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As you can see, this year’s Yearbook is unusually voluminous. We are delighted to publish not only our MFA and BFA students’ graduation projects and texts, but also the more research-oriented Master’s theses written by our students in the Critical & Pedagogical Studies programme. I’d like to give particular mention to José Tomás Giraldo’s diligent study of the legendary Lund gallerist Anders Tornberg, which is the first academic study of Tornberg’s work and which will have far-reaching implications for the contemporary art scene.

You’ll also find presentations of the new PhD candidates who we have the pleasure of admitting to full-time positions. Alejandro Cesarco, Lea Porsager, and Imogen Stidworthy are internationally renowned artists whose exceptionally interesting research projects were selected out of a competitive pool that included ninety other applicants. They will be adding to the group alongside artists Rosa Barba, Marion von Osten, and Andrea Ray. I am convinced they will produce excellent results in the nascent field of artistic research under the mentorship of Professor Sarat Maharaj.

We are also pleased to welcome our new Professor of Fine Arts, the British artist and filmmaker Emily Wardill. She is a very valuable addition to our excellent line-up of professors, teachers, and mentors: Joachim Koester, Matts Leiderstam, Haegue Yang, Maj Hasager, Maria Hedlund, Per-Olof Persson, Margot Edström, Viktor Kopp, Charif Benhelima, Andreas Eriksson, Nathalie Melikian, João Penalva, Nina Roos, and Christine Ödlund.

In collaboration with artists and curators such as Jürgen Bock, Ieva Misevičiūtė, Linda Norden, and Michael Portnoy, they produce the academy’s abundant curriculum of courses and mentorships, which is renewed each year, as this Yearbook reveals.

Another important project this year was the school’s seminar for students from all of the KUNO schools, “Mellan Målare (Between Painters)” on February 24–27, 2015. The four established painters Julia Rommel, Vincent Geyskens, Nina Roos, and Narcisse Tordoir, along with their younger colleagues Jakob Simonson, Viktor Rosdahl, Hertha Hanson, and Ditte Ejlerskov, spent four days discussing the possibilities of contemporary painting. This meeting laid the groundwork for a renewed discourse on painting.

Furthermore, this year we had the pleasure of being invited to put on the summer exhibition at the Malmö Art Museum. We chose to show our MFA2 students’ graduation projects, from both the Fine Arts and Critical & Pedagogical Studies programmes, and named the exhibition We will push the ship from shore and let it drift toward the darkest of oceans. We’d like to thank the Malmö Art Museum’s director, Cecilia Widenheim, and her staff for a very fruitful collaboration.

Marie Thams, who besides editing the Yearbook also assisted Cecilia Widenheim in making this exhibition, deserves special thanks, as do our excellent external examiners Kirsty Bell, Stine Hebert, and Georgia Holz.

—Gertrud Sandqvist
Rector
Malmö Art Academy celebrated its twentieth anniversary by inviting students, former students, and friends to a dinner. We expected about one hundred and fifty guests, but, to our great joy, twice as many turned up. In all the long corridors of the school, long tables were well laid for the dinner, which was made by chef Martin Sjöstrand, brother to one of our former students, artist Hanna Sjöstrand. Still warm, with a full moon, it was a wonderful evening in late August.

The former vice-chancellor of Lund University, Boel Flodgren, and the former university director, Peter Honeth, gave talks together with the former and present DEANS of our faculty, Håkan Lundström and Solfrid Söderlind. The generosity with which Boel Flodgren, Peter Honeth, and Håkan Lundström allowed us to develop our ideas of a new way to build an art academy back then, in 1995, was of course decisive for the path we took. Malmö Art Academy is deeply grateful for their support and enthusiasm.

—Gertrud Sandqvist
Rector
I dag, fredag klockan 17 inviger Konsthögskolan Malmö.

Studenterna flyttade redan tidigare in i de nyrenoverade lokalerna i den före detta Mellersta Förstadsskolans lokaler.

Invigare är den finländske konstnären Paul Osiow, som är känd som en av Norden dande målare och förnyar konstruktivismens formspänning också som en av de skära lärarna vid Konsthögskolorna i hela Norden.

