have happened somewhere else in the city. The next morning reports online said there had been an explosion outside of Rättscentrum. According to Sydsvenskan, there had been nineteen explosions in Malmö in 2014. Later on I found out that only one of the nineteen explosions had led to someone being injured. In the summer of 2016 there were over a hundred car fires in Malmö—though once again without anyone being injured. Were these actions a matter of sending a message, or were they random acts of vandalism? They usually happened around midnight and later on in the night. Except for some phone conversations with people back home in Norway, no one I met talked about these car fires, and they were only discussed in the media. I started to think about how I lived in a dualistic society: the calm and the collected walked about during the day, and then the wild and the unruly woke up at night.

“One evening in Sorgenfri, where I live now, I woke up to the sound of a car alarm that wouldn't stop. It was just under an hour to midnight. Frustrated, I looked out the window and saw smoke billowing in colours that suggested a fire. I put on some clothes and went outside to take a closer look at what was going on. A car parked right by the cemetery was in flames. Neighbours were huddled together in a little group outside the main entrance to our building, looking at the flames with fear in their eyes, their arms folded; some of them spoke into their phones. Passers-by stopped and spoke to one another with their hands in their jacket pockets. The front lights of the burning car were still on, as the flames rose up through where the windscreen and the side windows had once been and that had now succumbed to the searing heat of the flames. It seemed surreal to me that the car’s lights were still on, as though it were alive. The sound of the car alarm, the flames, the smell of burnt rubber, and the car lights made me imagine that the car was standing there crying for help. I suddenly saw the car as a person—it was strange to feel sad for a human-made vehicle. I couldn't stop looking into the flames. It reminded me of the meditative feeling you get when you gaze into a campfire. I took out my iPhone, snapped a picture, and sent it to friend via Snapchat. He wrote back to me, “What is going ON down there?” I sent him an emoji of flames, sent unwittingly as a large flame. Perhaps some of the people who had set fire to the car were just following their inner pyromaniac. After about ten minutes, the police turned up from both sides of the street in their blinking blue lights and politely instructed us to move away from the area. I returned home and went back to bed.

Back home in Norway for Christmas, I sat in a pickup with two friends on our way to Hemsedal. After we parked the car and began unloading it, I felt an inner peace. I was halfway between Oslo and Bergen in a valley that I consider my favourite place on earth. My sense of calm gave me time to reflect both on the individual events and on the urban landscape in its entirety. I was about to have a week off in nature with my friends before having to return to the urban everyday of Southern Sweden. It was time to play around in the snowy landscape.


14. Vito Acconci, *Blinks*, 1969, photo/text work, http://www.vitoacconci.org/portfolio_page/blinks-1969/. Vito Acconci’s *Blinks* shows the artist’s movements in a series of photographs featuring shifting views of the street he was walking down. Like other artists of his generation, Acconci used photos to document his activities. Photography was appealing not only because of its role in documentation, but also because of its disciplined, unsentimental mode of reporting (Linker, “On Language and Its Ruses,” 18).


Shift, 2017. Oil on canvas. 145 x 117,5 cm. Elisabeth Ostin
Elisabeth Östin

Relocation
Painting as Process and Non-verbal Language

In a panel discussion on painting at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London, the artist Vanessa Jackson described painting as part of a process, something that is constantly developing and is never complete. She spoke of a metaphorical container in which knowledge about painting is collected and accumulated, and which takes time to “make sense of.” The idea of painting as a conversation, a constant dialogue between the artist, the viewer, and the references in the work, appeals to me. Something that goes backwards and yet moves forward. To move forward, I believe, it is important to trust painting as a form of non-verbal language. A language that needs room to develop. If a painting can be directly deciphered, it means that you “know” that painting through references in art history. In order to move forward, I believe I am given a certain responsibility through which I take part in the container Jackson refers to.

The artist Allison Katz refers to painting as a voice and to the process from lived experience to finished artwork as a translation, where information is lost and added, and where the result becomes different, where the painterly process is a conversation. During a tutorial in my studio, I used the example of a dance critic and videographer who studied language translation to write about dance movements. Katz interpreted this language translating as an idea about how different idioms, such as those of dance, speech, or painting, are parallel to each other without being equivalent. She also mentioned the artist Cecilia Edefalk’s series Double White Venus (2006), in which a momentary vision she caught in the corner of her eye of light falling on a sculpture of Venus in the garden is painted over and over again. The lived experience took place once, but the idea of the sensation it caused is reassessed and translated over and over again in different versions, where the results are neither right nor wrong.

Lived Experience -------- An Artwork Translation Loss

According to Katz, it is essential to allow one’s painterly language to appear in the work by permitting the voice to take part in the decision-making. She explains:

Themes and motifs are generated by firstly, some form of experience, and then, a method of translation. By that point language and chance have extended the terms. I hold onto the impossibility of any of this being worthy of painting, because by doing so you hook into a voice, rather than a subject, and that’s what ends up making the decisions.

To me, allowing room for chance is a crucial part of the process. Since painting is a craft that takes time to develop and in which a great deal lies in the movement of the hand, one learns through doing. It is impossible for me to formulate my intention in spoken language. I believe Gertrud Sandqvist describes this in her essay “On Intuition”: “Accumulated experience that is not immediately accessible to language, but which does affect our consciousness, is usually called intuition. An intuitive choice is thus as conscious as a considered choice, it simply uses aspects of consciousness that are not accessible to language. It cannot say, but it can show.”

My Body Is Both Visible and Seeing

As a viewer, the body, and physical reactions, are involved in the reading of a work. A painting can cause a physical sensation, a specific experience in the chest or neck, that cannot be expressed in words. A sensation that has nothing to do with logic.
Shift, 2017. Oil on canvas. 145 x 117,5 cm. Elisabeth Ostin
Relocation (diptych), 2017. Oil on canvas. 29 x 35 cm. Elisabeth Östin
The art historian Amelia Jones refers to the phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty in her essay on how a viewer sees, both as a subject and an object, with the body and its surroundings. With the body as flesh, surrounded by the world of flesh, one sees through the fibres of flesh. Jones writes about how the viewer's identity is essential to the interpretation of gender identity, class identity, and racial identity, not merely in how we identify ourselves but also in the values and identities, desires and fantasies we project onto a viewed artwork. She describes how we interpret a work from our own position as subject, but also the work as subject, where the context and even the artist's identity are involved in the viewer's interpretation, a form of non-static mutual relationship. She explains:

What used to be thought of as subject and object are chiasmically intertwined; both are what Merleau-Ponty felicitously calls “flesh of the world” (where, he writes, “are we to put the limit between the body and the world, since the world is flesh?”) The two reciprocally—but not symmetrically—determine one another as “bodies” or “subjects”; my body is both visible and seeing (both sensible and sentient, both object and subject).7

Interpretations of artworks, according to Jones, are fluid, and the way we project our references, identities, and ideas change over time.

The idea of the subject as being fluid, something that is not static, appeals to me.
Is This How?, 2017. Oil on canvas. 125 x 90 cm. Elisabeth Östin
**Fiction**

I am interested in getting at a mood that could be interpreted as a dream state or a state of mind. Faltering in a veritable world in between worlds.

It reminds me of the experience of painting when I come up against something that is new to me and transports me to a different place, in the way that fiction can. This is a sensation that the artist Nina Roos shares:

> I can only present my own plan or suggestion for the image. The fiction is then completed in a get-together with the author and the spectator. We approach a painting physically. A painting is more than just visual information, it is also an object. Through fiction in painting we approach corporeality, leaving narration behind. My paintings are characterised by their pronouncedly physical presence. This is what I refer to as a demarcation between reality and fiction. The physical sensation a painting provokes is real.

The above quote is from an interview in which Roos refers to fiction as a form of mental relocation, and how the experience of painting is a non-linear fiction. She compares the fiction of painting with written fiction. The images that arise in the painting, and it is unsettling to describe this presence: “Presence and absence carry equal weight in the work and its title. I am drawn to motifs and subjects that don’t allow you access to all the information, where you are only given a clue or a hint and where you as the viewer must resort to your own references and ideas, given access only to a part of the “totality” — just like, for instance, catching a glimpse of a monster’s eye, your imagination probably conjuring up something more horrific than if the rest of the creature were to be revealed. This is something I refer to in my work process, where each painting is a smaller part or fraction of something bigger.

> “Upon everything was a haze of restlessness and oppression; a touch of the unreal and the grotesque, as if some vital element of perspective or chiaroscuro were awry.”

In the horror fiction author H.P. Lovecraft’s short story “The Colour Out of Space,” he describes a kind of parasite, initially from a meteorite from outer space, that spreads over a large area of the planet and saps the life from the earth, the animals, and the humans. The most interesting thing about this monster is that it is amorphous, and what is described as the “threatening mass” is omnipresent — a colour, a light, and a movement — that manifests itself in space, on earth, and in the mind.

> “I vaguely wished some clouds would gather, for an odd timidity about the deep skyey voids above had crept into my soul.”

These quoted passages are from the beginning of the story, where the narrator first visits the fictive town of Arkham and experiences a strong presence in its surroundings. The way this presence is described reminds me of the occasions when I have seen paintings in which the artist has succeeded in activating a spatiality, an image with such energy that I experience the contents as being specifically present, like an amorphous subject. I believe that Roos has a way to describe this presence: “Presence and absence carry equal weight in this painting. It adheres to the borderline that delays viewing, in between the narrative expectations that it arouses to distance the viewer from the surface and the illusion of sensory presence.”

Film occasionally serves as a tool for me, for instance, when I need to describe a certain state of mind or a particular mood or I need to formulate something that is difficult to talk about. Scenes that often come to mind are from sci-fi movies or psychological horror films. Whatever motif I use, I always seem unable to avoid attributing some form of physiologically recognisable element to the surface of the painting, and it is unsettling if a wall in a room behaves like a body.

Examples of movie references include *Repulsion,* especially the scene in which the protagonist, Carol, walks down a corridor where the walls reach out their arms towards her (fumbling hands are a recurring subject for me); scenes from *Alien,* and the possessed girl in *The Exorcist.*

The latter titles are mentioned in the documentary *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema,* in which Slavoj Žižek talks about an inner voice present in these films, from a psychoanalytical perspective. An inner voice we don’t want to know, an alien within ourselves, threatening constantly to materialise and burst forth from our bodies. He describes it in this way: “Whenever we talk to someone, there is always this minimum of ventriloquist effect as if some foreign power took possession.”

In the first part of the documentary, Žižek speaks of the artificiality of our ideas of desire and love.
Schele’s Green, 2016. Oil on canvas. 40 x 30 cm. Elisabeth Östin
We learn through fiction how to behave. When something is too big, complex, or difficult to grasp, we fictionalise it.

**A Separate Organism**

“I was thinking about, I mean not legs, they are just the excuse.”
—Phil Guston 16

A scene in a documentary about the artist Philip Guston shows him standing before his painting *The Monument* (1976), which seems to portray a jumble of leg-like limbs with feet wearing horseshoes. Describing what the subject of the painting “looks like” is irrelevant in this context; as Guston himself says, the so-called legs are merely a pretext for getting at something more specific, beyond what can be considered as represented in the picture. He describes the painting as a separate organism with its own multiplied energies, and the way he performs his work as being almost autonomous, as though executed by a third party.

In a 2016 lecture at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, the artist Phoebe Unwin spoke of her work *Man with Heavy Limbs* (2009) as “what it feels like rather than what it looks like.” This reminds me of what Guston said about *The Monument*: that the “legs” are just an excuse for something else. When I stand before Unwin’s work and recall her description of it, I understand what she means—a kind of tacit knowledge. The heavy limbs are heavy in me, in my legs or my chest.

“A call: ‘Paint me!’ Listen! Let it echo generation after generation, again and again. Here I am, the one who is. One look and you are here. See the light, let the world become visible. Let the darkness fall and gradually call forth the colours. Slowly a face takes shape and the eyes seek out their place.”

The painterly voice is silent but shows itself through the hand. The desire to paint, to express this voice that cries throughout the body, takes the work further.
PhD Candidates

Rosa Barba
Alejandro Cesarco
Marion von Osten
Lea Porsager
Andrea Ray
Imogen Stidworthy
Rosa Barba

*From Source to Poem*, 2016. 35 mm film, color, optical sound. 12:00 min. Installation view from CAPC Bordeaux, 2016. Rosa Barba.
Using my installations, which represent a method of thinking through, I continue my exploration of film and its capacity to be simultaneously an immaterial medium that carries information and a physical material with sculptural properties. The category of film is expanded and abstracted beyond the literal components of the celluloid strip, the projector through which it passes, and the image projected onto a screen. Each component becomes a starting point for artworks that expand on the idea of film as well as explore its intrinsic attributes. Projectors mutate into new mechanical objects that generate information in real time; they turn on themselves and bend the conventions of cinema to the requirements, possibilities, or limitations of their new forms. The films engage with questions of time such as inscriptions in landscapes, language, and cuts across history. My PhD discusses anarchic organisations within spatial cinematic forms, with the insertion of “A Fictional Library.”

—Rosa Barba on her PhD project
Here, There, Where the Echoes Are, 2016. 4 x 16 mm film, 1 x 70 mm film, 4 glass filters, 5 screens, sound. Detail. Rosa Barba
Above: *Bending to Earth*, 2015. 35 mm film, color, optical sound; 15:00 min. Installation view from Malmö Konsthall, 2017. Rosa Barba

My PhD research, tentatively titled “Under the Sign of Regret,” focuses on aesthetically mediated responses to regret. It interrogates the qualities of the feeling of regret and what it produces, both as objects and as experiences. My enquiry traces regret as a form of memory and as a way of narrating ourselves (which in some cases may amount to the same thing). My research also looks at regret as an aesthetic mode through the methodologies and tropes employed throughout my artistic practice and through selected case studies. The hypothesis is to consider regret as a generative force, as a bittersweet drama of adjustments, and as a way of questioning perspective itself.

—Alejandro Cesarco on his PhD project

BIO Alejandro Cesarco (born Montevideo, Uruguay, lives and works in New York) utilises different formats and strategies to address his recurrent interests in repetition, narrative, and the practices of reading and translating.

Recent solo exhibitions include The Inner Shadow, A Tale of a Tub, Rotterdam, 2016; Prescribe the Symptom, Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis, 2015; Loyalties and Betrayals, Murray Guy, New York, 2015; Secondary Revision, Frac Île-de-france/Le Plateau, Paris, 2013; A Portrait, a Story, and an Ending, Kunsthalle Zürich, 2013; Alejandro Cesarco, mumok, Vienna, 2012; A Common Ground, Uruguayan Pavilion, 54th Venice Biennale, 2011; One without the Other, Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, 2011; and Present Memory, Tate Modern, London, 2010.


In 2011, Cesarco was the recipient of the Baloise Art Prize at Art 42 Basel, for his installation The Streets Were Dark with Something More than Night or The Closer I Get to the End the More I Rewrite the Beginning. He is Director of the non-profit arts organisation Art Resources Transfer in New York, and since 2015, has been a PhD in Fine Arts candidate at Malmö Art Academy, Lund University.
Marion von Osten

In the Making—Decolonising Culture Production

In her PhD project, Marion von Osten reflects on the long-durational and entangled character of transdisciplinary collaborations and research processes including photography, webprojects, filmmaking and exhibition making, as specific forms of her cultural production. The thesis highlights how multiple forms of knowledge and practice have been generated in part through a site-specific approach and material and social thinking. The thesis reflects the embodied and collaborative form of production that privileges dialogue and intersubjective exchange and acknowledges diverse materialisations and manifestations beyond fixed object-subject relations. Productions reflected in the thesis deal with architecture, art, theory, and literature in European and non-European contexts that established or countered colonial modernity. By revisiting historical contexts from a contemporary perspective, the PhD traces genealogies of critiques against the division of the arts and the crafts, the high and the low that were expressed already by artists and intellectuals in the era of decolonisation.

BIO  Marion von Osten is an artist, writer, researcher, and exhibition maker. She is a founding member of the Center for Post-colonial Knowledge and Culture (CPKC) and kleines postfordistisches Drama (kpD) in Berlin as well as of the media collective Labor k3000 Zürich. In 2016 she became artistic director and curator of the Bauhaus centenary project the bauhaus idea (2017–2019) initiated by the Bauhaus Cooperation Weimar Dessau Berlin, Goethe Institute and Haus der Kulturen der Welt Berlin. Since the fall of 2013, she has been a PhD candidate in Fine Arts at Malmö Art Academy, Lund University.


This series of photos was taken at the Musée Tiskiwin, which was founded by Bert Flint, a self-taught anthropologist who continues to run this private museum in the Medina of Marrakech.

The Tiskiwin represents the material culture of the Berber populations, who live in the north of the Sahara, and the Tuaregs of the south, who call themselves Imazighen. The museum is organised in chapters that relate to the route of the caravans that connect North Africa with the Sahel zone.

Bert Flint taught in the 1960s at the L’école supérieure des beaux arts in Casablanca together with the artists Farid Belkahia, Mohamed Melehi, and Mohamed Chabaa and the art historian Toni Mariani. This group of post-colonial art teachers developed a new curriculum in post-independence Morocco that aimed to decolonise art education and establish a new methodology that acknowledged the material culture of the Berbers as a popular and coeval art form.
E(AR)THERIC SLIME ~ POST OP, 2016. E(AR)THERIC SLIME ~ POST OP, 2016. Waxed Hammer (I, II, III) (3 hammers, beeswax), Blue Structure w/ Wax Slits ~ Drone w/ WarmWetWound (painted wood, beeswax, 15 m x ~ 34 cm), 1,000 Sets of Venus Balls ~ Beaming Eyeballs (2,000 stainless steel balls, silicone strings, beeswax), QUEEN bed (wood, foam mattresses, watercolours), Disrupted E(ar)thereal Fantasy (honey-moon) (film / 3D animation, 13 min). Installation view, Brandts 13, Odense, Denmark, 2016. Lea Porsager
The crux, or nucleus, of my research is the philosophical writings in and around the early development of quantum mechanics. I am taking advantage of my location—being close to the Niels Bohr Archive—to delve into Bohr’s more speculative writings on mind and biology. The concepts and thought-forms belonging to the realm of quantum theory have long been favoured by artistic and spiritual movements. I am focusing on how these pioneering ideas—distorted by spiritual allegories and inferences—have leapt out of the scientific orbit and created bastard sciences like that of quantum mysticism.