Under invigningen i dag det också tal av Lunds universitetets rektor Boel Flogdrotten, kulturkommunalrådet i Malmö Anna Brännström.

Dessutom kommer bl.a. framföras en specialkompis rad farfar till Konsthögskolan.

I morgon, lördag den 18 november, är det allmänhetens dag att få ta sig en titt på Malmö senaste högskola.
Två faktorer skapar konst – den ena är konstnären, den andra betraktaren som senare blir eftervärlden.

Marcel Duchamps nära 40 år gamla insikt är idag en självklarhet för de flesta unga konstnärer. Om bildkonst innebär ett naturligt och meningbärande relationer mellan konstnär och betraktare, blir konstnärens roll att skapa förutsättningarna för att detta sammanhang kan uppstå. Den ökade friheten motsvaras av kravet på precision.

Liksom andra forskning tar det konstnärliga arbetet tid. Det går inte att vänta på att konstnären och betraktaren ska komma samman. Varje tid, med dess tillgång till mycket snabb information om sågaller, och vad som redan gjorts via samlandet i museer och vad som nu göras åtminstone i Västerlandet via tidskrifter, utställningar, internet, ställer frågan om val och inringandet av ett arbetsområde i fokus. Teknik, och kanske även mer stil, får då en underordnad betydelse.

Att starta en konsthögskola i mitten av 1990-talet innebär att det förstas hand att ge unga konstnärer med verktyg att förstå betydelsen av dessa verktyg. Det är alltså en förutsättning att de framväxande informationstekniken visar verkliga möten är för bildkonst. Renässansens betydelse som en möjlighet för människor med erfarenheter att mötas har blivit än viktigare.

Utifrån dessa riktlinjer arbetar Konsthögskolan med att ge en plats, verktyg, och kunskap om hur man kan erbjuda möjligheter till möten och samtiden kan varje individ fundera på sitt eget arbetstema. Resten är för att under skoltid och efter. 
Master of Fine Arts

Year 2

Isabelle Andriessen
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Lily Benson
Balthazar Berling
Marie Bonfils
Desmond Church
Karin Hald
Niilas Helander
Ingvild Hovland Kaldal
Loui Kuhlau
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Kalle Lindmark
Rina Eide Løvaasen
Sandra Mujinga
Madelene Oldeman
Emelie Sandström
Marianne Skaarup
The Mesh—strange strangers between life and non-life, 2015. A series of sculptures. Metal, plastic, plexiglas, water, PVC tubes, humidifiers, fans, mycelium/mushrooms. 520 x 240 x 210 cm. Isabelle Andriessen
The Mesh—strange strangers between life and non-life, 2015. A series of sculptures, detail. Metal, plastic, plexiglas, water, PVC tubes, humidifiers, fans, mycelium/mushrooms. Isabelle Andriessen
The first vivid memory of my life is that of my father passing away over night due to an accident. As a child of barely five years old, I asked myself: Where do things go to when they’re no longer here? How can something once present, something that was physically here, disappear into another space? A space that I cannot enter physically? Ever since, the notion of death has been very close to me and it has been a compelling force at the centre of my artistic research. The earthiness of death and finitude is rooted in time. Since the Enlightenment there has been no greater sense of disenchantment than in regards to our view of living things. Generally speaking, we understand the things we see in nature and the things around us in a very naturalistic way without invoking anything supernatural. In the words of Boris Groys:

The soul may have no further life after the death of the body; however, the body certainly lives on after the soul passes away. Here, [one] can definitely speak of a life after death, since a corpse is active throughout: after death, it remains active in that it elapses, decays and decomposes. This process of decay is potentially infinite... Even if the vestiges of the corpse can no longer be identified, it doesn’t mean the body has disappeared, but simply that its elements—molecules, atoms, etc.—have dispersed throughout the world to such extent that the body has practically become one with the entire world.²

It’s a little discouraging that human beings are not the stars of a cosmic drama that has been planned from the beginning. Rather, they are the stars of a concern about life after death. This must have been a preoccupation of human beings from long before there was any writing of history. It’s hard to realise that there might be nothing after death. It’s a chilling thought and it requires some form of constellation of realisations. Part of the constellation is just to be able to face this statement without turning to some supernatural comforting. As Steven Weinberg says, “It takes a certain amount of courage and resignation to accept the world as a place where human beings are not that important.”³ This point of view is the foundation of my artistic research. I aim to react to this viewpoint by exploring ways to address an awareness of the passage of time and the way we position ourselves in relation to the vast nature we’re part of.

In my installations and sculptures, I apply different techniques and media in order to explore the paradox between the beauty of transformation and the continuous loss inherent within it, both material and perceptual. It is exactly this paradox that keeps me fascinated with my research. A term for this paradox is found in Japanese philosophy and literature: “mono no aware,” the sad beauty of transience, an awareness of impermanence or the passing of things. The physical experience of the viewer is at stake in my complex installations, which I approach as “parallel environments.” I aim to orchestrate time. By employing elements like scent, light, sound, and time, I investigate ways to evoke a highly sensory and bodily experience that contributes to a sense of disorientation. Through the use of perishable materials and natural processes, I draw attention to the impermanent nature of the present in order to draw attention to the now.

In my research I contemplate the paradox between emphasising finitude and the desire for immortality. In this text I will discuss several facets connected to this research. I aim to reflect on what exists between being human and non-human—between living and non-living. This text is a wander through a network of connections that have been in play in my practice up to this point. As a start, I would like to highlight a moment in European medieval times when time, duration, and finitude were emphasised within the genre of memento mori. Memento mori is a Latin theory and thematic in art and architecture that means “remember you will die”—death is unavoidable, and comes reaping at random. This genre in art history emphasises the fleeting nature of life and experience in order to remind the viewer of mortality and the notion that one should prepare for the inevitable. From the perspective of the ruling Christian culture, living well and dying well in favour of the last judgment was highly valued. Memento mori works later also became known as “vanitas,” a genre of still-life painting that became popular towards the sixteenth century. Although vanitas paintings contain a number of explicit symbols of mortality, they also feature...
symbols emphasising the worthlessness of worldly goods, science, and achievements—depicting that everything is just vanity and discoveries in sciences will not prevent you from dying.

In earlier stages of my artistic research, I investigated ways to communicate the memento mori message “remember you will die” from a contemporary viewpoint. I perceive a compelling paradox between the fear of finitude and the longing for immortality. The longing for immortality comes along with a parade of “vampires, zombies, clones, and living machines— the miscellaneous undead—who take pride of place in today’s mass culture.”

I feel the necessity to create a field of discourse around these “side effects” of facing finitude within the art institute—a context where creating becomes an act of prolonging life. How can I orchestrate time, duration, and modes of finitude within the context of art in order to stress the above-addressed subjects?

The Rhizome

According to Bergson, the real is “understood as durational: it is composed of millions even billions of specific durations, each with its own measure, its own span. Yet each duration can be linked to the other only because each partakes in the whole of duration and carries in it durational flow. This flow is an irresistible orientation forward and an impulse to complexify in this movement.” Bergson “shows that there must be an original common impulse which explains the creation of all living species”; this vital impulse he calls “élan vital.”

Deleuze’s attraction to Bergsonism lies in Bergson’s undermining of the stability of fixed objects and states; that is, Bergson’s “affirmation of the vibratory continuity of the material universe as a whole … in his developing a philosophy of movement and change.”

Bergson notes that the material universe is duration, although when divided and analysed, it presents itself as the other, the opposite of duration. Matter, in spite of its scientific reduction to closed systems operating according to predictable laws, also carries duration and flux; matter is duration at its most enlarged sense. Mind and matter, life and matter, are different degrees of duration, different modes of relaxation or contraction, neither opposed nor continuous and eternally differing duration. Durational force, the force of temporality, is the movement of complication, dispersion, or difference that makes any becoming possible and the world a site of endless becoming.

In other words, becoming is a principle of matter itself. According to Bergson, the real is “understood as durational: it is composed of millions even billions of specific durations, each with its own measure, its own span. Yet each duration can be linked to the other only because each partakes in the whole of duration and carries in it durational flow. This flow is an irresistible orientation forward and an impulse to complexify in this movement.”

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The Rhizome

Time and duration are major subjects in the theories of Henri Bergson. In this text I will explore some concepts of Bergson in relation to those of Gilles Deleuze, since these were highly influenced by the writings of Bergson. Both figures are important when it comes to framing my philosophical territory.