In my work, matter, irony, experiments (doings), and esoteric doctrines are cut-spliced with scientific theory. Seeking a critical discourse that encompasses dreams, meditations, and delirious suppositions about quantum scientific concepts, my project emphasises how the misunderstandings generated by these unorthodox couplings serve as trailblazers for radical cross-disciplinary visions. My experiments aim to disrupt—not to illustrate—fixed or local notions of truth through a practice of radical openness, to better understand the uncertainty and mercuriality of our thinking-in-form. To quote Bohr’s closing words from a 1929 essay: “the new situation in physics has so forcibly reminded us of the old truth that we are both onlookers and actors in the great drama of existence.” The interpretation is indeed a literal, frenzied one, and the method that of weird situated knowledge.

—Lea Porsager on her PhD project

BIO Lea Porsager was educated at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, where she received her MFA in 2010, and the Städelschule in Frankfurt am Main (2008–09).

Porsager’s recent solo exhibitions include the National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen, 2016–17; Nils Stærk, Copenhagen, 2016; Brandts, Odense, 2016; X and BEYOND, Copenhagen, 2016; Göttingen Kunstverein, Germany, 2015; Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 2015; Henie Onstad Kunstcenter, Høvikodden, Norway, 2013; and the Emily Harvey Foundation, New York, 2013.

Recent group exhibitions include KÖS Museum of Art in Public Spaces, Køge, Denmark, 2016–17; Pivô, São Paulo, 2016; Annual Contemporary Art Festival, Riga, 2016; Sora Kunstmuseum, Denmark, 2016; and SixtyEight Art Institute, Copenhagen, 2016.

In 2017, Porsager won the Swedish competition for the memorial for the victims of the tsunami in Djurgården to be erected in Stockholm, with her proposal Gravitational Ripples. In 2014, she was awarded the Carl Nielsen and Anne Marie Carl-Nielsen Art Scholarship, and in 2012, she participated in dOCUMENTA (13) with the work Anatta Experiment. Porsager was part of the 14th Istanbul Biennial: SALTWATER: A Theory of Thought Forms in 2015 as Annie Besant’s “medium,” recreating watercolours from the book Thought-Forms (1905). She became a PhD candidate in Fine Arts at Malmö Art Academy, Lund University, in September 2015.

1 Niels Bohr, The Philosophical Writings, vol. 1, Atomic Theory and the Description of Nature (Woodbridge, CT: Ox Bow, 1934), 119.
E(AR)THERIC SLIME ~ POST OP was inspired by the bee colony. In the exhibition, however, no actual bees were to be found. In their wake, a cluster of by-products, like wax and honey, along with references to drones and queens, colony collapse disorder, monoculture, libido loss, uselessness, and absence. Suspended from the ceiling and held up by ropes was a basic, blue drone structure with waxed elements. Underneath it, scattered pairs of steel balls reminiscent of so-called Venus balls used for sensual pleasure. In the corner, a queen bed and a yellowish mattress with a built-in media player looping a video/3D animation.

The exhibition was accompanied by a speculative text referencing the American artist Lee Lozano, quantum bee researcher Barbara Shipman, and Rudolf Steiner’s classic lectures on bees, among others.

E(AR)THERIC SLIME ~ POST-OP could be viewed as a drowsy, masturbatory boycott of mindless drive (BZZNZZ) and artificial sweeteners. In spite of fatigue and desolation, a paradoxical reclaiming of outrageous lust.
E(AR)THERIC SLIME ~ POST OP, 2016. E(AR)THERIC SLIME ~ POST OP, 2016. Waxed Hammer (I, II, III) (3 hammers, beeswax), Blue Structure w/ Wax Slits ~ Drone w/ WarmWetWound (painted wood, beeswax, 15 m x ~ 34 cm), 1,000 Sets of Venus Balls ~ Beaming Eyeballs (2,000 stainless steel balls, silicone strings, beeswax), QUEEN bed (wood, foam mattresses, watercolours), Disrupted E(ar)thereal Fantasy (honey-moon) (film / 3D animation, 13 min). Installation view, Brandts 13, Odense, Denmark, 2016. Lea Porsager
#QUEEN BOYCOTT

"The drones, they say, are traitors; they have already split away from the group and fallen to Earth. They no longer belong with them. They only tolerate them because they need them. And what do they need them for?"

Sucked back into the Kingdom, jolted awake by the hammering X-rays of a distant evening star. EARTH animal. Post-sonic vibrations and frenzied dance. Drones, off on their nuptial drive towards an inexhaustible sky behind grey clouds. Featherbrains feeding off the blood-machine (BZZNZZZ). Automatons packed with quantum sperm’s deadly matter, heading for the royal womb.

#cray-cray #beE sweet

Beneath the Kingdom, an ocean of unfertilized EGGs. Ovarian dry spell.

In a corner of a cell lies the queen, withdrawn in her solitary sack. Extraterrestrial honey ball. Masturbatory fizz-fest! Overwhelmed with bittersweet hallucinations, the virgin queen envisions horny worlds of sparks and quarks. One little death after another. Steel eggcitement! Venus goggling the all-too-blue. Deep Brain Resistance. Sting stays in the sticky-sack.

Fizzle out

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Cosmo – Political Party, 2016. Digital image on album cover. 30,5 x 30,5 cm. Andrea Ray
Andrea Ray

In-progress Notes for ReCast LIVE ON-AIR

WPPF Radio Utopia presents ReCast LIVE ON-AIR. Radio Utopia—of ideas forming, of individuals becoming. Time is a sound. You have to tune in to it, not just keep yelling. WPPF—A Past, Potential Future.

ReCast LIVE ON-AIR is a project that enacts folds in time, allowing radical thinkers from across centuries to speak together and conjure new ways of caring for one another outside of the “charmed circle.” ReCast LIVE ON-AIR is a sound installation in which recorded voices are heard coming from megaphone-like speakers. The audio takes the form of a radio programme in which figures from across two hundred years come together to discuss and dispute the egalitarian nature of various sex practices and relationship forms. This group of spectres and futuristics form a quasi-fictive radio documentary that combines the personal and analytical to hash out the separation of love from pleasure and explore the liberatory possibilities of different forms of caring. Some voices are inspired by the words of, for example, Anais Nin, Paul B. Preciado, and Victoria Woodhull. Other voices include a nineteenth-century free love commune member who appears in the studio to share the continued relevance of their community’s sex practices; a twentieth-century essentialist feminist writer unable to let go of the gender binary; and others from a future where gender distinctions are no longer centralised and neither is marriage, instead they practise “relationship anarchy” and “compassioned expression.” The script is written using my doctoral research for my PhD project within the Malmö Art Academy, titled “Sounding Expanded Affinities.”

ReCast LIVE ON-AIR ultimately seeks to ask if a polytemporal conversation that examines gender and sexuality issues can suggest new ways of thinking the social today. Can the spectres of the past recast relations of the future if considered outside of linear time?

“I’ve been focused on the possibility of [conversing] across time, collapsing time through affective contact between marginalized but vocal people then and now.” (Carolyn Dinshaw)
Re-Cast LIVE ON-AIR, 2016. Speaker prototype, mixed media. 31 x 31 x 36 cm. Andrea Ray
Re-Cast LIVE ON-AIR is a component of my doctoral project, “Sounding Expanded Affinities.” “Sounding Expanded Affinities” extracts a methodology of non-linear time from my sound installation practice to examine how folds in time might contribute to our understanding of the systems of stratification circulating through normative relationships, and then asks how this alternate register might help to reconceptualise interpersonal relations. Experimenting with the delimitations of time, subjectivity, and sociality, the project culls feminist critiques of marriage, questions the egalitarian potential of non-monogamies (like free love, polyamory, and relationship anarchy), and proposes the term “expanded affinities” as having the social and political potential to contribute to a disruption and reorganisation of patriarchal holdovers. “Sounding Expanded Affinities” includes three installations, a body of creative writing, and a theoretical text. The project develops and tests a methodology of non-linear time to surpass the limitations of the everyday, using the registers of the personal, political, and theoretical together.

“I have the kind of imagination that hears. I think of it as radio imagination.” (Octavia E. Butler)

—Andrea Ray on her PhD project

BIO Andrea Ray completed the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program, received a MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan, and earned a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. Ray is a part-time assistant professor at Parsons, the New School in New York and teaches online for the School of the Art Institute of Chicago’s Low-Residency MFA. Ray became a PhD candidate in Fine Arts at the Malmö Art Academy of Lund University in 2013 and expects to complete studies in 2018.

Solo exhibitions include those at Zilkha Gallery, Wesleyan University, Connecticut; Open Source, Suite 106, and Cuchifritos, all in New York; and Yalo Gallery, Mississippi. Group exhibitions include Sculpture Center, Apex Art, P.S.1 Clocktower Gallery, and White Columns in New York; Skissernas Museum and Wanås Foundation in Sweden; and venues in Dublin, Brussels, and Turin. Ray has been awarded an Art Matters grant and a Trans-Canada Fellowship and is a two-time New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship recipient. Residency awards include P.S.1 MoMA, New York; MacDowell Colony, New Hampshire; Cité des Arts, Paris; and the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, New York. Ray’s work has been included in the publications Artforum, BOMB Magazine, Zing Magazine, New York Times, and ARTnews.
Drawing for Re-Cast LIVE ON-AIR, 2016. Ink and graphite on paper. 23 x 31 cm. Andrea Ray
Summoning Feminist Spiritualists, 2016. Chalk, paint, wood. 31 x 20 cm. Andrea Ray
BIO Imogen Stidworthy’s work focuses on the voice as a sculptural material in investigations into different forms of language and relationship. She works with people who inhabit the borders of language, whose relation to language is affected by conditions such as aphasia or the impact of overwhelming experiences. Often combining the staged and the observed, Stidworthy makes films and installations and uses a wide range of media including sculptural objects, print, and photography.


Stidworthy curated the group exhibitions *BLACKOUT!*, ERC, Liverpool, 2013; *In the First Circle* (in collaboration with Paul Domela) at Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, 2011–12, and *Die Lucky Bush* at MuHKA, Antwerp, 2008.

Stidworthy’s work is represented by Matt’s Gallery, London, and AKINCI, Amsterdam.
Recently I sat in on a day of sessions in which two therapists for the London-based charity Us in a Bus were working with non-verbal autistic people and people with learning difficulties, in non-verbal ways. We are with Jess in the afternoon. She lies very still except for a tiny, purposeful action of her forefinger, the slightest movement we could call a gesture, accompanied by a barely voiced opening of the throat. Beside her, Marina is timing her own breathing to the irregular rhythm and patting Jess’s shoulder gently but emphatically in synch. On the other side, Joëlle’s attention is on the connection between Jess’s fingertip and her own, as though connected by an invisible thread; when Jess taps, Joëlle taps a key on an electronic keyboard. The voicings of one are amplified, confirmed, and accompanied by the other two. Listening with all the senses, they are tuning in to voice and gesture, listening to voicing. It seems Joëlle and Marina are not trying to follow, but to coincide their rhythm with Jess’s, which is much more demanding. At its most tuned-in, this means sensing the impulse to sound before it becomes audible.

Later when I watch and listen to my recordings of the session, the sonic-affective dimension that drew me in is missing; the semantics of their words dominate. The physical, rhythmic, bodily, temporal “meaning” they produced between them can only be experienced by being present. It cannot be transcribed or translated, it can’t be captured simply with the recording device: it has to be experienced in and with the now and my recordings drive this home.

Voicing on the Borders of Language
“The borders of language” is an image with which to imagine encounters between different forms of language. We experience the borders when we engage with people whose language confounds us. In the encounter, (our) language founders, rendering us to some degree at a loss, speechless. Grappling for ways to make sense, other forms of language emerge in sounds, rhythms, bodily movements, gestures, and facial expressions.

The overarching question in this research is twofold: How do encounters on the borders of language affect (our own) language, being, and social relation? Does it develop the scope of our response-ability—(to others and to ourselves)?

Borders
From momentary glitches in a flow of communication, to forms of language we have no idea how to respond to, even to recognise as meaningful, my research takes heed of what happens between (our) languages and voices.

The borders of language are not so much a subject as a space between subjects (topical, or human); a space of no dimensions, dynamic, fluid, and unstable. This “impossible” space happens; temporal, ephemeral, existing only for the duration of dialogue between two people, leaving traces in and changing both. My research involves listening to the voices on both sides of the dialogue, or in the case of non-verbal
communication, the *being-with*; sounding the space, or *rub-up* it generates, and new or different forms of language it produces. What are these forms? Can they be traced? How do they impact (our) language, which we think and live through, rejigging and undoing the grounds of sense-making? And how do these voices and traces, and my engagement with them as an observer, interlocutor, and artist, relate to the artwork that is shaped by them?

These are questions I address in a mode of thinking oriented by the notion of voicing. Voicing is the doing of the voice, its sounding and address towards others. It happens within a continuum that includes *all forms* of voicing, from the primarily linguistic to the non-verbal, from the audible to the inaudible. Some of the dialogues I think and work with in my dissertation include people who “voice themselves,” figuratively speaking, less through vocal sounds than through sounds of tapping or blowing, shaking or rubbing of materials and objects, or the near-silent rhythms of unvoiced breathing.

How we understand language and voicing is relative to our place in language, shaped by the conditions of our being and relationships with others. In the spaces between languages, our conceptions of them are challenged, and we return to them with new perspectives.

**Dialogues**

Starting with lived experience, I draw on voicings on the borders of language that have formed the ground of my artistic research, and on new encounters, which now become part of this PhD research. Therapists working with the London-based charity Us in a Bus use Intensive Interaction as a central tool in their sessions with non-verbal autistic people and people with learning difficulties. The Swedish therapist Iris Johansson, who is autistic, learned to speak when she was twelve and to write at the age of thirty; she is someone who is able to *speak* about and from non-verbal being.

In 1967, French educationalist Fernand Deligny started an experimental network for living with non-verbal autistic children, in Monoblet in the Cévennes mountains of southern France, which continued until his death in 1986. Contemporary therapist Phoebe Caldwell engages with non-verbal autistic people using Intensive Interaction. On many levels, Deligny’s and Caldwell’s work is fundamentally different. Deligny’s project is driven by philosophical, social, political, and, arguably, artistic questions, whereas Caldwell’s is a therapeutic practice, the aim of which is “to help,” that is, to find a point of contact (an “anchor”) amid the chaos and pain, physical as well as mental, of the autistic storm, commonly known as meltdown, that can ensue in response to sensory overload. I imagine a dialogue between Deligny and Caldwell; no straight comparison, but a teasing out of points of intersection, correspondence, and difference for what they make tangible, or evoke, of the spaces between languages.

I consider my own work in terms of the dialogues through which work is shaped (the dialogue at source) and the dialogue between work and audience: How does the space of the work relate to a space between languages, without succumbing to the logic of translation? What is this unstable *dis-connectedness* between them? How to trace other *forms* of language and work with them to produce an affective space (the space of the work) that can open out other places of our own and others’ languages and voicings on the continuum?

—Imogen Stidworthy on her PhD project

2 As Richard Kearney writes, referring to the work of Paul Ricoeur and his notion of linguistic hospitality: “Ricoeur argues that good translations involve a crucial openness to the other. Indeed he recommends that we be prepared to *forfeit our native language’s claim to self-sufficiency*—which can sometimes go to extremes of nationalism and chauvinism—in order to ‘host’ (qua *hospes*) the ‘foreign’ (hostis).” My emphasis.
3 In her autobiographical book *A Different Childhood* (2012), Johansson describes her childhood and later years during which learned to write. She is now a therapist specialising in working with groups.
4 Conversation with Phoebe Caldwell, February 2016.
Christo is autistic, non-verbal, and cannot read. He spends hours at a time “reading” with total attention to the non-semantic dimensions of books: their smell, their weight, and the modulating rhythms and sounds of the pages as he manoeuvres them between his hands.
Selected Activities

The World Turned Upside Down: Art and Ethics in the Rise of the “Stone Age South”

Dit Vindarna Bär/Whither the Winds, Lunds Konsthall on the Occasion of Lund University’s 350th Anniversary

Mary Kelly, New Honorary Doctor at Lund University

Museet/The Museum/المتحف

Critical & Pedagogical Studies Exam Projects 2017

Moulding Course: Bronze/Aluminium/Silicone

Plastic Course

Welding Course
During the 2017 spring semester, the course “The World Turned Upside Down: Art and Ethics in the Rise of the ‘Stone Age South,’” initiated by Professor Sarat Maharaj, took place at Malmö Art Academy.

The starting point for the project was a reconstruction of the Art History Room (Durban, South Africa) of the apartheid years. The AH Room was at the University of South Africa, University College in Durban for Blacks of Indian Origin. The reconstructed room in Malmö, given the title the Anti-Apartheid Room, served as the backdrop for all events that took place during the course, which included a number of open lectures by speakers from around the world, covering the different themes of the course: migration, colonialism, cosmic awakening, women in historical accounts of apartheid, and the decolonisation of knowledge production.
The Art History Room at Salisbury Island, University of South Africa, University College in Durban for Blacks of Indian Origin, circa 1971
The Anti-Apartheid Room at Malmö Art Academy, 2017. Reconstruction by students Sebastião Borges, Ellinor Lager, Max Ockborn, Joana Pereira, and Joakim Sandqvist
The thrust of today’s migrations seems largely “Northward”—even in the Antipodes, where they are clearly headed towards the opposite pole. The “South” has tended to signal underdevelopment and crisis. It has also flagged up notions of other possibilities, alternative perspectives, other designs for living. The exodus from the South to the North is at odds with the idea of the Global South as a privileged vantage point from which to critique the world system. We rather have anomalies and crossovers that affirm and straddle, unpick and unravel in one go the received N/S dividing lines. How to map this topsy-turvy global space, how to take its sound?

On the one hand, with today’s migrations, the classic cardinal points and domains—East/West/North/South—are constantly fixed, even vehemently asserted. On the other, migratory drives surge and spill over such distinctions, blurring and undoing them—throwing up fresh contact and interaction. Do these emerging spaces mirror strands of the “primordial, pristine” space that our ancestors, Stone Age Homo sapiens, wandered into from “out of Africa,” to roam and rove what were the protocontinents? An “unnamed” space, prior to demarcations and orientations—or should we say, a pre-cardinal space? It seems to echo the rising post-cardinal spatial mentality and experience thrown up, against the odds, by today’s migrations. With this streaming movement do we have the glimmerings of a contemporary Palaeolithic non-cardinality?

The starting point for our project at Malmö Art Academy was a reconstruction of the Art History Room (Durban, South Africa) of the apartheid years. The AH Room was at the University of South Africa, University College in Durban for Blacks of Indian Origin. This is in the province of Natal with the great Drakensberg mountain range—Ukahlamba—which includes one of the world’s most extensive sites of prehistoric rock art and cave paintings. The reconstruction or recreation in Malmö, Sweden, could have been in any mode—art installation, film, diagrammatic or performative statement, walks, discursive picnics, critical rambles, etc.