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According to Elizabeth Groz, “Deleuze seeks a real that is intimately linked to the dynamism of temporality itself.” An important notion both philosophers comment on is “multiplicity,” a unity that is multiple in itself. Unity is a “multiplicity that varies according to the dimensions considered.” In other words, “multiplicities are defined by the outside … according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities.” A multiplicity “is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. … When a multiplicity of this kind changes dimension, it necessarily changes in nature as well, undergoing a metamorphosis.” It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle from which it grows and which it overspills; it has multiple entryways.

This is one of the most important characteristics of the rhizome, as defined by Deleuze and Félix Guattari in A Thousand Plateaus. The rhizome is an acentered, non-hierarchical, non-signifying aborescent model. The rhizome can be explained as a map of “attractions and influences with no specific origin or genesis.” The rhizome is “open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, and susceptible to constant modifications.”

The rhizome is “always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo,” and, further, “the planar movement of the rhizome resists chronology and organization, instead favoring a nomadic system of growth.
A rhizome is characterised by “ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.”

In my artistic research I question the central role that humanity and the human body plays in our constitution of “the world” in relation to our environment. In this text I contemplate different propositions about what it means to be human and non-human, sentient and non-sentient, and living and non-living, in order to extend my view on the uncanny road this configuration takes. The rhizome as an arborescent conception of knowledge appears in this text in alignment with the contemplation that has let me to my graduation project, *The Mesh—strange strangers between life and non-life*.

**Orchestrated Time**

“As we envisage our fragmented time of presence as spectators, and the sheer impossibility of experiencing the exhibition in its totality, the experience of duration itself renders those who made the exhibition the memory of this elapsed time.”

—Pierre Huyghe

How can I challenge the experience of time in the format of an exhibition? In my work I aim to use time as a medium. Bergson’s concept of duration and Deleuze and Guattari’s of the rhizome enriched my explorations of the notions of time and duration in my work. Since 2010 I have investigated ways to produce work that performs in the here and now, works that are in constant flux or transformation alongside the exhibition.

*The Mesh—strange strangers between life and non-life*, 2015. A series of sculptures. Metal, plastic, plexiglas, water, PVC tubes, humidifiers, fans, mycelium/mushrooms. 350x180x160 cm. Isabelle Andriessen
The Mesh—strange strangers between life and non-life, 2015. A series of sculptures. Metal, plastic, plexiglas, water, PVC tubes, humidifiers, fans, mycelium/mushrooms. 320x180x120 cm. Isabelle Andriessen
I aim to confront the viewer with something that is not supposed to last: something that might vanish, collapse, disappear. I aim to place the viewer in the role of witness of a process that will partly be missed. I intend to research ways to direct time and so the way it is experienced. How can I evoke a sense of longing or desire? What is the role of durability and presence according to these short-lived, present, and sometimes even performative works? What is the difference in impact of witnessing a work that has “not yet happened,” “is happening,” or “just happened”?

During this period of time I created a series of sculptures that depict miniature landscapes made out of everyday materials. Each element in the sculptures was orchestrated to activate different physical and chemical processes. In the first stage of this experimentation, I applied materials that would transform along the line of entropy; materials would melt, decay, and fall apart. I aimed to shed an ironic transformation along the line of entropy; materials would make out of everyday materials. Each element in this experimentation, I applied materials that would transform along the line of entropy; materials would melt, decay, and fall apart. I aimed to shed an ironic light on Caspar David Friedrich’s landscape paintings and the romantics’ intention to depict nature as something unknown, sublime, and mysterious. With Study on the Entropy of Life (2010) and Falling Sky Study (2010) I intended to merely provoke the romantics’ intention and question it by integrating materials like ice, gelatin, foam, water, and ink in such a way so as to depict “postcard-perfect” images of a natural landscape. In doing so, these temporal sculptures formed the romantic perception of the sublime into sloppy miniatures that transformed into self-destructive representations of nature.

In 2011, this line of experimentation shifted, though the ironic approach remained present. Whereas before I would use technological devices that contain qualities of transformation, I now started to look into the capacity of machines to become performers in order to manifest transformation over the course of time. I began to direct these devices to activate certain processes of transformation. In Phantom Galaxy (2012), a printer-scanner is set up to simulate a representation of a telescope picture of our galaxy. The installation contains a printer-scanner with a glass box placed on top, in which two balloons float on the current of air coming from the fan. The printer-scanner is run by a computer script that directs the scanner to make a scan every two minutes. Each time, this scan is sent to the Internet in order to be projected large-scale onto a wall in the same space. The speed of the scanner creates a discontinuous, stretched, and morphed image of the continuous movement of the balloons. In doing so, I aim to recreate a flow of images that reminds the viewer of an interstellar nebula.

Thinking through the experience of time in the format of an exhibition is also something that is of major influence in the oeuvre of Pierre Huyghe. Where should the exhibition appear? When should it appear? How can one temporalise space? These are questions that come about in my work as well as in Huyghe’s. He researches modes to direct situations in the format of an exhibition in a way I find very successful and inspiring. In 1995, Huyghe founded an artist collective called the Association of Freed Time, which researches the time-based protocol of the exhibition. How can an exhibition grow along and extend in reality? How can an exhibition be performative? The formats of time at play in Huyghe’s exhibitions give a sense that “nothing is ever fully obliterated by the passage of time.” He aims to question and suspend that moment of production. And he likes to call his audience “witnesses” who experience this temporality, which is accidental and not accidental. The witness is the person who exhibits and is exhibited. This mode of performativity happens, according to Huyghe, when the representation is activated or active. The living, the intensification of what is, its vitality, is at stake here.

A work in which many of these aspects come about is Untitled, which he presented at documenta in 2012. For Untitled, Huyghe presented a biotope hidden behind a few bushes at the end of the Karlsaue Park, in an offsite place which is normally used to collect plant refuse. On this site one might stumble into Human, the white dog with the pink leg. In the midst of this artificial biotope that appears to be a non-site, a sculpture was installed: “a reclining figure of a woman on a cement block. Instead of a head, however, she has a huge beehive on her shoulders, which lends the entire ensemble something totally surreal.” Art critic Achim Drucks continues: “Here … the swarm of bees has a very concrete task to perform. It pollinates the blossoms in the garden, ensuring that the plants procreate.”

For Untitled, Huyghe selected several highly particular plants, like cannabis, jimson weed, foxglove, and nightshade, which contain substances whose ingestion alters consciousness and breaks down ordinary notions of the self and the world. Linda Norden, who has curated many of Huyghe’s exhibitions, told me that his work was influenced by Jakob von Uexküll’s book A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans, which I will go into later in this text.

Huyghe prefers to think about the exhibition as a format existing of a set of time-based protocols and configurations that affect how we think about and perceive things. That is, as it being a set of things that affect each other and yet construct themselves. According to Huyghe, an exhibition is an accidental moment of presentations, an intensification of the present. Most of his exhibitions live on through variations in intensity: “it overflows its frame or its script, and it becomes a series of operations that do not exist solely through its recording.” His interest is in the conditions from which situations emerge that exist in co-presence. Something that exists outside of the exhibition, indifferent to light and to whoever experiences it; something that, according to Huyghe, could be called “non-time.” Huyghe explains he doesn’t understand why we have the experience of duration even though there is a time “in-itself” that exists without us.
**Humanimal**

I perceive a sense of disconnection to time and environment in my observations of my generation: a generation in which machines have turned into our companion species. To support my point of view, I would like to refer to the Finnish architect Juhani Pallasmaa. He says that “the dominance of vision has been reinforced in our time by a multitude of technological inventions and the endless multiplication and production of images.”28 I believe that when one’s senses become more receptive to our environment and how this environment is interconnected and continuously changing, one becomes closer to an awareness of the present. By employing elements like scent, sound, and light in my sculptures and installations, I aim to go beyond the hegemony of the eye and open up to what I call “parallel environments.”

Pallasmaa claims that “the gradually growing hegemony of the eye seems to be parallel with the development of a Western ego-consciousness and the gradually increasing separation of the self and the world; vision separates us from the world whereas the other senses unite us with it.”24 He continues: “One becomes detached from an incarnated relation with the environment through the suppression of the other senses, in particular due to the technological extensions of the eye.”