The Art History Room in Durban put on show an “evolutionary ladder” of artefacts, artworks, and cultures from across the world. Its effect, if not explicit objective, was to underline a Eurocentric vision of things—a view not uncommon in art studies of the time. Some took it to imply that the spectrum of world cultures and art forms existed in separate, segregated compartments, almost in parallel universes. To their eyes, the display embodied apartness—sometimes touted during the apartheid years as a “multicultural rainbow” (where, needless to say, some cultures were more equal than others).

But did the display also open up—perhaps quite unwittingly—counterviews, alternative readings? A glance across the original room inescapably brought into play notions of mix, exchange, and swap—the sense of brisk translation between diverse artistic and cultural idioms, styles, and modes of thinking. What light could this throw on today’s migratory swirl of peoples and cultural elements—on prickly issues of multiculturalism, its limits and shortcomings; on questions of living with diversity, difference and multiplicity; on much-thumbed notions of hospitality and tolerance; on ceaseless everyday cultural translation and cosmopolitanising forces—all in a setting of apparent racisme sans race?

Our explorations in Malmö, centred around the reconstruction of the AH Room, which we called the Anti-Apartheid Room, linked up studies of the Swedish anti-apartheid archives, ranging over issues of South African and Swedish women; minorities and their overlooked place in representations of the historical struggles to end apartheid; North and South prehistoric, parietal art; and contemporary ancestral and aboriginal presences.

The AH Room had evoked the idea of a world art system: in some ways, it tended to mirror André Malraux’s cosmopolitan views of art and culture in a “museum without walls.” Today, does the development of the global museum—hand in glove with contemporary creative industries—see the makings of flat-pack, “globalised” art practices across our art education institutions, galleries, and museums?

To mull alongside: The AH Room had come into being with apartheid’s segregating, ethnicising logic. At the time, opposition to this development was summed up in the slogan “Knowledge Is Colour Blind.” What to make of such a claim in the face of today’s search for a “decolonialisation of knowledge”—for “tonal modes of knowing”—not least, in the thick of an all-encompassing knowledge society with its drive towards a pansophic world? What mileage for art practice, creativity, and art research, not simply as hard-nosed “knowledge production” but perhaps its opposite, as modes of “knowledgeable ignorance,” as Ignorantitis sapiens?

—Sarat Maharaj, 2017
The Art History Room at Salisbury Island, University of South Africa, University College in Durban for Blacks of Indian Origin, circa 1971. Detailed documentation. Courtesy of The Documentation Centre, University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal at Durban Westville.

During the highpoint of the Apartheid years, a new campus was built (1972) and University College, Durban for Blacks of Indian Origin was renamed: University of Durban-Westville for Indians. After the Apartheid years, the above institution was de-segregated and merged with the other segregated universities for the Zulu and for Whites, creating the post-Apartheid, multiracial university renamed University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal at Durban Westville.
The World Turned Upside Down: 
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Lecture programme January–May 2017

— January 31
Inauguration of the Anti-Apartheid Room, reconstructed by students Sebastião Borges, Elinor Lager, Max Ockborn, Joana Pereira, and Joakim Sandqvist.

“After the Apartheid State. Beyond Cardinality: Neither North/South nor East/West. The Paleolithic and the Contemporary Today’s Migrations,” opening lecture by Professor Sarat Maharaj.

Sarat Maharaj is Professor of Visual Art and Knowledge Systems and Supervisor for the Doctoral Programme at Malmö Art Academy.

— February 2
“This Gift of Tears,” lecture by Professor Mats Leiderstam.

This lecture focused on Mats Leiderstam’s artistic practice in relation to a series of paintings showing a handsome man carrying a cross—all made after a composition by Giovanni Bellini from the late fifteenth century. It is an iconic image of Christ, one that became a prototype for a new type of private devotional picture. Today we know of at least sixty-five versions produced by Bellini’s workshop or by his followers. Starting from the seeing experience of the most beautiful of them, Christ Carrying the Cross (1505–10) at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum—in which Christ has a tear clearly visible on his left cheek, a feature unique to this version—Leiderstam then talked about his own work in relation to these pictures.

Matts Leiderstam is Professor of Fine Arts at Malmö Art Academy.

— February 3

Starting from the mathematical definition of mapping, Franco Farinelli’s lecture focused on the history of the concept, stressing the relationship between geometry, the history of science, fine arts, and politics. The lecture underscored the fundamental relevance of mapping in understanding the nature of modernity, and of post-modernity, too.

Franco Farinelli is Professor of Human Geography at the University of Bologna, Head of the Department of Philosophy and Communication Studies, and President of the Associazione dei Geografi Italiani (Italian Geographers Association).

— February 6
“The Scandinavian Pioneer Settlements,” lecture by Senior Lecturer Jan Apel.

Anatomically modern humans (AMH) is a young species that has its origins in Africa (200,000 to 1,500,000 years ago). Groups of AMH migrated from Africa from about 60,000 years ago onward. They quickly colonised southern Asia, New Guinea, and Australia and reached Europe approximately 43,000 years ago from the south-east, and assimilated or outcompeted the Indigenous European Neanderthal population. During the last Ice Age Maximum (c. 25,000 y.a.), with its harsh Arctic climate and large ice sheets covering Northern Europe and the Alps, humans gathered in refuges in Europe’s southwest (Iberian Peninsula) and southeast (Eastern Mediterranean area). At the end of the Ice Age (15,000–8,000 y.a.), these groups colonised Northern Europe and eventually Scandinavia from the south. At the same time, human groups with an East European/Asian origin reached the Baltic Sea from the east and brought with them specialised hunting and fishing technologies, entering Scandinavia from the north. These different groups make up the founding Stone Age population of Scandinavia.

Jan Apel is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Archaeology and Ancient History at Lund University.

— February 10
Artist talk by Ndikhumbule Ngqinambi.

Ndikhumbule Ngqinambi’s dazzling landscapes are restless beings. They seem to rumble with the weight of a charging army or the resonance of a thunderous sky. They are things in motion, the figures captured within them always moving, departed but not yet arrived, running and tumbling in a vast no man’s land between past and present, dreams and reality, promises and disappointments. As noted by Fay Jackson of Art Africa magazine (South Africa), “Ngqinambi successfully makes political comment without propaganda, and conjures spectacle without being histrionic,” drawing upon the traditions of both nineteenth-century European romanticism and twentieth-century Soviet art to create a style entirely his own, one that resists easy categorisation. Both political and personal, critical and introspective, Ngqinambi engages with social contexts and histories in subtle and unusual ways. His love of theatre and film is apparent in his paintings’ strong sense of narrative and the drama incurred by his sweeping, broiling skies, fevered brushstrokes, and striking use of colour.

Ndikhumbule Ngqinambi is a visual artist based in Cape Town. He was the guest of Malmö Art Academy through an IASPIS grant and participated in “The World Turned Upside Down: Art and Ethics in the Rise of the ‘Stone Age South’” between February and April 2017.
February 15
“The Activists,” full-day seminar with Margot Edström.

Students undertook archive research and were given a presentation on the SAFRAN group, Swedes active in the fight against apartheid, in this seminar run by Junior Lecturer Margot Edström. From February 7 to 15, Edström and the participants researched the Skåne archives of anti-apartheid groups at Arkivcentrum Syd in Lund.

Margot Edström is Junior Lecturer in Fine Arts at Malmö Art Academy.

February 20
Screening and presentation of Full Firearms (2012) by Professor Emily Wardill.

“Full Firearms reframes the history of arms heiress Sarah Winchester in a contemporary context where her haunting is not limited to America and the specter of its own violence en route to manifest destiny, but rather is inundated with the scope of the contemporary international arms trade and the nations that bear the brunt of its success. The house in the film produces an echo, because those who occupy it articulate their voices in relation to the making and writing of a history. Tracing the echoes of actions through the production of social spaces does not remain solely within the diegesis of the film. Instead, it extends to the exchange initiated by Wardill with her collaborators as they produce a film together, and also attempt to implicate the viewer in a film that is also a body—one that is constantly living and growing.” —Jacob Korczynski, 2011

Emily Wardill is Professor of Fine Arts at Malmö Art Academy.

February 27
“Migration, Extinction, and Colonisation in the Palaeolithic: Neanderthals, Denisovans, and Modern Humans,” lecture by Professor Thomas Higham.

Thomas Higham’s lecture covered the movement of modern humans out of Africa, when and how this happened, and how our ancestors, Neanderthals and Denisovans, interbred around 50,000–60,000 years ago, making us who we are today. Higham also touched on early art and music.

Thomas Higham is a professor of archaeological science, Deputy Director of the Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit, and a fellow at Keble College, University of Oxford.

March 1–3

Three films by Mali-born filmmaker Manthia Diawara offered a platform to discuss the complexities of the relationships between Africa and the Europe (the West), focusing on the ongoing impact of colonialism and postcolonialism on contemporary society. Keywords included architecture, nation state, Négritude, and pan-Africanism, as well as relationships, borders, immigration, and art. Each of
Diawara’s films was screened in dialogue with another film in order to expand the topics emphasised by Diawara. Each of the films commented on the other, mirroring a dialogical technique frequently used by Diawara in his films and writings.

Jürgen Bock is an art theorist and curator and Director of the Maumaus School and Residency Programme and its associated exhibition space Lumiar Cité, Lisbon.

**March 9–10**

Full-day seminars with Hans Carlsson and Runo Lagomarsino, and lectures and workshops by Julia Willén, Patricia Lorenzini, and Jakob Jakobsen.

**“Unsettling White Temporalities,” lecture by Julia Willén.**

Julia Willén’s lecture explored temporal modalities and claims of modernity during apartheid, analysing the British-imperial and the Afrikaner nationalist notions of modernity, progress, and “African time.” Conceptions of time, temporality, and modernity in South Africa were discussed in relation to the period before the implementation of apartheid in 1948, the first decade of apartheid politics, and a final homing in on the 1970s, focusing specifically on the Black Consciousness Movement and the African talking back to ideas on “African time.”

**Seminar with Julia Willén, Runo Lagomarsino, and Hans Carlsson.**

The seminar, drawing from the morning’s lecture, focused on artistic practices that developed into acts of resistance during apartheid, simultaneously responding to the demands of the discourses of arts and culture, which are in many ways part of an oppressive colonial power apparatus. The seminar touched upon how this theme (art’s simultaneous emancipatory and oppressive qualities) has been highlighted in major art exhibitions and art projects in the 2000s, with a focus on South Africa, but also in relation to other parts of Africa.
“Modernity, Delinking, and the Global South,” lecture by Patricia Lorenzoni.
Patricia Lorenzoni discussed the concepts of decoloniality, delinking, and modernity, in dialogue with the theories of Walter Mignolo. Author of works such as _The Darker Side of the Renaissance_ (1992), _Local Histories/GLOBAL Designs_ (1999), and _The Darker Side of Western Modernity_ (2011), Mignolo is one of the most renowned thinkers within the field of decolonial theory. The lecture took its departure in Mignolo’s usage of these central concepts, in order to open further discussion on their scope and utility.

**Seminar with Jakob Jakobsen and Runo Lagomarsino.**
The seminar departed from the piece _The Revolution Must Be a School of Unfettered Thought_ (which appeared at the 2016 Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art), in which Jakob Jakobsen together with artist Maria Berrios examines various anti-imperialist strategies—for decolonisation and for the liberation of the Global South. The work revolves around the exhibition _Del Tercer Mundo_ (1968, Havana). The seminar also addressed other current and past examples of art and exhibition practices containing methods of decolonisation.

Julia Willén is a PhD candidate at the Institute for Research on Migration, Ethnicity and Society (REMESO), Linköping University.

Hans Carlsson is an artist, writer, and curator based in Malmö and is Interim Project Coordinator of Critical & Pedagogical Studies (MFA) at Malmö Art Academy.

Runo Lagomarsino is a Swedish artist living in São Paolo, with major interest in colonial histories.

Patricia Lorenzoni holds a PhD in intellectual history and works as an independent researcher, writer, and translator. Her current research deals with colonial expansion in contemporary Brazil in relation to the notions of nation, territory, and the people.

Jakob Jakobsen is a politically engaged visual artist, educator, and activist based in Copenhagen.

**March 20**
“The Drakensberg Prehistoric Cave Paintings and the Retinal,” lecture by Professor Sarat Maharaj.

**April 4–6**
“The World Upside Down—A View from the South,” full-day lectures and seminar with Dr. D. Govinden.
Against the historical background of slavery, indentured servitude, colonialism, and apartheid, the role of literature has been crucial in imagining a new, alternative world in South Africa. This series of lectures considered the role of Indian women’s writings, with particular reference to the contribution of political activists such as Dr. Kesaveloo Goonam, Phyllis Naidoo, and Fatima Meer.

Participants were presented a broad critical overview of the literature of protest, of the influence of Mahatma Gandhi and passive resistance in South Africa, and of the identity politics of race and gender.

The lectures included (auto)biographical input, with narratives related to Betty Govinden’s grandmother, who came from India to South Africa as a child labourer, and Govinden’s experience studying in one of South Africa’s “tribal colleges,” on Salisbury Island in the seaport town of Durban, in the 1960s.

Dr. Devarakshamam (Betty) Govinden is an author and Senior Research Associate at University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa.

**April 4**
**Artist talk by Ângela Ferreira.**
Ângela Ferreira’s presentation focused on how she, as a Mozambican-born, South African-educated art school graduate, responded to the final years of apartheid. She described the local circumstances that informed and shaped her search for a politically meaningful and internationally pertinent contemporary art discourse and critical practice.

The limitations of modernity in contemporary art are recognised. The artist’s response is to investigate how to reference popular material culture (artefacts that are recognisable by a community and reflect political issues) as starting points for developing political artworks. Ferreira has identified music as a potentially powerful popular culture vehicle for communicating aesthetic and political meaning. Music’s immanence, however, proves challenging to render in sculpture, so as an alternative, given its material similarities with the three-dimensional artistic object, she shifted focus to architecture. Ferreira develops metaphoric and political sculptural statements from critical investigations into buildings that reveal contradictions emerging from the spread of architectural modernism in Africa. By reflecting on the history and broader meaning of architectural structures, she has devised a sculptural language that delivers a personal relationship with sound and performance.

Ângela Ferreira, born in Maputo, Mozambique, grew up and studied in South Africa and is now based in Lisbon. She is Professor of Fine Art at Lisbon University, where she obtained her doctorate in 2016.

**April 20–21**
“Decolonising Minds? The Global Politics of Knowledge,” full-day lectures and seminars with Professor Arathi Sriprakash.

These sessions explored the active legacies of colonialism and the global hierarchies of knowledge across the sciences and arts. We ask of our respective fields: What are the possibilities for a pedagogic project to “decolonise the mind”?  

Arathi Sriprakash is Lecturer of the Sociology of Education, in the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. She is Joint Editor of the journal _International Studies in Sociology of Education._

**April 27**
“The Daughter of Cosmos,” lecture by Professor Gertrud Sandqvist.
Gertrud Sandqvist delivered a presentation on the Indian pioneer Rukmini Devi—thesos, recreator of the classic Indian Temple Dance, animals rights defender, and reviver of theatre arts, crafts, literatures, and art education in India. It was even proposed she become the country’s president.

Gertrud Sandqvist is Professor of Art Theory and the History of Ideas, Supervisor of the Doctoral Programme, and Rector of Malmö Art Academy.
Paul Gilroy lecturing in the Anti-Apartheid Room, Malmö Art Academy, 2017
May 2–4
“Disorienting Europe: Reading Césaire and Fanon in the Twenty-First Century,” full-day seminars with Manuela Ribeiro Sanches.

In the 1950s and early 1960s, in the wake of World War II and the challenges it posed to Europe’s economic, political, and theoretical supremacy, the first explicit anti-colonial movements in European colonies announced their willingness to claim national independence, in some cases leading an armed struggle. Two major figures of anti-colonial thinking, Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon—both born in a French colony, the Caribbean Island of Martinique, whose residents were recently turned into full French citizens as a consequence of major legislative changes intended to contain demands for autonomy—wrote some of the most vehement denouncements of Europe.

Césaire and Fanon argued Nazism, capitalism, and colonialism are complicit and denounced the inherent racism that had assisted Europe’s notion of progress and the ensuing “civilising mission” that ultimately divided the world into two discrete, opposed, but interdependent zones.

However, Césaire and Fanon launched their challenging denunciation and appeal to a more just world, drawing on the same theoretical weapons that had been used to turn indigènes into subaltern populations, devoid of voice and power, transforming those means of oppression into the weapons of the “wretched of the earth.” They thereby posed a decisive challenge to Eurocentric claims to universality and the definition of what it means to be human, which has provided the basic foundation of the Declaration of the Rights of “Man” since the late eighteenth century.

Forgotten or silenced for several decades, Césaire’s and Fanon’s works gained renewed attention in the 1990s, and more recently have become a major reference in addressing issues of discrimination and racism in Europe.

How is one to read and make sense of Césaire’s and Fanon’s claims in twenty-first-century Europe? How has their work contributed, and how does it still contribute, to a dislocation of the “West” and the decolonisation of its knowledges and disciplinary epistemologies? How far can they contribute to a challenge to our orientation points and the ensuing divisions of the world, of the disciplines we practice and the way we deal with our everyday lives?

The aim of Manuela Ribeiro Sanches’s seminar was to propose a close reading of Aimé Césaire’s Discourse on Colonialism (1950) and Frantz Fanon’s The Wretched of the Earth (1961), considering, on the one hand, the historical contexts in which these texts were written and received as well as the travels of such theories (via, for example, Edward W. Said), and, on the other, the ways in which they have recently been rediscovered and reappropriated. The seminar considered important rereadings of these texts coming from Africa (including those of Achille Mbembe) and their relevance for the redefinition and dis-orientation of Europe, and its future in a fatally interconnected world—albeit a world increasingly divided by physical and symbolic, external and internal borders, and the ensuing widespread inequalities.

Reading:
Aimé Césaire; Frantz Fanon; Jean-Paul Sartre; Homi K. Bhabha; Achille Mbembe.

Manuela Ribeiro Sanches is a retired assistant professor with teaching aggregation at the School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon. She is the coordinator of the research group CITCOM—Citizenship, Critical Cosmopolitanism, Modernity/ies, (Post)Colonialism, University of Lisbon.

June 6
“Acoustemics and the ‘Decolonising of Knowledge’ in the Age of Superintelligence,” closing lecture by Professor Sarat Maharaj.
Making of the Anti-Apartheid Room at Malmö Art Academy, 2017. Reconstructed by students Sebastião Borges, Ellinor Lager, Max Ockborn, Joana Pereira, and Joakim Sandqvist

The Anti-Apartheid Room at Malmö Art Academy, 2017. Detail. Reconstruction by students Sebastião Borges, Ellinor Lager, Max Ockborn, Joana Pereira, and Joakim Sandqvist
Markings—A Discursive Walk
by Hanni Kamaly

Following Carl von Linné and his system of nature, we walk through the streets of Malmö. Walking in the streets is connected to a subversive act, in contrast to walking in nature. It is associated with illegality, the lower classes, and danger. But walking in itself is thought of as a symbolic act as well.

Djäknegatan: Carl Milles, *Emigranterna*, 1940
Originally placed at the Swedish Emigrant Institute in Växjö, the sculpture was bought by a private collector and placed in the streets of Malmö in 2010. It depicts a shark with seven men on its back, each man holding an obscure object.

Stortorget: Stig Blomberg, *Torgbrunn*, 1964
The fountain *Torgbrunn* depicts figures connected to historical events in Skåne and Sweden. The fountain is next to an original water well (*vattenkonsten*) that was built around 1580 and subsequently decorated with a “Moor” (*morian*) made in wood. This Moor is represented in Blomberg’s sculpture through different imagery than that commonly used for Moors during the 1600s. Blomberg’s sculpture is of a black boy with a monkey on his shoulder.

Linné visited Stortorget on his travels to Skåne in 1649. He described the square as well as the water fountain, which at that time wasn’t decorated with the figure.

Ostindiefarargatan
A short street between Stortorget and Slottsparken, named after those who travelled with the Swedish East India Company, a colonial trade union operating in Ghana and South Africa.

*The Man and Pegasus* sculpture was given to Malmö Stad and placed at the artist’s choice location of Linnéplatsen, Slottsparken. Milles is known for his public and figurative sculptures. This one in particular represents figures from Greek mythology. The sculpture was originally atop a four-metre pole, and then raised two times more until its final height of ten metres. Milles was a man who idolised fascist leaders, such as Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini. He especially admired the Nazi exhibition *Entartete Kunst*, a collection of artworks exhibited to showcase distasteful art in Germany in 1943.
The World Turned Upside Down: 
Art and Ethics in the Rise of the “Stone Age South”

Dr. D. Govinden at Malmö Art Academy, 2017
Reconstituting the Art History Room on Salisbury Island, Durban, of the 1960s and ’70s at the Malmö Art Academy, in Sweden, in 2017, 5961.5 miles away, projects and propels the extended time of memory that we have been experiencing in South Africa post-1994 in dynamic and meaningful ways. South Africa—“Country of My Skull, Country of Grief and Grace,” as one of our eminent Afrikaans poets and thinkers, Antjie Krog, has stated.2

The Art History Room on the island originally depicted an “evolutionary ladder” of artefacts (in keeping with apartheid ideology), but, transplanted and transmuted, at Malmö, built from an “image of an image of an image,” invited “counter readings.”3

Predictably, and clearly “by design,” this project was inspired and directed by Sarat Maharaj, Professor of Visual Art and Knowledge Systems at Malmö Art Academy, and himself a past fine arts student at Salisbury Island (in the mid to late 1960s). When I began to reflect on this, I appreciated that this is not surprising, as we live our lives, as Milan Kundera points out, as a musical composition, with “motifs” from our past,4 repeated, augmented, or modulated and, I would add, rendered as point-counterpoint …5

Or, to change the metaphor, they may be “fragmented images,” to use the evocative words of Herselene Lazarus Charles,6 a fine arts student on Salisbury Island in 1968, but still enduring in their own way. As she writes, “Etched in the windmills of my mind are fragmented images of the Fine Arts Department … the portals of my mind.”7

This reconstruction here at Malmö, and its ready identification with the island’s history—separated from Sweden both spatially and temporally, if not experientially—readily resonated on many levels. It demonstrated and expanded the notions of both filiation and affiliation, in Edward Said’s formulations, where there is “miscegenation” on different levels, both in terms of political solidarities and alliances (which Sweden has amply demonstrated in relation to apartheid-era South Africa, from the 1960s, the heyday of apartheid, and over the decades that followed) and, crucially, in terms of our continuing connectedness in a common world both past and present.8

One of our eminent scholars in South Africa, Sarah Nuttall, has drawn attention to our co-existence, our entanglement, in South Africa, against the usual “grotesque” trope of separateness. Nuttall draws attention to the notion of “terrains of mutuality,”9 and this is true both within South Africa and beyond—south to north and west to east …

“The World Turned Upside Down … Is this the strange Antipodes …? That down is up, and up is down!”10

Indeed, the installation at Malmö invoked Mieke Bal and others’ “migratory aesthetics.”11 We appreciate that by inhabiting the border, the liminal, the in-between, both temporally and spatially, we become migratory, diasporic subjects in ever-widening concentric circles.12

Dilip Menon, based at Wits University in Johannesburg, using another metaphor, points out that we “have to cultivate a form of archipelagic thinking that sits alongside the empire, nation and transnational and generates maps of affinities. … It should reflect the simultaneity of affiliation with community, nation and the world, and also the fact that identities are conjunctural and oscillate between narrower and wider imaginings.”13

The Malmö installation was a bold and creative attempt, I believe, to build an open “archive that brings in the contingent, the exigent and the eternal in one frame” (to use Menon’s formulation).14
How deeply poignant for me, with my past, to find here at Malmö a “zone of exchange,” a “zone of crossing,” an “imaginary homeland,” a “third space,” beyond a linear and teleological rendering of that past.\(^{15}\)

After all, this is the “epoch of juxtaposition,” as Michel Foucault has declared:

> The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed.\(^{16}\)

Opening the vault of memory and creating this “museum without walls” in Malmö, albeit germinating from a certain place in time and space, stresses the singularity of the world, to use the formulation of an intellectual from the South, Roberto Mangabeira Unger.\(^{15}\) Unger writes of “the infinity of the individual,” that we are context bound but also “context transcending.”\(^{19}\) His thoroughly anti-deterministic view—that the world is not a closed system of options governed by deterministic laws and typologies—is, indeed, as far away from the apartheid logic that created Salisbury Island as one can ever imagine.

This project and others similar to it are, arguably, seeking a new “grammar of identity” by showing a “transitive imagination” at work, where there is “transitivity,” or “being in the space of crossing,”\(^{20}\) of inhabiting the “discursive threshold” or border, or interstice.

Of course, such “crossing” may sometimes be into the “abyss,” of experiencing “a grand way to fall,” as Cape Town artist Ndikhumbule Ngqinambi’s evocative and enigmatic paintings depict.\(^{21}\) But his painting The Other Side might be seen as a crossing over, albeit precarious, to the light, and all the promise it might intimate. The contest of competing truths—past and present, the particular and the perennial—may be played out against the wide and wild expanse of the celestial skies, as in Ngqinambi’s paintings,\(^{22}\) with all the promise and perils that attend it.

Further, in what way might Ngqinambi’s paintings be “speaking back,” in different ways, to Dumile Feni’s African Guernica,\(^{23}\) for example? Feni produced this work in 1967—when Professor Maharaj and I were both at Salisbury Island—a painting that vividly depicted the “insanity of reason” of the time.\(^{24}\)

**The Salisbury Island Reunion of 2011 and the reconstruction and installation of the Art History Room at Malmö in 2017, then, are more than casual strolls down memory lane. They constitute, for me, a “powerful act of projection”—onto the past—in order to live in the South Africa and the world of today, and the future …**

We have to ask how a “refusal of amnesia,” in general, and of “remembering Salisbury Island,” in particular, would propel us into a new mobilisation and critical creativity for the present time. Indeed, *Memory Is a Weapon.*

The installation at Malmö is, arguably, in the grand scheme of things, a redemptive act, if not an act of exorcism, expunging the ghosts of the past, as Pablo Picasso would have seen it,\(^{25}\) the “spectres” that are part of our “haunting capital,”\(^{26}\) whether of apartheid, or of indigent servitude, or of slavery.\(^{27}\)

Homi Bhabha, recalling Frantz Fanon, notes that “remembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-membering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.”\(^{28}\)

(At the moment playing to full houses in South Africa is a film entitled Kalushi; it is the story of Solomon Mahlangu, who was a student leader who owed his political formation to the 1976 Soweto uprising. He left the country for training in the African National Congress (ANC) camps outside South Africa, and on his return was put on trial, under the *Terrorism Act* at the time, for attacks between the police and him and his comrades. He was executed in 1979. The point about watching this film, in the present moment, is that it is a most painful experience, alongside a celebration of the extraordinary valour of someone who gave his life in the course of freedom.)

As I think about our protracted time of memory, our history, our refusal of amnesia, I realise how important this time is. About his 2016 book *An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India,* Shashi Tharoor states, “You cannot revenge yourself on history; history is its own revenge.”\(^{29}\)

During the post-1994 season of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, which took place from 1995–98, we spoke of “restorative and retributive justice.” But, since the formal work of the TRC is over, we have to ask how different memory projects, alongside diverse retributive and restorative acts, contribute to the prolonged transitional justice that we seek in South Africa at the present time and into the future, to a “re-membering,” in the sense that Toni Morrison has intended to use the concept.

In writing about the TRC in *Country of My Skull* (1998), Antjie Krog urges an expansive understanding of justice: “If it sees truth as the widest possible compilation of people’s perceptions, stories, myth and experiences, it will have chosen to restore memory and foster a new humanity, and perhaps that is justice in its deepest sense.”\(^{30}\)

But I do not want to suggest that our remembering and re-membering in post-apartheid South Africa is a clear and unambiguous process. There are still squabbles over sites or commemoration, for example, the way our struggle heroes and key liberation events may be remembered in opportunistic ways, as well as a distortion of what they really stood for and what that might mean in the present moment.

Certainly, one of the questions we ask is of the role of memory in identity formation, or re-formation,\(^{31}\) and its ongoing impact for change and transformation.

**Journeying from the separateness of a “tribal college,” as Salisbury Island was dubbed, we realise that the need to make our higher education institutions across the globe places of new community is more important now than ever before: “In this joint discovery of self and Other, it is the role of the academy to transform what might be conflict, or contest, or assertion into reconciliation, mutuality, recognition, and creative interaction.”\(^{32}\)**

The challenge of the reconstruction in Malmö, representing an attempt to explore what it means to find a *decolonial cosmopolitanism* in its different formulations and permutations (against other formulations, such as post-colonial cosmopolitanism, etc.), is to explore the “cognitive injustices” (to use the formulation of Gurmund Bhabra) that we have been collectively heir to.

In his novel *Astonishing the Gods* (1995), Ben Okri envisions such a university “without walls” (although André Malraux’s vision—*a musée imaginaire*—was more encompassing). Okri envisions a transformed university
not simply as a new place of learning but as a new place of living and loving. The irony of history is that the kind of covert police presence we had on Salisbury Island is now evident in the increased “securitisation” of our campuses.33 Okri’s great visionary consciousness is for a new education, for an expansive social imagination, not a shrinking one, for another “brave new world”... for a new human community.

“Suddenly he saw the city as a vast network of thoughts. Courts were places where people went to study the laws, not places of judgement. The library, which he took to be one building, but he later discovered was practically the whole city, was a place where people went to record their thoughts, their dreams, their intuitions, their ideas, their memories, and their prophecies. They also went there to increase the wisdom of the race. Books were not borrowed. Books were composed there, and deposited.

“The universities were places for self-perfection, places for the highest education in life. Everyone taught everyone else. All were teachers, all were students. The sages listened more than they talked; and when they talked it was to ask questions that would engage endless generations in profound and perpetual discovery.

“The universities and the academies were also places where people sat and meditated and absorbed knowledge from the silence. Research was a permanent activity, and all were researchers and applauders of the fruits of research. The purpose was to discover the hidden unifying laws of all things, to deepen the spirit, to make more profound the sensitivities of the individual to the universe, and to become more creative.

“Love was the most important subject in the universities. Entire faculties were devoted to the art of living. The civilisation was dedicated to a simple goal, the perfection of the spirit and the mastery of life.”34

I conclude with another thinker from the South, Eduardo Galeano, the Uruguayan journalist, writer, and novelist, one of Latin America’s foremost writers, who has been described as a “historian of conscience.” Ironically, during the 1960s, when Salisbury Island was being set up, Galeano was developing into a forthright critic of his own society in Uruguay, and in 1971 he published his book The Open Veins of Latin America. He was imprisoned in 1973 after a military coup in his country. He was concerned about inequality and the injustice of what he calls the “looking-glass world.” He said that an intellectual should not be a “seated writer,” an “intellectual in the library.”

**Time Tells**

*We are made of time. We are its feet and its voice. The feet of time walk in our shoes. Sooner or later, we all know, the winds of time will erase the tracks. Passage of nothing, steps of no one? The voices of time tell of the voyage.*35

Indeed, “Let the wind speak”36... Let the wind that blows over Salisbury Island ... And reaches the shores of Malmo ... speak ...

“The wind of recurrence”37

The rest is silence38...

**PS. [POSTSCRIPT]**

I feel compelled, if you will, to end with a postscript.

The installation at the Malmö Art Academy may be one isolated, seemingly insignificant configuration of a particular past and the present; but I should like to submit that it is a powerfully prescient example of the contrapuntal methodology that Edward Said dramatised in his work exploring culture and imperialism39 and could well be a parable of how to live in the global world today.

In a lecture entitled “On Global Memory: Reflections on the Barbaric Transmission of Culture,” Homi Bhabha stated something directly pertinent, I believe, to our “Memory Project” here. Drawing from Walter Benjamin, Bhabha highlighted the notion of temporality (alongside spatiality) in relation to the “‘in-between’ space” of a ‘past-present’ that resembles memory:40

As critics have argued in support of Bhabha’s thesis,41 in this act of “translation”—which is both an intercultural and intertemporal process—demonstrated the emergence of counter-memory, and such counter-memory constitutes a powerful act of insurgency, where there is a “re-signification of the past in the present”—(a process) that unsettles canonical cultural memory.”42 And this is the purpose, as a whole, that I believe the series of lectures and activities ”The World Upside Down” attempted to achieve.

This “return to our native land,” with all of you in tow, was not just a contemplation of the (epistemic) violence and domination of the apartheid that we experienced individually and collectively and an act of expiation for the barbarism of apartheid that emerged from the barbarism of colonialism. Reclaiming the banished, suppressed, erased archive in a new, alternative recreation of the past—a counter-memory—this is what the Malmö reconstruction/transmission/translation attempted to do, in its contrapuntal performance of memory.

In this, counter-memory goes well beyond what the TRC had hoped to accomplish in South Africa. This act of “remembering back,” this “practice of remembrance” is a powerful “writing back.”43

A particular example continued to play on my mind as I wrote about the journey from Salisbury Island to Malmö. A long time ago, at Salisbury Island, in my very first year, I studied the novella Heart of Darkness (1899) by Joseph Conrad. My life has been marked by many things over the decades, but, from the many reincarnations that the novel has undergone in terms of its interpretation, to this very day, I cannot help but ponder over the way we live our lives in circles, in spirals, albeit marked initially by mimicry, but which has seeds of its own dialectic that continue to prod us on to spirals of subversion, reversal and revision of that mimicry, in a continual writing back ...

This writing back is not an act of “resemblance” but a recognition (or re-cognition)—from the moment of the present—of the past. It is like a Möbius strip, displacing the angle of vision.44
And in displacement may come expansion of vision. As Antjie Krog writes at the end of *Country of My Skull*:

... the retina learns to expand
daily because by a thousand stories
I was scorched

A new skin.45

An excerpt from her poem “Country of Grief and Grace” shows how we all have to make journeys across the divides of our histories (as persons, as nations, and as the world):

between you and me
how desperately
how it aches
how desperately it aches between you and me

And, if I might add,
How long does it take
For a voice to reach another?
In this country held bleeding between us46

It should be added that Sarat Maharaj and I were students in the 1960s at a separate university, according to apartheid law (referred to as a “tribal college”), and this was at Salisbury Island, in Durban Bay. In 2011, a reunion took place, fifty years after its inception.


“Contrapuntal reading”—reading for various simultaneities/intersections—was developed by Edward Said (*Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage, 1993)). In a sense, this essay arguably deploys a “contrapuntal” reading of Salisbury Island at different points.

Lazarus Charles also captures the mood of the counterculture of the time: the flower children of the 1960s, dreaming of universal peace, and the Beatles, with John Lennon’s iconic song “Imagine” released in 1971. In the 1960s, Bob Dylan composed many hit songs against war and in support of civil rights.

From a brochure produced in 2011.

In an interesting circular connection and coincidence, my late husband, Professor Herby Govinden, who was a lecturer on Durban Island, came to Uppsala, Sweden, as a lay delegate of the Anglican Church in Southern Africa, to attend the World Council of Churches (WCC) Fourth Assembly, in 1968, the year when the art depictions in the art history classes collated here were executed. Martin Luther King Jr., who was to speak at the assembly, was assassinated a few months earlier. It was at the Fourth Assembly that the resolution to inaugurate the WCC Programme to Combat Racism was taken, which played an important role in planned resistance to apartheid.


This comes from J. Brunton Stephens’s poem “The Antipodes.”


This comes from J. Brunton Stephens’s poem “The Antipodes.”


Menon, *Thinking about the Global South*.


Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,” *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986).

The phrase is André Malraux’s, and quoted in the outline for the lecture series at Malmö Art Academy, 2017.

Unger is a professor of law at Harvard University and past minister of strategic affairs in Brazil, under President Lula.
Entrance to Fine Arts Department

FINE ARTS

THE MUSEUM: CUSCO: 1980

Souls Stultified

To the Art Student
Salisbury Island, a Soulless Place
No Challenges, no Creative Debate

They spoke of Style
Line, Colour, Space, Composition
No Hope of Political Statement
No Hope of Art's Statement
Politically Neutral, Art, without Content,
That was the Order of the Day.

Painting Technique
Drafting Technique
Spatial Relationships
Exploring New Subjects, No Way
Maintaining Control, That was the order of the Day.

Education Through Art
There was None
Graded according to Form and Colour
A Reduction of Interest in Subject Matter
Forcing and Maintaining the Values of
The State,
Perpetuating Suppression
Subversity
Creativity.

Salisbury Island, a Soulless Space

Sherene Timol-Seedat, 1971

Apartheid History of Art Library

ANDREW VESTER
Fine Arts Lecturer

Each Morning I sit
In the Halls of the Dead
The only sound
The scratch of my pen
Noting:

Flesh turned to stone,
Neck's roped,
Bodies bound and awkward.

A Thousand Years
Of Silence
Between
Them and me.
From Salisbury Island to the Malmö Art Academy, University of Lund, Sweden

Selected Activities

FRAGMENTED IMAGES

Dribbled in the windmills of my mind are fragmented images of the Fine Art Department... the portals of visual thinking.