This concern influenced me in 2013 and 2014 to produce works in which scent, sound, and light became more prominent elements investigate within the format of an exhibition. For *The Eyes of the Skin* (2014), I built as the main object of the work a light installation that interfered with the architecture of the gallery the work took place in: a landscape experienced through the senses of the perceiver. In doing so, I aimed to distort the sensory experience of the viewer.

In order to become more aware of what constitutes the sensory experience of our environment and its interconnectedness, I believe it is important to have a better understanding of a non-human perception. To get a better sense of the non-human experience of “the world,” I turn to the investigations of Jakob von Uexküll. His theories are important to my research because he claims that all living species contain an infinite variety of perceptual worlds, in which animals are uncommunicating and reciprocally exclusive.25 Uexküll’s descriptions can be approached as a variety of examples of the rhizome concept, like Deleuze’s reference to the orchid and the wasp.27 Agamben explains that Uexküll’s explorations of the animal environment are contemporary and “express the unreserved abandonment of every anthropocentric perspective in the life sciences and the radical dehumanization of the image of nature.” Uexküll’s theories strongly influenced Deleuze, “who sought to think the animal and environment in an absolutely non-anthropomorphic and heterogeneous way.”28

Uexküll’s theories disprove the idea that the relation a certain subject has to the things in its environment takes place in the same space and in the same time as those which bind us to the objects in our human world. Agamben notes that Uexküll “shows that such a unitary world does not exist, just as a space and a time that are equal for all living things does not exist.” Organisms do not merely receive sense data and nor do they respond automatically to stimuli. Instead they construct and interpret through receptive territory and experience. Uexküll carefully distinguishes “the Umgebung, the objective space in which we see a living being moving, from the Umwelt, the environment-world that is constituted by a more or less broad series of elements that he calls ‘carriers of significance’ … or of ‘marks’ … , which are the only things that interest the animal.” Uexküll contends that “in reality, the Umgebung is our own Umwelt, to which [he] does not attribute any particular privilege and which … can also vary according to the point of view from which we observe it. … Every environment is a closed unity in itself.”29

Theorist Donna Haraway draws further on these notions of Uexküll, which I aim to put into the light of Timothy Morton in order to challenge the formulation of ecology or nature:

Human genomes can be found in only about 10 percent of all the cells that occupy the mundane space I call my body; the other 90 percent of the cells are filled with the genomes of bacteria, fungi, protists, and such, some of which play in a symphony necessary to my being alive at all, and some of which are hitching a ride and doing the rest of me, of us, no harm. … I love that when “I” die, all these benign and dangerous symbions will take over and use whatever is left of “my” body, if only for a while, since “we” are necessary to one another in real time.30

How can I contemplate the central role that humanity and the human body plays in our constitution of “the world” in relation to our environment? I think an ecological approach to modes of thinking complicates traditional distinctions between appearance and reality, between ontology and epistemology, and between the empirical and the transcendental. Haraway states that “a human being is first of all an embodied being, and the complexities of this embodiment means that human awareness unfolds in ways very different from those of intelligence embodied in cybernetic machines.”31 Haraway invites us to see the human as just another knot in the worldwide web of interspecies dependencies, as always already in-formed by organic and technological nonhumans. According to Haraway, our intra-actions at many scales of space-time need to be rethought. She suggests that instead of aiming for categorisation and ways of relating, one should see that “all that is, is the fruit of becoming with.”32 In my recent practice I have been aiming to apply the notions of Uexküll and Haraway in order to create a work that contemplates new
ways of formulating and understanding ecology. Like Katherine N. Hayles, I wonder “what kind of environments will be created by the expanding power and sophistication of intelligent machines.” Will this power actually derive from technological singularity or bacteria and organisms? In an attempt to find answers to this question, I will go deeper into the notion of “hyperobjects.”