Distorted images of pylons, ships and sailboats reflected onto the waxy gateway to our Camp of Creative Contradictions and highlighted the warp and weft of my tapestry; a canvas of light and dark reminding me of a suspenseful surround.

Global atrocities and events captivated and reshaped my thought processes. A faded, fragment in my tapestry was our final year art exhibition when Dr. Behr and David Horner subtly challenged and analyzed the subversive nature of my drawings.

The drawings included the Bhutan children Vietnam War, Mao Mao killings, thalidomide children and Woodstock. If the aesthetics of art were one of questioning and exploration, were my drawings then not a reminder of “mass humanity to man” (Joseph Conrad) on our island?

We were the four spiritual Flower children who brought light to any canvas of life.

Lighter shades reflected in my spectrum of colour, was when Sarath Maharaj introduced us to early morning History of Art lecture with, “bleh-d-blah-blah-da Life goes on... and on and yes it did. It was a time that continued to play in the recesses of my mind even until now.

A somber tone of grey recalls missing the use of milky white partially clad male models for our Life Drawing lesson. Instead out of the Darkness sprang the life, lean, muscular, and sun-drenched models... Ben David, Shira Moodley and Kgos Radley.

However, despite the distorted reflections that were part of my canvas and colour-filled spectrum, I chose “to see the world in a grain of sand” and vowed to make a difference in our universe.

HERSELENE LAZARUS CHARLES, 1968
On the occasion of Lund University’s 350th anniversary, Lunds Konsthall dedicated a substantial group exhibition to artists who have taught at the Malmö Art Academy. The Academy, which is part of Lund University, was founded in 1995, continuing the activities of the Forum schools of painting and printmaking in Malmö.

In a relatively short time, the Academy has built a solid reputation for itself. Today it offers an advanced and varied array of courses and programmes, all adapted to the students’ individual needs, and receives a high number of applications every year, not just from all parts of Sweden but also from the neighbouring Nordic countries, Europe, and the rest of the world. It is a great advantage for our region that some of contemporary art’s brightest students and teachers gather here.

The exhibition Dit Vindarna Bär/Whither the Winds presented a selection of the many accomplished artists affiliated with Malmö Art Academy over the years, whether as professors, lecturers, visiting tutors, or candidates in the doctoral programme. We were able to see works by Rosa Barba, Charif Benhelima, Matthew Buckingham, Jimmie Durham, Maj Hasager, Olav Christopher Jenssen, Mary Kelly, Joachim Koester, Matts Leiderstam, Sharon Lockhart, Lars Nilsson, João Penalva, Nina Roos, Jim Shaw, Sophie Tottie, Emily Wardill and Haegue Yang. Without a doubt, a magnificent panorama of the many precise forms of expression and modes of storytelling that today’s art comprises.

In collaboration with the Sommarlund festival, Lunds Konsthall built a stage in its inner courtyard and developed a programme titled Lunds Konsthall Outdoors. For this, three artists studying at or just graduated from Malmö Art Academy—Axel Berger, Joana Pereira, and Ana Rebordão—were invited to produce three new temporary works in response to the city of Lund and its communities, all meant to be shown in public space. Lunds Konsthall hopes to be able to continue this new initiative again next summer.

Lunds Konsthall warmly thanks Professor Gertrud Sandqvist of Malmö Art Academy for the extraordinary curatorial process resulting in Whither the Winds and for her catalogue essay that provides unique insight into art education today. Heartfelt thanks also goes to all the artists for the outstanding work they contributed to this exhibition.

Of course, Lunds Konsthall also wishes to thank all the lenders whose generosity made the exhibition possible: Magasin III, Stockholm; Simon Lee Gallery, London; Galleri Riis, Oslo; Galleri Nicolai Wallner, Copenhagen; Galerie neugerriemschneider, Berlin; Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Culver City; Galleri Thomas Wallner, Simris; and not least the private lenders who also contributed. A very special thanks to Lund University’s Jubilee Fund and to the Birgit and Sven Håkan Ohlsson Foundation for supporting the realisation of this exhibition so generously.

—Åsa Nacking, Director, Lunds Konsthall


Mary Kelly giving a special introduction to her work *Gloria Patri* (1992), at the exhibition *Dit Vindarna Bär / Whither the Winds*, Lunds Konsthall, 2017
On June 2, 2017, the artist Mary Kelly was awarded an honorary doctorate by Lund University.

Mary Kelly is a legendary artist, feminist, and teacher. Her *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79) was one of the first research-based works in an international art context and was pioneering in its form, which combines Lacanian structuralism with personal diary entries and field research about living together with a small child during their first few years. The film *Nightcleaners* (1972–75), which she made as part of the Berwick Street Collective, is a groundbreaking work of feminist film history.

Other important works include *Interim* (1984–89), *Gloria Patri* (1992), and *The Ballad of Kastriot Rexhepi* (2001). In Sweden, her works have been shown at the Uppsala Art Museum, in 1994, and at Moderna Museet Stockholm, in 2010. Kelly is also famous as an educator, working at Goldsmiths College, University of London in the 1980s, in the Independent Study Program at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, from 1989 to 1996, and, since 1996, at the University of California, Los Angeles, where she holds the position of Distinguished Professor and Head of Interdisciplinary Studio.

Mary Kelly has been a very important source of inspiration at Malmö Art Academy, and has taught and lectured here on several occasions.

On June 3, Kelly gave a special introduction to her work *Gloria Patri* (1992), which was part of the exhibition *Dit Vindarna Bär/Whither the Winds* at Lunds Konsthall, celebrating the 350th anniversary of Lund University.

To mark the occasion, Malmö Konsthall together with Malmö Art Academy and Malmö Art Museum held the seminar “The Practical Past” on June 4, for which Kelly gave a talk on being an artist. The other speakers were Maj Hasager, visual artist and Programme Director of Critical & Pedagogical Studies (MFA) and Senior Lecturer at Malmö Art Academy, with the talk “Excavations—notes on slow art processes,” and visual artist Bettina Vestergaard, with the talk “Gatherings—Between Image and Text,” both of whom have been heavily influenced by Kelly.
Golv [Floor], installation with wooden floor based on the artist’s studio, works selected from Malmö Art Museum’s collection. Malmö Art Museum, 2017. Rasmus R. Streith
Museum Selected Activities

Malmö Art Museum
March 25–April 30, 2017


The exhibition Museum/The Museum marked the conclusion of a collaboration between Malmö Art Academy and Malmö Art Museum. During the 2016–17 school year, eleven students took part in a course that combined fine art and theory in a study of the art museum as a context. The course explored topics such as the museum’s history and ideological background and its role as a framework for artistic interventions.

Each student worked on an individual project, developed in relation to Malmö Art Museum’s gallery spaces, collection, archives, and research, in several cases working closely with the museum staff. A couple of the participants took a particular interest in the exhibition Från 1500 till nu (From 1500 to now), dealing with how this permanent exhibition of art and style history came into being in the 1970s and how it has changed in the years since. Other students found their points of departure in the museum’s database, classification system, and relationship to the art market, as well as stories of life behind the scenes at the museum. Some chose to base their projects on specific works in the collection, while others explored the museum’s exhibition design and various attributes linked to the museum as a place.

The resulting exhibition, Museum/The Museum, was shown in the F Gallery at Malmö Art Museum, as well as expanded to other spaces on the same floor: the stairway, the exhibition space of Från 1500 till nu, and the Skovgaard Concert Hall.

The lead instructors for the course and the curators of the exhibition were Professor Matts Leiderstam of Malmö Art Academy and Director Cecilia Widenheim and Curator Anna Granqvist of Malmö Art Museum. Laura Hatfield, Teacher and Programme Administrator for Critical & Pedagogical Studies (MFA) at Malmö Art Academy, held a lecture and seminar on the museum’s formation, its ideologies, and artists who work with the museum as a medium.
Selected Activities

Chamber of parables for Jan Guillou as a mythical figure, 2017. Fir wood, lacquer, HD projection, 10:00 min, headphones.
Installation view, Malmö Art Museum, 2017. Maxime Hourani
Grinding, 2017. Vitrine placed within the permanent exhibition From 1500 Until Now, Malmö Art Museum. Johanne Hestvold

Critical & Pedagogical Studies
Exam Projects 2017
 KEZIA PRITCHARD  
 CRITICAL ANGEL NUÑEZ POMBO & IEKE TRINKS POMBO & IEKE TRINKS POMBO & IEKE TRINKS  
 PEDAGOGICAL KAREN BOHØJ STUDIES MAX OCKBORN EXAM LUCY SMALLEY PROJECTS  
 ELENA STREMPEK 2017  
 FRANCIS PATRICK BRADY  

Kezia Pritchard  
Vattnet vet  
(The water knows)  
Wanås Konst, Knislinge  
16 April, 14:00  

Angel Nuñez Pombo  
Study for a Quartet  
Inter Arts Center, Malmö  
30 & 31 March  
Time TBA  

Ieke Trinks  
One Performance is Many Performances  
Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen  
30 March, 19:00  

Karen Bohøj  
MORNING // Mother-Mother  
Location, date & time TBA  

Max Ockborn  
Someone put a stone on another stone, but they are not our stones, they are the stone’s stones, and that which is material has a lifespan that will sooner or later dissolve into smaller parts and become transformed into something else.  
Anti-Apartheid Room, Malmö Art Academy  
24 April, 10:00–16:00  
25 April, 10:00–16:00  

Lucy Smalley  
Sketches for an Unseen Future  
Skissernas Museum, Lund  
16 March, 18:00–20:45  

Elena Strempek  
Chimaera Class – In Between Multiple Heads  
Skånes konstförening, Malmö  
17–19 March, 20:00  

Francis Patrick Brady  
The Feast of the Red Herring  
Modern Museet Malmö  
Public symposium:  
24 March, 12:00–17:00  
LARP workshops:  
25 & 26 March, 14:00–17:00  

APPLY BEFORE 3 APRIL  
www.universityadmissions.se, www.khm.lu.se
Kezia Pritchard will present her artwork (The Water Knows) created with the local residents of Knislinge and the surrounding area, in the sculpture park at Wenks Konst. The presentation will include a description of the project and an insight into the artist’s research on dialogue as an art form, oral history, storytelling and her pedagogical methods involving walking and dialogue.

Kezia Pritchard

STUDY FOR A QUARTET

This project entails the organization of two workshops, one in Coruña, Spain with music students and another one in Vienna, Austria with art and architecture students familiarized with programming and interactive installations. In collaboration with the students of both workshops an interactive installation is developed. This video installation shows musicians playing a classical quartet and through the use of computer programming software, the movements of the spectators will trigger the playback of the composition, creating yet another form of interaction between players and spectators.

ANGEL NÚÑEZ POMBÓ

Angel Núñez Pombo is a visual artist from Spain. He studied at Universidad Complutense in Madrid and holds an MFA in Sculpture and New Media at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA, USA.

LOCATION

Inter Arts Center
Borggatan 29
214 22 Malmö, Sweden

DATES & TIMES

Thurs 30 March & Fri 31 March Time to be announced

CHIMAERA CLASS – IN BETWEEN MULTIPLE HEADS

The lecture and the meditation class are different pedagogical formats which share the desire of the transformation of the subject. Both could be seen as inadequate, proliferating a high performance culture, boosting the participant’s capability to work – intelligently and efficiently. But can we use them to find a way to perform with our own agency? Following an anachronological approach, images from the past will perform on us. We will close our eyes, we will hear many tongues. We might lose our heads, and find others to put on. Likewise: forested lion, reaptart oaks, middle she-goat.

ELENA STREMPEK

Elena Strempel is an artist and art historian working across the disciplines through research-based performance.

LOCATION

Skåne konsthantverk
Broggatan 15
214 10 Malmö, Sweden

Each class is limited to 15 participants. Please sign up by sending an email to: chimaeraclass@strompek.de

DATES & TIMES

Fri 17 March, 14:00
Sat 18 March, 20:00
Sun 19 March, 20:00

THE FEAST OF THE RED HERRING

Initiating the concept of a secret society dinner, The Feast of the Red Herring creates a place where the roles of ordinary society may be reversed. After the secret dinner the setting and leftovers from the actual event will be opened to the public at Moderna Museet, featuring pieces made by invited artists. There will be a public symposium where those involved in the dinner will be invited back to be asked questions and open up a discussion around the topics that may or may not have come up during dinner. Following this, two public workshops will be held to re-play and re-imagine the secret dinner through roleplay and with the use of Nordic LARP techniques.

FRANCIS PATRICK BRADY

Francis Patrick Brady is an artist and pedagogue based in Malmö whose work creates artistic games as archetypic compositions that utilise storytelling and worldbuilding. These games reject participation as a simple immersive technique and instead play in between the aesthetic possibilities of agency and collaboration.

LOCATION

Moderna Museet Malmö
Ola Billgrens plats 2-4
210 19 Malmö, Sweden

DATES & TIMES

Public symposium:
Fri 24 March, 12:00–17:00
LARP workshops
(Registration required, limited to 16 participants)
Sat 25 March, 14:00–17:00
Sun 26 March, 14:00–17:00
To sign up email:
francis.p.brady@gmail.com
The presentation will include a discussion on dialogue as an art form, oral during our workshop will be a collaborative document to aims to open up new discursive pedagogy. Her current research deals with dialogue and move-ment with art making processes. Drop-in workshopKEIZA PRITCHARD CRITICAL ANGEL NUÑEZ POMBO & IJEKE TRINKS PEDAGOGICAL KAREN BOHØJ STUDIES MAX OCKBORN EXAM LUCY SMALLEY PROJECTS ELENA STREMPEK BRADY
Moulding Course:
Bronze/Aluminium/Silicone

See course description p. 595
Plastic Course

Teacher
Senior Lecturer
P-O Persson

Guest Teacher
David Nilsson

See course description pp. 590, 595
Selected Activities

Teacher
Senior Lecturer
P-O Persson
Guest Teacher
Robert Cassland

See course description p. 590
Gertrud Sandqvist
Rector of Malmö Art Academy
Professor of Art Theory and the History of Ideas; Supervisor for the Doctoral Programme

Gertrud Sandqvist has been Rector of Malmö Art Academy since 2011, a post she also previously held from 1995 to 2007. Professor Sandqvist has been writing extensively on mainly European contemporary art since the early 1990s. In 2010 she was the co-curator of the Modernauställningen at Moderna Museet, Stockholm. She co-curated, together with Sarat Maharaj, Dorothee Albrecht, and Stina Edblom, the Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art 2011. Furthermore, she recently curated Siksi—The Nordic Miracle Revisited at Galleri F 15, Moss, Norway, 2015; Red Dawn at HISK, Ghent, Belgium, 2014; Channeled, which showed contemporary artists alongside Hilma af Klint, at Lunds Konsthall, 2013; and Against Method for Generali Foundation, Vienna, 2013. Currently she is writing on a monograph on the Norwegian painter Olav Christopher Jenssen.

Dr. Sarat Maharaj
Professor of Visual Art and Knowledge Systems; Supervisor for the Doctoral Programme

Sarat Maharaj was born in South Africa and educated there as well as in the UK. Dr. Maharaj is a writer and curator. He was a co-curator of documenta11 and he curated retinal. optical. visual.conceptual … at Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, in 2002, with Richard Hamilton and Ecke Bonk. Dr. Maharaj was also co-curator of Farewell to Postcolonialism, Guangzhou, in 2008, and Art, Knowledge and Politics, at the 29th São Paulo Biennale in 2010. He was Chief Curator of the 2011 Gothenburg Biennale, Pandemonium: Art in a Time of Creativity Fever, and a peer advisor to the Sharjah Biennial 11 in 2013.

His PhD dissertation was entitled “The Dialectic of Modernism and Mass Culture: Studies in Post War British Art” (University of Reading, UK). Between 1980 and 2005, he was Professor of History and Theory of Art at Goldsmiths, University of London. Dr. Maharaj was also the first Rudolf Arnheim Professor, Humboldt University, Berlin (2001–02) and Research Fellow at the Jan Van Eyck Akademie, Maastricht (1999–2001).

Dr. Maharaj is currently working on two art research projects: “Repristinating London: Knowledge Mecca, Sandwich Street, Bloomsbury” and “The Apartheid Art History Room, Durban, Salisbury Island,” which involves sounding art practice as a mode of non-knowledge or "ignorantitis sapiens."

Matts Leiderstam is a Swedish artist based in Stockholm. He obtained a PhD in Fine Arts at Malmö Art Academy in 2006 and studied painting at Valand Academy between 1984 and 1989. Selected solo exhibitions include Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam; Andréhn-Schiptjenko, Stockholm; Kunsthalle Düsseldorf; Grazer Kunstverein; Salon MoCAB—Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade; Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe; Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz; and Magasin III, Stockholm. Selected group shows include the 11th Shanghai Biennale; National Gallery Prague; Henie Onstad Kunstsentret, Kvikkodden, Norway; Fondazione Prada, Milan; 8th Berlin Biennale; Gasworks, London; Museo Tamayo, Mexico City; Witte de With, Rotterdam; Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art 2010; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and Third Guangzhou Triennial. Publications on and of his work include the artist book MOM/2011/47 (and into the room swallows flew), 2012; Matts Leiderstam: Seen from Here (Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2010); Matts Leiderstam: Nachbild / After Image (Argobooks, 2010); and his dissertation, “See and Seen: Seeing Landscape through Artistic Practice” (Malmö Art Academy, Lund University, 2006).

Dr. Matts Leiderstam
Professor of Fine Arts

Haegue Yang is a Korean artist based in Berlin. She has studied at Seoul National University, Fine Arts College; Cooper Union, New York; and Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste, Städelschule, Frankfurt.

Yang’s work explores the affective power of materials by destabilising the distinction between the modern and premodern, and her vocabulary of visual abstraction with sensory experiences combine industrial fabrication and folk craftmanship. Yang’s ongoing research is empowered by underlying references to art history, literature, political biography, and history, as well as a somewhat hidden social structure for reimagining a possible community, through which she reinterprets some of her recurrent themes: migration, postcolonial diasporas, enforced exile, and social mobility.

Her most recent solo exhibitions include Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 2016; Hamburger Kunsthalle, 2016; Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2015; Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul, 2015; Museum of Contemporary Art, Strasbourg, 2013; Bergen Kunsthall, 2013; Haus der Kunst München, Munich, 2012; and Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria, 2011. Furthermore, her work was included in the 8th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane, 2015; Vienna Biennale, 2015; 13th Biennale de Lyon, 2015; Sharjah Biennial 12, 2015; dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel, 2012; 8th Guangju Biennale, South Korea, 2010; and 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009.

Her work can be found in the following museums and collections: AmorePacific Museum of Art, Yongin; Bristol’s Museums, Galleries & Archives, Bristol; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Explum, Murcia, Spain; Galerie für zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig; Guggenheim Abu Dhabi; Kulturstiftung des Bundes, Halle an der Saale, Germany; Hamburger Kunsthalle; Kunstmuseum Stuttgart; Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź; M+, Hong Kong; National Museum of Contemporary Art; Neuer Berliner Kunstverein e.V., Berlin; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; SeMA, Seoul Museum of Art; Serralves Foundation, Contemporary Art Museum, Porto; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster.
Joachim Koester
Professor of Fine Arts

Joachim Koester is a Danish artist based in Copenhagen. His work has been shown at documenta X, Kassel; 2nd Johannesburg Biennale; Gwangju Biennale 1995; 54th Venice Biennale; Busan Biennale 2006; Manifesta 7, Trento; Tate Triennial 2009, London; and Taipei Biennale 2012, as well as in solo shows at Centre national de la photographie, Paris; Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen; Centre d’Art Santa Mónica, Barcelona; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museo Tamayo, Mexico City; Power Plant, Toronto; Kestnergesellschaft, Hanover; Institut d’art contemporain, Villeurbanne; MIT, Boston; Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; S.M.A.K, Ghent; Camera Austria, Graz; Centre d’art contemporain, Geneva, Turner Contemporary, Margate; Greene Naftali Gallery, New York; Galleri Nicolai Wallner, Copenhagen; Gallery Jan Mot, Brussels; and Camden Arts Centre, London.

Koester’s work can be found in the following museums and collections: Louisiana Museum, Humlebæk; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Reina Sofia Museo Nacional Centro de Arte, Madrid; Museum Boijmans, Rotterdam; S.M.A.K, Ghent; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Baltimore Museum of Art; Centro de Arte Dos de Mayo, Madrid; Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Kiasma, Helsinki; Kongojelige Biblioteks Fotografiske Samling, Copenhagen; Fonds national d’art contemporain, Paris; Sorø Kunstmuseum, Denmark; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Malmö Konstmuseum; Sammlung Hoffmann, Berlin; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; MAC’s, Grand-Hornu; Kadist Art Foundation, Paris; FRAC Le Plateau, Institut d’art contemporain, Villeurbanne; Generali Foundation, Vienna; Sammlung Verbund, Vienna; and Museum Sztuki, Łódź.

Emily Wardill
Professor of Fine Arts

Emily Wardill is a British artist based in Lisbon, Portugal. She has had solo exhibitions at the Bergen Kunsthall, 2017; Gulbenkian Project Spaces, Lisbon, 2017; Index, Stockholm, 2014; National Gallery of Denmark, Copenhagen, 2012; Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, 2012; De Appel Arts Centre, Amsterdam, 2010; Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, 2011; and Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 2007–08.

She participated in the 54th Venice Biennale (2011) and the 19th Sydney Biennale (2014), as well as in group exhibitions at Hayward Gallery, London; Witte de With, Rotterdam; mumok, Vienna; and Museum of Contemporary Art, Miami. Wardill was the recipient of the Jarman Award in 2010 and the Leverhulme Award in 2011. Her work is in international collections from Tate Britain to mumok, Vienna. She is represented by carlier | gebauer, Berlin; STANDARD (OSLO); and Altman Siegal, San Francisco.

Maj Hasager
Programme Director of Critical & Pedagogical Studies (MFA); Senior Lecturer in Fine Arts

Maj Hasager is a Danish artist based in Copenhagen. She studied Photography and Fine Art in Denmark, Sweden, and the UK, earning an MFA from Malmö Art Academy. Hasager’s artistic approach is research based and interdisciplinary, and she works predominantly with text, sound, video, and photography.

She has exhibited her work internationally in events and at institutions such as Lunds Konsthall; Fondazione Pastificio Cerere, Rome; Critical Distance, Toronto; GL STRAND, Copenhagen; Galleri Image, Aarhus, Denmark; FOKUS video art festival, Nikolaj Kunsthal, Copenhagen; Moderna Museet, Malmö; Cleveland Institute of Art; Red Barn Gallery, Belfast; Laznia Centre for Contemporary Art, Gdansk; Liverpool Biennial; Al-Hoash Gallery, Jerusalem; Al-Kahf Gallery, Bethlehem; Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center; Ramallah; Overgaden Institute of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen; Guangzhou Triennial;
Hasager is the recipient of several international residencies and most recently a fellowship at Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart. She has been awarded grants in support of her work from the Danish Arts Council, Danish Arts Foundation, Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (Beirut), ArtSchool Palestine, Danish Centre for Culture and Development, and Danish Arts Agency. Additionally, Hasager is a guest lecturer at the International Academy of Art Palestine; Barbados Community College, Bridgetown; Sacramento State University; Dar al-Kalima College, Bethlehem; and University of Ulster, Belfast. She occasionally writes essays, catalogue texts, and articles.

Maria Hedlund is a Swedish artist based in Berlin. She studied in the Photography Department at the University of Gothenburg, graduating in 1993. Two of her recent, ongoing works were exhibited in Stockholm during spring 2014: Life at Hyttödammen, in a group show at Artipelag, and Some kind of knowledge, at Elastic Gallery. In the latter work, one of the items comes from a friend. It used to stand on a plinth, inscribed with the words “I love you” underneath. The plinth was never to be found again. The work also includes a plant shaped into its current form by a taxi ride. Another object was found at Musée royal de l’Afrique centrale outside of Brussels. Adopted plants and things that no one actually wants. Things that are in a state of transition: on the way to oblivion but equally likely to enter new contexts where a different set of narratives appear.

The things were placed and photographed in front of the same wall. These become images, whereas the objects as a group function as an image bank. Pictures lead to new pictures that become objects, which consequently lead to new items. The image bank grows and the work continues. Parts of the works are now being transformed into books.


Grants include Edstrandska stiftelsens stipendium, 1996; the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, working grant, 1990–95; Ellen Troetz Foundation, Malmö, 1981; Malmö Stad kulturstipendium; and Aase and Rickard Björklund stipendium, Malmö. Public collections include Malmö Museum, Kristianstad Museum, and Blekinge Museum, Karlshka.

Viktor Kopp is a Swedish artist based in Stockholm. He completed studies in fine arts in Malmö, Gothenburg, and Helsinki and teaches painting at Malmö Art Academy. Selected solo exhibitions include Bureau, New York; Ribordy Contemprary, Geneva; Blondeau & Cie., Geneva; Galleri Riis, Stockholm; Passagen Linköpings Konsthall; Galleri Magnus Åklundh, Malmö.

Group exhibitions include Galerie Nordenhake, Stockholm; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Royal/T, Culver City, California; Salon Zurcher, New York; Ribordy Contemporary, Geneva; Bureau, New York; Ystad Konstmuseum, Ystad, Sweden.
Margot Edström is specialised in video and digital media (2D and 3D animation, 3D printing, digital imaging, and postproduction). She graduated from Malmö Art Academy in 1997. Her artistic background is in performance-based video and animation. Group exhibitions include the National Art Gallery, Kuala Lumpur; Galleri Stefan Andersson, Umeå, Sweden; and International Performance Festival, Tampere, Finland.

Hans Carlsson is an artist, writer, and curator based in Malmö. He has an MFA from both the Critical & Pedagogical Studies Programme at Malmö Art Academy and from Konstfack — University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm. His artistic and curatorial work is focused on archival practices, often with references to knowledge and culture producing institutions such as libraries and museums, and their relationship to technological and industrial development. As a writer, Carlsson has published interviews, essays, and critiques for several newspapers and art magazines, including Kunstkritikk and Helsingborgs Dagblad.

Carlsson has had exhibitions at and collaborated with Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm; Art Lab Gnesta, Sweden; Arbetets museum, Norrköping, Sweden; and Malmö Art Museum. For the exhibition Samarhallsmaskinen at Malmö Art Museum, Carlsson presented the work Celebration (2016–17), a lecture and video installation that drew on the remainders of the construction of the two final ships produced by the Kockums shipyard in Malmö in the 1980s. Recent curatorial projects include the symposium and screening Contested Histories From El Complejo: The Intersection Between Erasure and Remembrance at Tensta Konsthall, 2017 (together with Claudia Del Fierro and Julia Willén) and the exhibition Behind the Same Façades, Skånes Konstförening, Malmö, 2017 (co-curated with Sebastian Dahlqvist).

Laura Hatfield is an artist whose work involves exhibition making, painting, writing, independent music, and museological experimentation. She holds a Master of International Museum Studies from the University of Gothenburg and a Master of Fine Arts from Valand Academy, where she also completed a postgraduate Independent Study in Fine Arts with Pedagogic Application. Hatfield has performed and exhibited internationally and has cooperated with many art museums and artist-run spaces. She is currently on the board of Skånes konstförening, Sweden, and is a member of the editorial board of Paletten Art Journal.

Nathalie Melikian is an artist based in Vancouver, Canada, and Malmö, Sweden. Since the late 1990s, she has been creating videos in which she calls into question and analyses the narrative structures of various film genres. Her work has been exhibited in solo shows at the MuHKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp; Malmö Art Museum; Frankfurter Kunstverein; Centre pour l’image Contemporaine Saint-Gervais Genève; and Voxx, Montreal, and in group shows at the 4th Biennale de Montreal; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Seattle Art Museum; Justina Bernicke Gallery, University of Toronto; Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel; Vancouver Art Gallery; Centro José Guerrero in Granada; MARCO, Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Vigo, Spain; Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo; and Bergen Art Museum.
João Penalva is a Portuguese artist. He studied at Chelsea School of Art, in London, where he has lived since 1976. He has been external visiting tutor at Malmö Art Academy since 2003.


Solo exhibitions include Camden Arts Centre, London; Contemporary Art Centre, Vilnius; Galerie im Taxispalais, Innsbruck; Tramway, Glasgow; Rooseum Center for Contemporary Art, Malmö; Institute of Visual Arts, Milwaukee; Power Plant, Toronto; Serralves Museum, Porto; Ludwig Museum Budapest; Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; DAAD Gallery, Berlin; Mead Gallery, University of Warwick, UK; Lunds Konsthall; Centro de Arte Moderna, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon; Brandts Kunsthallen, Odense; and Trondheim Kunstmuseum, Norway.

Group exhibitions include, among others, Lunds Konsthall; Haus der Kunst, Munich; Museum Folkwang, Essen; K20 Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden; Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; National Museum of Contemporary Art, Seoul; Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei; Taiwan; Tramway, Glasgow; Wellcome Collection, London; South London Gallery; Hayward Gallery, London; and Tate Modern, London.

Penalva was awarded the DAAD Berlin Artist’s Residency in 2003 and the Bryan Robertson Award, London, in 2009. Penalva is represented by Simon Lee Gallery, London, Hong Kong, New York; Galerie Thomas Schulte, Berlin; Barbara Gross Galerie, Munich; and Galeria Filomena Soares, Lisbon.

Nina Roos is a visual artist working in the field of painting. She lives and works in Helsinki.

Solo exhibitions have been held at Galerie Forsblom, Helsinki; Galerie Francois Mansart, Paris; Galleri K, Oslo; Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Malmö Konsthall; Kiasma, Helsinki; and Brandts Klædefabrik, Odense.

Selected group exhibitions include the MuHKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp; Kiasma, Helsinki; Galleri F15, Moss, Norway; Espoo Museum of Modern Art, Finland; Artipelag, Stockholm; Lunds Konsthall; Carnegie Art Award touring exhibition (first prize 2004); KUMU Art Museum, Tallinn; Kunstverein München; Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki; 46th Venice Biennale (Nordic Pavilion); and Frankfurter Kunstverein.

Public commissions include Campus Allegro, Pietarsaari, Finland, 2013; the Church of Shadows, Chengdu, China, 2012; and University of Gävle, Sweden, 2006.

Roos’s works are included in collections internationally, including the Amos Anderson Art Museum, Helsinki; Apoteket AB, Stockholm; ArtSpace, San Antonio; Gothenburg Art Museum; Helsinki City Art Museum; Kiasma, Helsinki; Malmö Art Museum; and Moderna Museet, Stockholm, among others.
Christine Ödlund
External Visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

Christine Ödlund is a Swedish artist and composer living and working in Stockholm. Ödlund graduated from the University College of Art, Crafts and Design, Stockholm, in 1995, and from the Video Department of the Royal Academy of Art, Stockholm, in 1996. She studied composition at EMS (Elektronmuskstüdion), Stockholm, from 2002 to 2004. Recent solo exhibitions include Magasin III, Stockholm, 2016; Galleri Riis, Stockholm, 2016; and Trondheim Kunstmuseum, Norway, 2015. Ödlund’s work has been shown in group exhibitions such as the 8th Momentum Nordic Biennial, Moss, Norway, 2015; Marrakech Biennale, 2014; Magasin III; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam; Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo; Moderna Museet, Stockholm and Malmö; Nationalmuseum, Stockholm; and Lunds Konsthall. Her work is included in the public collections of Moderna Museet; Magasin III; Public Art Agency Sweden; Museum of Sketches, Lund; StatOil Collection, Oslo; and Trondheim Kunstmuseum.

Charif Benhelima
External Visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

Charif Benhelima is a Belgian artist. He lives and works in Antwerp, Belgium, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Through the medium of photography, Benhelima deals with the topics of memory/oblivion, time, space, origin, identity, politics of representation, and perception. He gained recognition with the Welcome to Belgium series (1990–99), a nine-year research project on the sentiment of being a foreigner. Besides having worked with analogical photography, he has been experimenting for fifteen years with the Polaroid 600.

In parallel to his artistic research, Benhelima is guest professor at the Higher Institute for Fine Arts (HISK), Ghent. Recent solo exhibitions include Museu Oscar Niemeyer, Curitiba, Brazil; Niterói Museum of Contemporary Art, Rio de Janeiro; BPS 22, Charleroi, Belgium; Palais des Beaux-Arts (Bozar), Brussels; Station Museum of Contemporary Art, Houston; Volta NY 2010, New York; and Künstlerhaus Bethanien GmbH, Berlin, among others.

Benhelima recently participated at the Lubumbashi Biennale, DR Congo, 2015; Beaufort, Triennial of Contemporary Art by the Sea, Belgium, 2015; Marrakech Biennale 5; International Biennial of Photography, 2010 and 2012, Houston; and in group exhibitions at the Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro; MuHKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp; Musée de Marrakech; Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore; Bag Factory, Johannesburg; Shanghai Art Museum; Palau de la Virreina—La Capella, Barcelona; Centro Arte Moderna a Contemporanea Della Spezia, Italy; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Buenos Aires; Witte de With, Rotterdam; EMST—National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens; Jewish Cultural Quarter, Amsterdam; and Lunds Konsthall.

Andreas Eriksson
External Visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

Andreas Eriksson is a visual artist based in Medelplana, Sweden. He graduated from the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm, in 1998. Eriksson’s artistic practice is highly expansive, encompassing a wide range of media, including painting, photography, sculpture, and installation. His work hovers enigmatically between the abstract and the figurative, creating a window onto the outside world, which is simultaneously familiar and mysterious. The emotional intensity with which Eriksson imbues his work is the result of a sustained investigation into charting his own reactions to the natural world that surrounds him.

In 2014–15, he was the subject of a major solo exhibition that toured from Bonniers Konsthall in Stockholm...
to Trondheim Kunstmuseum in Norway, Centre PasquArt in Biel, Switzerland, and Reykjavik Art Museum in Iceland.


Eriksson’s works are included in collections internationally, including the Gothenburg Museum of Art; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Skövde Art Museum, Sweden; National Public Art Council, Sweden; Sundsvall Museum, Sweden; Uppsala Art Museum, Sweden; MUMOK, Vienna; FRAC, Auvergne, France; Centre Geroges Pompidou, Paris, France; and Nasjonalmuseet, Oslo, Norway.
About Malmö Art Academy

Malmö Art Academy is a department at Lund University that has been offering higher education in fine arts since 1995. Together with the Academy of Music and the Theatre Academy, Malmö Art Academy is part of the Faculty of Fine and Performing Arts, one of nine faculties within Lund University.

Malmö Art Academy offers advanced study programmes in fine arts at the Bachelor’s and Master’s degree levels for aspiring artists. The academy also has a well-reputed research studies programme. Teaching is not divided into separate categories of art. As a student, you can choose to move freely between various forms of artistic expression or to specialise in a particular form. Your studies will provide ample opportunity to develop your art and a firm professional identity. You will be included in new and inspiring contexts and acquire the tools to develop your critical thinking. To enable you to develop your skills, you have access to the academy’s premises and your own studio around the clock.

Malmö Art Academy offers well-equipped workshops for work with wood, metal, plaster, plastic, clay, concrete, photography, video, and computing. It also features large project studios, a library, and lecture rooms, as well as the students’ own studios and a common study room for students on the Master’s programme in Critical & Pedagogical Studies. Malmö Art Academy also offers a PhD programme in Fine Arts, mainly intended for internationally active artists, at the academy’s research centre, the Inter Arts Centre. The programme is key to current artistic research.

Our study programmes offer students the opportunity to work with internationally active artists and teachers, whose expertise covers a broad spectrum of interests and media. Individual supervision of the student is considered to be key. The lecturers’ expertise covers a broad spectrum of interests and media. The language of tuition is usually English. The students’ commitment to and influence on the design of the study programme is given high priority. In 2014, Malmö Art Academy was assessed as being of very high quality, with regard to both its BFA and MFA programmes, by the Swedish Higher Education Authority’s quality evaluation of all higher education in fine arts in Sweden.

Malmö Art Academy cooperates with other fine arts programmes all over the world and has built up strong networks over the years. The education offered at Malmö Art Academy also benefits from the active artistic climate in the Öresund region, with its galleries, museums, and other arts institutions in a markedly cosmopolitan context. Lectures from visiting artists, critics, and curators, as well as various forms of collaborative projects, are natural elements of Malmö Art Academy’s activities.

Several graduates of Malmö Art Academy have become successful artists who have earned strong international recognition.
HISTORY

Malmö Art Academy was set up in 1995 by Lund University. Its study programmes were offered in the former Mellersta Förstadsskolan in central Malmö, a building that was considered a model of modern school architecture in 1900.

Lund University’s remit for the new school included the ambition that the academy be interdisciplinary and international. This did indeed happen. The academy became the first school in Sweden to actively avoid the so-called professors’ school model. No divisions were created at the academy—the idea was to make the hierarchies as horizontal as possible. Another of the academy’s central concepts was the requirement for students to be independent. It is still the case that meetings with lecturers take place on the students’ own initiative.