Hyperobjects

“Our entering into what scientists call the ‘Anthropocene’ challenges Karl Marx’s concept of the ‘ghost dance,’ and makes it more complex: today, human beings are involved in a new ‘ghost dance’ not only with industry, but also with our environment and our atmosphere, with animals, domestic technology, bacteria or plants.”
—Nicolas Bourriaud

We live in an era marked by the strong impact of human activities upon the atmospheric and geological evolution of planet Earth. In 2016, a group of scientists will come to the conclusion of whether this impact is changing the constitution of the planet so much that the current epoch should get another name: the Anthropocene. Everywhere, humans lose ground against technostructure and the algorithms of profit. As founders of this new epoch we leave traces (land, architecture, materials, satellites) behind, which will last incredibly longer than humanity will. I believe that the sphere of interhuman relations cannot be conceived any longer without its environmental and technological sides.

I propose that our cosmopolitical and ecological history is a history full of ghosts that are neither light nor dark, present nor absent, visible nor invisible. Ghostly apparitions are weird and uncanny.

*The Mesh—strange strangers between life and non-life*, 2015. A series of sculptures, detail. Metal, plastic, plexiglas, water, PVC tubes, humidifiers, fans, mycelium/mushrooms. Isabelle Andriessen
One cannot neatly categorise having experienced a ghost, since it is both real and unreal, actual and possible, living and non-living, being and non-being. Learning to live is to learn to live with ghosts. These ghost call for our attention and demand our respect as well as a compelling discussion of what constitutes them. The writings of Morton help me to understand what these ghosts are in the context of the Anthropocene. The deeper I get into my artistic research, the more I realise how the elements constituting ecology are interdependent. I’m fascinated by the fact that being a human being means seemingly being driven to grasp the vastness of the world we live in, in order to make sense of it, to overcome mortality, and perhaps even to become immortal, like zombies moving on the arrow of the Anthropocene.

Morton claims that “the notion that we are living ‘in’ a world—one that we can call Nature—no longer applies in any meaningful sense, except as nostalgia or in the temporarily useful local language of pleas and petitions. .... the world as such—not just a specific idea of world but world in its entirety—has evaporated. Or rather, we are realising that we never had it in the first place.”

His writings on “hyperobjects” have provided me with a closer understanding of how in contemporary times this “ghost-dance” is choreographed ontologically. Morton explains it by using the term “hyperobjects.” “The world,” he says, “is more or less a container in which objectified things float or stand. ... World as the background of events is an objectification of a hyperobject: the biosphere, climate, evolution, and capitalism.” One could say that this resonates with the rhizome, though Morton’s reaction to this seemingly apparent relation is somewhat ambivalent. In DIS magazine, he says that it’s merely “Deleuzian materialists” who link his theories with the rhizome, while he claims they “have their differences.” As a reaction to this relation, he goes on to talk about Deleuze’s concept of the smooth: “things are so granular, like you’re up against the surface of the painting or whatever and you’re so close to something that you can’t grip it with your conceptual mind; it doesn’t mean that everything is completely opaque.” Morton thinks Deleuze’s reality principle is overrated, and that it doesn’t really exist. And so, “imposing it or getting used to it is not that great, because it’s ontologically violent as well as politically funny.”

Hyperobjects seem massively distributed in time and space in a peculiar way, of which global warming is one of the more comprehensive examples he discusses. Hyperobjects are systems that you can’t see or touch; they are real, they have an effect on our world. Even though they are real, they are inaccessible. And yet we can think them. They force us into an intimacy with our own death, because they are toxic; with others, because everyone is affected by them; and with our future. They are sinister phenomena like earthquakes and tsunamis. Hyperobjects are beyond the human, but they aren’t infinite or abstract. They are just really, really big and of a scale and consequence beyond human understanding. According to Morton’s theory, hyperobjects remove human beings from the centre of the world. And remove us more and more from what we have understood to be nature until now. Our concept of nature and environment needs a certain distance to exist and make sense. This distance is disappearing, as we are more and more affected by the cloud of effects that the hyperobject emits, as we gather more and more knowledge and data about them.

THE MESH—strange strangers between life and non-life

“The Interdependence Theorem:
Axiom 1. Things are only what they are in relation to other things
Axiom 2. Things derive from other things

1. Life forms constitute a mesh that is infinite and beyond concept—unthinkable as such.
2. Tracing the origins of life to a moment prior to life will result in paradoxes.
3. Drawing distinctions between life and non-life is strictly impossible, yet unavoidable.
4. Differentiating between one species and another is never absolute.
5. There is no ‘outside’ of the system of life forms.
6. The Interdependence Theorem is part of the system of interdependence and thus subject to deconstruction!
7. Since we cannot know in advance what the effect of the system will be, all life forms are theorizable as strange strangers.”