From the outset, Malmö Art Academy wanted to make the most of the artistic expertise of its lecturers and professors. This is also why administration is not part of their duties. The academy also wished to facilitate the continuation of the artistic careers of its lecturers and professors, enabling them to participate in major international contexts. Hence lecturers and professors have come, and continue to come, to the academy for certain periods in order to free up time for their artistic work. In 1996, external supervisors were introduced into the academy’s teaching structure, extending further opportunities for students to benefit from a broad spectrum of artistic supervision. External supervisors are internationally active artists who come to the academy five times per year.

Malmö Art Academy launched its Master of Fine Arts in 2002, the same year the PhD in Fine Arts was established. In 2006, Malmö Art Academy was the first institution in Sweden to award three doctoral degrees in fine arts.

The Bachelor of Fine Arts was introduced in 2007.

Critical Studies was first set up as a one-year Master’s programme in 2001, and became a two-year Master’s programme in 2008–10. The following year, it was reconfigured into the two-year Master’s degree programme in Critical & Pedagogical Studies.

Gertrud Sandqvist has been Rector of Malmö Art Academy since 2011, before which she was Head of Department from 1995 to 2007. Anders Kreuger was Director of Malmö Academy from 2007 to 2010.

The academy’s first Yearbook came out in 1996 and has been published every year since then.
Programmes

Malmö Art Academy is the ideal institution for those intending to pursue a professional career as an artist and who want solid training in their field of interest.

The teaching is not divided into artistic specialisations and the Academy has no separate departments. Students have the opportunity to move freely between different forms of artistic expression or to specialise in a specific form.

The programmes offer a range of courses and projects in artistic creation, theory, and technique. Students choose freely from these options and build up a personalised programme of study. Regardless of the focus the students choose for their work, their own artistic development is always key, and emphasis is therefore placed on individual artistic supervision.

The three-year Bachelor’s programme consists of individual work in the studio and individual tutoring from professors and other teachers, as well as scheduled courses in major areas of artistic techniques, artistic interpretation, and art theory. Since Malmö Art Academy has no separate departments, students organise their own curriculum by choosing from a wide range of courses.

The programme begins with a set of compulsory foundation courses dealing primarily with different artistic techniques and the development of the artist’s role over the last two hundred years. After this, students select their courses in theory, technique, and artistic creation. The topics offered vary from year to year, depending on students’ interests and the current artistic activities of teaching staff.

Students who successfully achieve 180 ECTS credits through their studio practice and the completion of courses, and who are approved for their graduation work and written dissertation based on their artistic position, receive a Bachelor of Fine Arts. Students furthermore must also participate and exhibit their graduation work in a group exhibition at Malmö Art Academy’s gallery, KHM (documentation and texts from this year’s graduating students are available in this Yearbook). Professors at Malmö Art Academy act as examiners for undergraduate students, and an external examiner is also invited to participate in the assessment.

Graduates with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Malmö Art Academy are entitled to apply for the two-year Master of Fine Arts programme at the academy or for Master’s programmes at other institutions.

The Master’s programme in Fine Arts at Malmö Art Academy is a two-year graduate programme in fine arts, including in-depth research in art through individual studio practice and courses in art and various related disciplines. During the first year, the students begin their advanced artistic work, with continuous discussions in seminars led by teachers as well as a study tour to an artistically interesting place. Students organise their own curriculum, choosing from a wide range of technical and theoretical courses, many of which are taught by internationally renowned artists. Guest lectures from visiting artists and critics as well as various forms of collaborative projects are regularly offered at the academy.

In the second year, students focus on their graduation work, which includes writing a dissertation about their artistic practice and presenting a solo exhibition at the academy’s gallery, KHM (documentation and texts from this year’s graduating students are available in this Yearbook). Students who pass their degree project are awarded a Master of Fine Arts (120 ECTS credits). Professors at Malmö Art Academy act as examiners for Master’s students, and an external examiner is also invited to participate in the assessment.
Critical & Pedagogical Studies (CPS) is a two-year international postgraduate study programme leading to a Master of Fine Arts degree (120 ECTS credits). The programme works across the borders between art theory, practice, and pedagogy and aims to encourage applied thinking within the artistic field related to art creation, training, and production. Students in the CPS programme include postgraduate students who hold a BFA as well as students who have previously completed a studio-based MFA.

Critical & Pedagogical Studies is a pioneering programme that seeks to examine the ways in which critical theory and pedagogy inform artistic practice. It encourages initiative and experimentation among the students and investigates how we might both produce and discuss art, as well as how pedagogical strategies can be seen as artistic models in art practice and as teaching. Theory is viewed as a practice, and practice is theorised. Key issues and topics of discussion are pedagogical strategies such as artists teaching artists and the artist’s role in mediating to a public, combined with critical thinking on artistic production, with the goal of enabling students to be critical of how educational structures operate, both within the programme itself and in relation to an educational practice. The curriculum is in constant development and is well suited for artists working from a hybrid or expanded practice.

The students and programme facilitators work together to form the programme structure through group dialogue and a critical examination of the content as it suits the participants’ areas of interest, while responding to relevant topics of the day. This normally takes the form of intensive seminars and workshops led by visiting lecturers, the professors at Malmö Art Academy, and the facilitators of the CPS programme. Past participants have proposed their own self-organised courses and have positively influenced the programme structure from within. Students also develop their own projects through group critiques and individual tutorials. In the final year of the programme, students participate in a work placement, where they apply theoretical knowledge to a practical teaching situation within an art school, museum, or other relevant institution. The final work towards completion of the degree is developed to bridge theory and practice through individual exam projects and a written thesis. Malmö Art Academy provides the participants with a collective workspace, and they may use all premises at the Academy, including the library and workshops. The facilitators of the programme have also negotiated strong relationships with local arts organisations that are keen to collaborate with our group and to support student initiatives.

As the programme enrolls a small group, of maximum nine students per year, participants receive individual attention and guidance on their projects. The programme usually entails at least one study trip, which in the past have taken students to London, Gothenburg, Graz, Italy and Scotland. The programme is conducted in English.

The four-year doctoral programme (PhD) in Fine Arts for practising artists and curators is the first of its kind. Sweden’s first doctors in Fine Art graduated from Malmö Art Academy, Lund University, in 2006. Professor Gertrud Sandqvist is responsible for the programme, and Professor Sarat Maharaj is Head Supervisor of the doctoral candidates, who gather for seminars in Malmö at least twice every semester.

The study programme is experimental and highly individualised, focusing on identifying, understanding, and developing artistic thinking as a specialised field of knowledge production. Studies are based on artistic knowledge and artistic work, and the focus is on individual artistic work and research.

The artistic work is both object and method. Reflective and theoretical study is not a self-fulfilling goal but serves the purpose of being a means for developing artistic competence. The programme in total is 240 ECTS credits, subdivided into various seminars or courses (60 ECTS credits) and a documented artistic research project (180 ECTS credits).

Find more information about admission requirements, the selection process, and tuition fees at khm.lu.se/en/studies/application.
Course Descriptions

BFA Fine Art Courses

**Plastic**

Teachers: Senior Lecturer P-O Persson

Guest Teacher: David Nilsson

Credits: 3

Participating students: Ellinor Lager, Samaneh Reyhani, Carolina Sandvik, Øystein Selberg

This course in handling plastics gives knowledge in the laminating and casting of plastics, plus basic information about safety prescriptions in the workshop. After finishing the course, you will get a “driver’s licence” that permits you to work in the workshop on your own.

**Imitation and Interpretation**

Teachers: Senior Lecturer Maria Hedlund

Professor: Joakim Sima

Guest Teacher: Ulf Stålhane

Credits: 7.5

Participating students: Sergio Alvear, Helen Haskakis, Emil Palmsköld, Nadja Svensk Ekron, Carl Östberg

This is a two-week workshop providing opportunity to learn more about the process of digital photography and printing. We will use imitation and interpretation as a tool, to open up new possibilities and ideas to investigate and play around with.

As part of this course, there are some preparations to be done. First, you must choose one or several images from an artist you find interesting, and then find out as much as possible about this work and the artist’s way of working. The images and the material you find will be presented to the group on the first day of the course. There is always the option of asking the library for help. This will function as a starting point for your work throughout the course, for which you will use imitation and interpretation as a method. The idea is that you should work digitally. But there’s also the possibility to photograph analogue and then scan the negative.

The goal is for you to increase your knowledge about a digital process and learn more about the digital equipment, such as camera, edge about a digital process and learn more about the different techniques. After the course, you will receive a “driver’s licence” that allows you to work on your own with the welding equipment.

**3D Animation and Printing Course**

Teacher: Junior Lecturer Margot Edström

Credits: 6

Participating students: Anna Andersson, Viktor Douglas Henderson, Jonna Hägg, Stephan Møller, Alexandra Hunts, Samaneh Roghani, Moa Sjöstrand, Albin Skaghammar

This is a two-week course in 3D animation, including one day for a workshop in 3D printing. The course gives basic skills in using several functions of the 3D software Maya for modelling, lighting, animation, and visual effects. But the focus is on animation and how to use animation techniques to create virtual objects to be printed from a Makerbot Replicator Z18 printer in PLA material (a biodegradable plastic material).

3D animation is a comprehensive and complex topic, and we will look at different types of animation techniques, including dynamic simulations. This includes introductions, and then further examination of the techniques and methods relevant for the individual animation projects to be carried out during the course. The 3D modelling and printing part of the course can be more focused on an individual basis, if preferred.

The course begins with hands-on exercises, demonstrations of techniques, and intense work with online and printed tutorials, as well as preparations for individual animation projects. Then, students will practise the techniques in individual projects to complete animations of their own together with the 3D printing workshop, and finish with the presentation of works.

Prerequisites: The course is designed for beginners, but for students with previous knowledge of other 3D software (e.g., Blender, Sketch-up, C4D, and Z-Brush), an individual animation project can be assigned. Students shall also present one of their own works; if you prefer, you can do this presentation in your studio. It’s important for you to get to know each other’s work.

**Welding**

Teachers: Senior Lecturer P-O Persson

Guest Teacher: Robert Cassland

Credits: 6

Participating students: Anna Andersson, Tine Damgaard, Mads Kristian Højlund Froeslev, Carl-Oskar Jonsson, Gabriel Karlsson, Ellinor Lager, Theis Madsen, Joana Pereira

Through this course you will gain knowledge about different welding techniques such as mig- and gas-welding as well as information about the security regulations for the different techniques. After the course, you will receive a “driver’s licence” that allows you to work on your own with the welding equipment.

**Cascades of Idiosyncrasies**

Guest Teacher: Ilva Misevičiūtė

Credits: 6

Participating students: Mads Kristian Højlund Froeslev, Eili Maria Lundgaard, Alexandra Hunst, Victor Selinger Aas, Elena Strempke, Frederike Jul Vedelsby, Joana Pereira

The aim of the workshop is to activate a broader creative apparatus through a number of physical and mental exercises, derived from Butoh, Action Theater, and other dance and theatre techniques. Sometimes we will be going into deeper states of mind in order to excavate and reach for a form of intelligence residing beyond our humanness. We will examine and collect idiosyncrasies—very personal occurrences in our minds and bodies. Eventually, we’ll treat those as seeds for planting further creative acts: be it a dance, a character, a beginning of a film, a sculpture, or a painting.

This workshop is based on my belief that as artists we should first and foremost be experts on ourselves as very intricate creative machines (a study that most probably will take a lifetime). It involves a type of vertical research in addition to a more horizontal collection of knowledge and facts. Thus it would only make sense that this course takes place in the margins of the rest of the curriculum: the sessions will be in the evening—after a full day of work, four times a week.
Economy and Law for Students

Guest Teacher: Christina Wainikka
Credits: 4

Participating students: Andreas Bentdal, Amble, Axel Berger, Tine Damgaard, Helen Kaskakis, Mads Kristian Højlund Freslev, Cecilie Kanthi Jonsson, Theis Madsen, Victor Selinger Aas, Samaneh Roghani, Moa Sjöstrand, Albin Skaghammar, Nadja Erixon, Frederikke Jul Vedelsby, Carl Østberg

After completing the course, students will have a basic understanding of economic and legal issues. They will become familiar with fundamental concepts and the impact economic and legal issues may have on their future activities. Students shall also understand the impact that intellectual property rights may have on their own protection and their possibilities to be inspired by others, as well as the effect of different types of agreements, including how agreements can be a part of the creative process. The course also covers the difference between different kinds of associations and imparts a basic understanding for the demands regarding accounting.

The course is built on three modules:
Module 1 firstly covers the importance of understanding economy and law, how economy sets frames, and how law can be seen as a tool to be able to do what you want. Secondly, we will look at the function of intellectual property rights, with a focus on how to protect oneself against imitation and how to set the base of an operation. Thirdly, we will focus on copyright and on regulation and function: What can be protected? How is protection obtained? What does the protection mean?

Module 2 first deals with conceptual creations, including the legal view on conceptual creations and the legal possibilities for packaging conceptual creations. Then the focus will turn to contracts and agreements, including the legal rules and other considerations surrounding these. Finally, we will look at contracts and agreements regarding intellectual property, copyright, and other intellectual property rights, as well as contracts and agreements as tools in artistry.

Module 3 focuses on different types of associations, looking at the different kinds of associations that can be used and what advantages and disadvantages each has. This will be followed by accounting: What are the demands? And where can assistance be obtained?

Mishandling the Tools of Humour / Experimental Sketch Pilot

Guest Teacher: Michael Portnoy
Credits: 6

Participating students: Francis Patrick Brady, Tine Damgaard, Maxime Hourani, Carl-Oskar Jonsson, Joakim Sandqvist, Victor Selinger Aas, Samaneh Roghani, Moa Sjöstrand, Albin Skaghammar

Hedy Lamarr, an Austrian film star of the 1940s, drafted inventions in her spare time, one of which, “frequency hopping,” ended up being indispensable to modern-day wireless communication. She was not known for being a particularly funny woman; however, the tools of the comedian are very similar to those of the inventor. Both the inventor and the comedian look at the way the world works and then fiddle with it until it either works easier or stranger. They use thought tools like exaggeration, reversal, feature addition, applying the logic of one situation to that of another, etc.

In this course, we will play like Hedy Lamarr with the tools of humour, to see what kind of discoveries we can add to the field of experimental comedy from the outside, and how these tools can contribute to our own work. The outcome of this course will be a TV pilot for an experimental sketch comedy show. Prefaced by an introduction to sketch format and a compressed survey and analysis of both mainstream and more experimental TV sketch comedy, the group will collaborate together on developing the pilot concept, pitching ideas, and writing, and each student will create a video piece. Aside from seeing how much we can mangle the form and content of so-called comedy, one of the aims of this course is to make a place for all the ideas that you might think are too wrong, too stupid, or too confusing to be art. Sometimes these are our best ideas. As this is a production course, there will be class meetings and self-directed work.

The Museum

Teacher: Professor Matts Leiderstam
Credits: 9

Participating students: Sebastião Borges, Axel Burendahl, Daniel Fleur, Johanne Hestvold, Maxime Hourani, Ellia Lundgaard, Emil Palmsköld, Rasmus Ramó Streith, Joakim Sandqvist, Martine Flor

The course “The Museum” deals with the art museum as a context—its collections, its ideological background, and as a genre for artists. It will be held in relation to and in close cooperation with Malmö Konstmuseum and its staff. Together, we will take a closer look at the art museum as framework, both as we know it from history and from a contemporary perspective.

Malmö Konstmuseum is located in the Malmöhus Castle along with the City Museum (Malmö Museer). The collection has over the years accumulated over 40,000 objects; today it holds one of the largest and most important collections of historic and contemporary Nordic art in Scandinavia.

We will read and discuss some important texts on the subject and get to know the positions of some contemporary artists and theorists in relation to the museum as an institution. A couple of guests will be invited to provide input to our discussions. Focus will, however, be on your own artistic practice. The core of the course is to develop a new project/work. We will work in relation to a specific room or context at the museum—this will be decided by us together with the museum.

Working methods: study, individual and group criticism of your work, lectures, and close reading of texts. The course starts with a close study of the context of Malmö Konstmuseum. At the end of the course, we will hold a show/presentation at Malmö Konstmuseum and gather for critique.

Location: Malmö Konstmuseum and lecture rooms at the Academy. Between our meetings, you will work on your own project in your studios. Malmö Konstmuseum will be the venue for the final exhibition/presentation.

Course materials
Doug Ashford; Mierle Laderman Ukeles; Tony Bennett; Chantal Mouffe; Calum Storrie.

Unless otherwise stated, BFA Fine Art Courses are open to students of all levels.
Analysing Your Own Artistic Work

 Teachers
 Professor Gertrud Sandqvist
 Credits 7.5

 Participating students: Julie Falk, Simen Godtfredsen, Mads Juel, Marcus Matt, Nicklas Randau

 The course offers a model for analysing your own work and training in analysing images. Students analyse works by other students and listen when their own work is analysed by the others. The course serves as an introduction to the analytical component of the MFA exam.

 The course offers close analysis of the students’ own work in group seminars. The method is simple. It aims at giving students tools for thorough analysis of individual works and an understanding of how viewers understand their work. If it is relevant and if the participants wish, we will also read image theory that might be applicable to the students’ work.

 Object/Writing/Movement

 Guest Teacher Maria Fusco
 Credits 3

 Participating students: Karen Bohøj, Francis Patrick Brady, Julie Falk, Viktor Landstrøm, Angel Nuñez Pombo, Max Ockborn, Kezia Pritchard, Georgina Sleap, Lucy Smalley, Elena Strempek, Martine Flor, ieke Trinks

 “The object of taste exists, concrete and singular outside of any short, finite sequence of technical terms. It carries and gives up the virtually infinite detail which causes us to suspect and guess the presence of the real, the object in the world.”
 —Michel Serres

 “God made everything out of nothing, but the nothing shows through.”
 —Paul Valéry

 “Object/Writing/Movement” is a two-day workshop comprising close readings, practical writing exercises, and collaborative group work.

 Day 1: We will examine and put into practice experimental forms of writing through objects. By embodying new and innovative forms of “object writing,” the practical exercises you will engage in will seek out informed preferences for subjective modes of historiography and collapsed registers of voice. This session is led by Maria Fusco.

 Day 2: We will engage with and explore the relationship between objects and movement. The aim of this part of the course is to consider if and how objects change identity through movement. By writing with objects in movement, you will also examine how the relationship between the mobile body and objects affect our understanding of objects. This session is led by Dr. Craig Martin.

 * It is essential that participants make close readings of all course materials.
 ** Paper and pens only, please. No laptops.
 *** Each participant should bring two objects with them. One object should be “mobile” and one object should be “immobile.” Participants should come prepared to explain why they have chosen these objects.

 Course material
 Radio play and text by Maria Fusco. Texts by Craig Martin and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone.

 MFA Critical & Pedagogical Studies Courses

 Object/Writing/Movement

 Guest Teacher Maria Fusco
 Credits 3

 Participating students: Karen Bohøj, Francis Patrick Brady, Julie Falk, Viktor Landstrøm, Angel Nuñez Pombo, Max Ockborn, Kezia Pritchard, Georgina Sleap, Lucy Smalley, Elena Strempek, Martine Flor, ieke Trinks

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 Course material
 Radio play and text by Maria Fusco. Texts by Craig Martin and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone.

 Instructors’ bios
 Maria Fusco is a Belfast-born writer based in Glasgow, working across fiction, criticism, and theory. Her latest work, Master Rock, is a repertoire for a mountain, commissioned by Artangel and BBC Radio 4. Her books include With A Bao A Qu Reading When Attitudes Become Form (New Documents, 2013) and The Mechanical Copula (Sternberg Press, 2011). She is the founder of The Happy Hypocrite, a journal for and about experimental writing and a reader at the University of Edinburgh, and was Director of Art Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London.

 Dr. Craig Martin is a cultural geographer and cultural theorist with a particular focus on objects and mobility. Martin’s research broadly focuses on the interplay between cultural geography and the social forces of mundane design, and has been widely published in journals including Mobilities, Society and Space, and Environment and Planning A, as well as edited collections including Architecture in the Space of Flows (2011), Stillness in a Mobile World (2011), and Cargomobilities (2015). His book Shipping Container was recently published by Bloomsbury Academic (2016) as part of their Object Lessons series.
Agency in the Classroom

In this one-week course we will concentrate on the agencies present in the classroom: teacher agency, student agency, and the structures and identities that shape them. How do we navigate our complicities and desires? How do we account for all the agencies in the classroom, and the potential obstructions, suppressions, and conflicts that happen when we encounter each other? These are questions I would like to investigate with you.

We will use our different experiences of learning, studying, and teaching as a starting point, exposing them to theories on what it is “to study” versus ideas on pedagogy in general, and on radical pedagogy in particular.

During the week we will engage in text seminars, physical exercises, writing sessions, experiments, games, and more. Any bigger assignments are developed together as a group.

Course material
Stefano Harney and Fred Moten; Jack Halberstam; Paulo Freire; bell hooks; Sara Ahmed.

Instructor’s bio
Lisa Nyberg is a visual artist based in Malmö. She is a PhD in Practice candidate at the Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, with a research project that aims to articulate an artistic methodology placed in the intersection of performance and pedagogy.

Nyberg’s work has been exhibited at Konsthall C, Stockholm; Trondheim Art Biennial, Norway; Signal—Center for Contemporary Art, Malmö; Röda Sten Konsthall, Gothenburg; Den Frie, Copenhagen; Dunkers Kulturhus, Helsingborg, Sweden; Liljevalchs Konsthall, Stockholm; Gothenburg Art Museum; and Rooseum, Malmö, among others. She has been awarded the one-year working grant from the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, the IASPIS project studio in Stockholm, and the Malmö City Grant for Artistic Development. She regularly teaches at art academies in the Nordic countries, such as the Danish National School of Performing Arts; Konstfack—University of Arts, Crafts and Design, Stockholm; Valand Art Academy; and Malmö Art Academy. Nyberg partook in a long-term collaboration with artist Johanna Gustavsson on radical pedagogy, for which they worked together for several years with Malmö Free University for Women (MFK) and co-wrote the book Do the Right Thing—A Manual from MFK (MFK, 2011).

Research Proposal for Exam Work

This course prepares students for exam works in the final semester. Beginning with an introduction and review of the exam project and thesis guidelines, students will then start to conceptualise and research towards the preparation of an exam project proposal and an annotated research bibliography throughout the third semester. Proposals and bibliographies will be submitted and reviewed by all CPS students for group feedback. Students will also have the opportunity to meet for individual tutorials on their proposals.

Course materials
Exam project and thesis guidelines; Annotated bibliography guideline; Research proposal guideline; Chicago Manual of Style (citation guidelines).

Pedagogy Intensive

Historically, ideological struggles have fuelled relations between education, emancipation, democracy, and equality. If education strives towards emancipation, where and how does that start? Is it through a decoding of the system or through a reliance on the subjects’ own will to change? How does this relate to artistic practice and art education today?

This intensive course on pedagogical theory includes seminars and presentations on assigned readings as well as a series of lectures on related topics by invited guests. Key texts by Paulo Freire, Jacques Rancière, and John Dewey, which examine pedagogical shifts in different times and places, will be discussed at length alongside a series of lectures on related topics by invited guests.

Course materials
Hormi K. Bhabha; Gert Biesta; John Dewey; Ann-Mari Edström; Paulo Freire; Pablo Helguera; Nicholas Houghton; Beverly Naidus; Jacques Rancière; Helen Reed.
Critical & Pedagogical Studies:

Internship
Mandatory MFA course, third semester.
Work experience and assignments

Credits

Participating students: Karen Bohøj, Francis Patrick Brady, Angel Nuñez Pombo, Max Ockborn, Kezia Pritchard, Lucy Smalley, Elena Strempke, Ieke Trinks

The purpose of the six-week internship is to give second-year CPS students the practical knowledge and skills required for the application of pedagogical tools learned during the program. Students are given the opportunity to apply theories learned during the first year of the program to practical skills in a work environment. A plan is produced prior to each individual internship, in collaboration between the place of internship and the student, where the objectives will be stated for further evaluation.

The internship should be a site for learning and contain an educational activity under supervision of the contact person(s) within each individual organisation. Students will prepare and deliver a project tailored for their place of internship that will incorporate the skills and knowledge learned thus far in the program. The intern is able to explore the notion of pedagogy as practice and the position of artist as teacher through the process of delivering their individual project. The intern should have hands-on experience in the educational situations, so as to be able to test out experimental pedagogical strategies and education both on a theoretical and on a practical level under supervision. This can be in the format of a course, workshop, or seminar, or organising an event or gallery education conducted by the intern, all depending on where the internship takes place.

In addition to the work experience and project, students will deliver two written assignments and a final presentation and peer assessment.

Assignment 1: Logbook
The logbook must be completed during the course of the internship and should document your work through direct written reflections and observations on your experience and activities. Students will be given a logbook to use and are encouraged to include two to three entries per week. When written on a regular basis, the logbook may be a valuable tool for keeping track of experiences in order to formulate the final internship report (assignment 2).

The logbook should include: Brief overview and presentation of the organisation (how is it run, mission statement, staff, protocol); Personal reflections, observational observations, and societal aspects of the workplace and experiences during the internship; Related images, articles, and other relevant materials.

Assignment 2: Internship Report
The purpose of the report is to document and summarise the internship but also to make an overall analysis of the work and organisation in relation to your individual art practice. The analysis should situate your personal reflections into a larger theoretical context and incorporate ideas addressed in the logbook—the personal, the organisational, the societal—as the basis for the report. The report should substantiate the ideas discussed in your logbook in relation to relevant theories and literature, detailing the practical and theoretical aspects of the experiences, activities, and educational program as they correspond to your role as an artist. Identify and analyse your strengths and weaknesses in the teaching situation.

The report should include: Introduction to the organization; Overview of the work completed; Documentation of educational activities; Personal, observational, and societal reflections on the experience; Commentary on how the work experience has informed your art practice; References to literature covered during the first year of the CPS program and/or other related texts; Ethical discussions related to any issues encountered during the internship; Commentary on how the work experience relates to, or has informed, your individual art practice.

Assignment 3: Internship Presentation
Each student will review and prepare two to three questions on each other’s internship reports in advance of the presentations for a peer-to-peer assessment. Students are asked to prepare a twenty-minute presentation on their internship to be given in the CPS room at Malmö Art Academy. The presentation should include reflections that highlight your position as an artist-teacher/course leader/mediator, how you have experienced the internship in relation to your own practice, the negotiations of working with the institution through individual approaches to education, and a commentary on what developments have come from the experience of the placement. Please be sure to meet with your internship supervisor for a debriefing of your work and to include this feedback in the presentation.

Evaluation
To receive credits for the internship, students are required to: Fulfil the work agreement with their assigned organisation; Complete and submit the final report; Hand in a logbook; Prepare and deliver a presentation about their experience; Read and respond to other student reports and prepare feedback during the presentations.
Moulding: 
Bronze / Aluminum / Silicone

Teachers
Senior Lecturer
P-O Persson

Guest Teacher
Robert Cassland

Credits
12

Participating students: Louise Hammer Moritzen, Johanne Hestvold, Cecilia Jonsson, Karl Eivind Jørgensen, Julie Sophie Koldby, Eli Maria Lundgaard, Madeleine Noraaas, Rasmus Ramo Streith, Clara Reeh

The course provides basic knowledge in silicone and cire perdue casting. With the help of moulds and silicone, the students will produce objects and moulds in wax that they will cast bronze or aluminum in.

The course will be divided in two blocks
Block 1 (two weeks): Silicone casting, producing objects suited for casting in bronze or aluminum. Location: Annexet.

Block 2 (two weeks): Casting (cire perdue, sand form), grind work, and patination. Location: KKv-gjuteri (located in the same building as KHM Gallery).

Plastic

Teachers
Senior Lecturer
P-O Persson

Guest Teacher
David Nilsson

Credits
3

Participating students: Karou Calamy, Tine Damgaard, Karin Lindstén, Victor Selinger Aas, Joana Vella Lopes Pereira

This course in handling plastics gives knowledge in the laminating and casting of plastics, plus basic information about safety prescriptions in the workshop. After finishing the course, you will get a “driver’s licence” that permits you to work in the workshop on your own.

Workshop in Scanning and Digital Printing

Teachers
Professor
Joachim Koester

Guest Teacher
Ulrik Heltoft

Credits
3

Participating students: Nils Ekman, Elisabet Anna Kristjánssdóttir, Alexandra Hunts, Emil Palm-sköld, Joakim Sandqvist, Carl Östberg

The workshop is a thorough introduction to scanning, the use of the flatbed and drum scanner, and digital printing. We’ll cover the basic techniques and uses of the digital darkroom, as well as touch upon the media archaeology of the software and hardware involved, including their conceptual and practical design. As part of the course we’ll discuss the individual prints of each student.

Introduction to Screenprinting

Guest Teacher
Chuva Featherstone

Credits
3

Participating students: Lynn Anjou, Karou Calamy, Tine Damgaard, Tina Kryhlmann Elstein, Louise Hammer Moritzen, Maxime Hourani, Julie Sophie Koldby, Elisabet Anna Kristjánssdottir, Oskar Persson

This course introduces artists to screen-printing, one of the most versatile print mediums. Students will gain a complete understanding of materials from coating and exposing a screen to registration, use of stencils, and mixing inks. Direct emulsion photo screens allow students to work from handmade, photographic, text-oriented, or digitally produced image sources.

Walter Benjamin: A Prism

Teachers
Professor
Gertrud Sandqvist

Credits
15


Walter Benjamin’s ideas remain topical. He is the Frankfurt School representative who is most challenging (and perhaps fruitful) to study. He is also the most poetical and referenced representative of the group.

We will pursue Benjamin’s ideas through the Arcades Project (1927–40), the gigantic archive that nurtured some of his most important texts, and read some of these in the light of the Arcades Project. Furthermore, we will engage with Benjamin’s epistemological model from The Origins of German Tragic Drama (1928) and the aphorisms from One-Way Street (1928). Hopefully, we will be able to sense the complexity of a thinker who was simultaneously a connoisseur of both books and toys, a flâneur with an interest in the neglected, obscure, and bizarre, and a convinced adherent to Marxist historical materialism.

Unless otherwise stated, BFA Fine Art Courses are open to students of all levels.
The World Turned Upside Down: Art and Ethics in the Rise of the “Stone Age South”

Teacher
Professor Sarat Maharaj and guest lecturers

Credits
22.5


The thrust of today’s migrations seems largely “Northward”—even in the Antipodes, where they are clearly headed towards the opposite pole. The “South” has tended to signal underdevelopment and crisis. It has also flagged up notions of other possibilities, alternative perspectives, other designs for living. The exodus from the South to the North is at odds with the idea of the Global South as a privileged vantage point from which to critique the world system. We rather have anomalies and crossovers that affirm and straddle, unravel and untravel in one go the received N/S dividing lines. How to map this topsy-turvy global space, how to take its sound?

On the one hand, with today’s migrations, the classic cardinal points and domains—East/West/North/South—are constantly fixed, even vehemently asserted. On the other, migratory drives surge and spill over such distinctions, blurring and undoing them—throwing up fresh contact and interaction. Do these emerging spaces mirror strands of the “primalordial, pristine” space that our ancestors, Stone Age Homo sapiens, wandered into from “out of Africa,” to roam and rove what were the proto-continents? An “unnamed” space, prior to demarcations and orientations—or should we say, a pre-cardinal space? It seems to echo the rising post-cardinal spatial mentality and experience thrown up, against the odds, by today’s migrations. With this streaming movement do we have the glimmerings of a contemporary Palaeolithic non-cardinality?

The starting point for our project at Malmö Art Academy was a reconstruction of the Art History Room (Durban, South Africa) of the apartheid years. The AH Room was at the University of South Africa, University College in Durban for Blacks of Indian Origin. This is in the province of Natal with the great Drakensberg mountain range—Ukahlamb—a place that includes one of the world’s most extensive sites of prehistoric rock art and cave paintings. The reconstruction or recreation in Malmö, Sweden, could have been in any mode—art installation, film, diagrammatic or performative statement, walks, discursive picnics, critical rambles, etc.

The Art History Room in Durban put on show an “evolutionary ladder” of artefacts, artworks, and cultures from across the world. Its effect, if not explicit objective, was to underline a Eurocentric vision of things—a view not uncommon in art studies of the time. Some took it to imply that the spectrum of world cultures and art forms existed in separate, segregated compartments, almost in parallel universes. To their eyes, the display embodied apartheid—sometimes touted during the apartheid years as a “multicultural rainbow” (where, needless to say, some cultures were more equal than others).

But did the display also open up—perhaps quite unwittingly—counterviews, alternative readings? A glance across the original room inescapably brought into play notions of mix, exchange, and swap—the sense of brisk translation between diverse artistic and cultural idioms, styles, and modes of thinking. What light could this throw on today’s migratory swirl of peoples and cultural elements—on prickly issues of multiculturalism, its limits and shortcomings; on questions of living with diversity, difference and multiplicity; on much-thumbed notions of hospitality and tolerance; on ceaseless everyday cultural translation and cosmopolitanising forces—all in a setting of apparent racism sans race?

Our explorations in Malmö, centred around the reconstruction of the AH Room, which we called the Anti-Apartheid Room, linked up studies of the Swedish anti-apartheid archives, ranging over issues of South African and Swedish women; minorities and their overlooked place in representations of the historical struggles to end apartheid; North and South prehistoric, parietal art; and contemporary ancestral and aboriginal presences.

The AH Room had evoked the idea of a world art system: in some ways, it tended to mirror André Malraux’s cosmopolitan views of art and culture in a “museum without walls.” Today does the development of the global museum—hand in glove with contemporary creative industries—see the makings of flat-pack, “globalised” art practices across our art education institutions, galleries, and museums?

To mull alongside: The AH Room had come into being with apartheid’s segregating, ethnicising logic. At the time, opposition to this development was summed up in the slogan “Knowledge Is Colour Blind.” What to make of such a claim in the face of today’s search for a “decolonialisation of knowledge”—for “tonal modes of knowing”—not least, in the thick of an all-encompassing knowledge society with its drive towards a pansophic world? What mileage for art practice, creativity, and art research, not simply as hard-nosed “knowledge production” but perhaps its opposite, as modes of “knowledgeable ignorance,” as Ignorantitis sapiens?

“The World Turned Upside Down” will be held in a reconstructed version of the room where Professor Maharaj used to teach art history at the university on Sainsbury Island, Durban.

Throughout the course, a number of lecturers from around the world will cover the different themes of the course: migration, colonialism, cosmic awakening, women in the historical accounts of apartheid, and decolonisation of knowledge production.

Following Sarat Maharaj’s introductory lecture, the participants will include Paul Gilroy, Thomas Higham, Franco Farinelli, and Betty Govinden, as well as Angela Ferreira and Jürgen Bock. There will be screenings of films by Manthia Diawara and Emily Wardill. A seminar on the restricted space for art during the apartheid era and on the Global South and decolonisation will be organised by Hans Carlsson, Runo Lagomarsino, Julia Willén, and Patricia Lorenzonzi. Margot Edström will manage the research conducted within the South Africa groups in Skåne, and UASPIS scholarship holder Ndikumule Ngqinamhi, a painter from Cape Town, will be involved in the project between February and April.
Current and graduating students

Bachelor of Fine Arts—Year 1
Lynn Anjou
Karou Calamy
Louise Hammer Moritzen
Mathias Höglund
Karl Eivind Jørgensen
Dag Kewenter
Julie Sophie Koldby
Elisabet Anna Kristjánsdottir
Karin Lindstén
Madeleine Noraas
Clara Frederikke Reeh-Mogensen
Filip Vest

Bachelor of Fine Arts—Year 2
Anna Andersson
Tine Damgaard
Nadja Erixon
Helen Haskakis
Mads Kristian Højlund Frøslev
Theis Madsen
Oskar Persson
Samaneh Roghani
Victor Selinger Aas
Moa Sjöstrand
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Bachelor of Fine Arts—Year 3
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Andreas Amble
Axel Berger
Inka Hiltunen
Carl-Oskar Jonsson
Cecilia Kanthi Jonsson
Gabriel Karlsson
Stephan Møller
Carolina Sandvik
Ernst Skoog
Øystein Solberg
Carl Østberg
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Master of Fine Arts—Year 1
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Axel Burendahl
Nils Ekman
Daniel Fleur
Martine Flor
Viktor Henderson
Johanne Hestvold
Maxime Hourani
Alexandra Hunts
Jonna Hägg
Alexander Jantz
Ellinor Lager
Eli Maria Lundgaard
Emil Palmsköld
Joana Pereira
Rasmus Ramö Streith
Joakim Sandqvist
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Anna Skov Hassing

Master of Fine Arts—Year 2
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Julie Falk
Andreas Franzén
Simen Godtfredsen
Lavinia Jannesson
Mads Juel
Tina Kryhlmann
Viktor Landström
Marcus Matt
Nicklas Randau
Samaneh Reyhani
Selma Sjöstedt
Georgina Sleap

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Francis Patrick Brady
Ionamaria Cojocariu
João Evangelista
Birta Guðjónsdóttir
Angel Nuñez Pombo
Max Ockborn
Kezia Pritchard
Lucy Smalley
Elena Strempek
ieke Trinks

PhD candidates
Rosa Barba
Matthew Buckingham
Alejandro Cesarco
Marion von Osten
Lea Porsager
Andrea Ray
Imogen Stidworthy