—Timothy Morton

The title of my graduation work, The Mesh—strange strangers between life and non-life, is based on the use of the concept of “the mesh” by Morton in his book Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World (2013), as well as many other books and lectures. A mesh is the threads and the holes between the threads, consisting of “relationships between criss-crossing strands ... and gaps between the strands.” Mesh functions as a potent metaphor for “the strange interconnectedness of things, an interconnectedness that does not allow for perfect, lossless transmission of information, but is instead full of gaps and absences.” Morton further states that “when an object is born it is instantly enmeshed into a relationship with other objects in the mesh.”

How can I meditate on this imprint that human activities leave on planet Earth without judgment or any didactical standpoint? When working towards my graduation project, I found myself asking how to reposition nature as we think it, along the force of the Anthropocene. I imagined an abandoned...
landscape made of materials that cannot be degraded, like plastics and metal, from which mushrooms would grow.

_The Mesh_ consist of a series of sculptures that contain mycelium, from which mushrooms grow through plastic and metal, accompanied by structures that support a carefully constructed humidification system that creates a moist atmosphere. Through different material interactions, these sculptures are in process. The work transforms over the duration of the exhibition. The mushrooms grow slowly: a development that cannot be witnessed in one visit. Other interactions are invisible, like the spreading of spores.

During my research into mushrooms, I stumbled upon the provoking but fascinating lectures of Terence McKenna, a self-taught psychonaut, lecturer, and author. He speaks about mushrooms in relation to the question of extraterrestrial penetration of the human world and in his attempt to assign mushrooms as potential aliens or extraterrestrial life forms. According to McKenna, the mushrooms bear looking at from this viewpoint for two reasons. He explains: “One physical argument is that some mushrooms contain psilocybin, a connection of molecules that are unknown be found in any other organism in nature on this planet.”42 This notion goes against the logic of nature, where through evolution genetics are passed on. Secondly, he claims that the spore is “one of the most electron-dense organic material known,” making it as strong as metal. It is a fact that mushroom spores happen to travel outside of our planetary atmosphere and they happen to survive the environment of outer space.43

I aim to emphasise the contrast between the alien and uncanny artificial yet organic mushroom and industrial and plastic materials. One of the most fascinating aspects of the mushroom is its uncanny texture: like that of cold, dead skin. Their nature is that they live off of dead matter by growing a dense rhizomatic network of neuron transmitters, called mycelium, that digests this material. How can I approach the mushroom as an intelligent material through the medium of sculpture? Through a predirected exhibition in which there is a sense of absence (of the human body) and the uncanny. In this context, I would like to define the uncanny as something uncomfortable or _unheimlich_ that appears to be strangely familiar and familiarly strange. In this project, I research the encounter with the uncanny when the seemingly rigid boundaries between life and non-life, sentient and non-sentient, and organic and inorganic become confused. In doing so, I aim to emphasise a contract between the human body, mushrooms, and systems. I contemplate the interconnectedness that is involved in the Anthropocene, the dissolving boundaries between machines of production and consumption, and our finite biological nature in order to communicate my view on the uncanny road this evolution is taking.

The alien might as well be so alien, one might not recognise it as such.

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7 Grosz, “Bergson, Deleuze and the Becoming of Unbecoming,” 10.
8 Ibid., 11.

Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 12.

"Rhizome (philosophy)," Wikipedia.

Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 7.


Ibid.


Mathieu Copeland, Choreographing Exhibitions (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2013), 144.


Ibid.

Copeland, Choreographing Exhibitions, 142.

Ibid., 145.


Ibid., 28. Authors emphasis.

Ibid., 29.


“The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid’s reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome.”

Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, 10.


Ibid., 40–41.


Haraway, When Species Meet, 17.

Hayles, How We Became Posthuman, 286–87.


Ibid., 99–100.


Morton, Hyperobjects, 83.

Ibid.


Further references


UNTITLED, 2015. Wolf urine on copper plates. 100 x 120 cm. Christian Bang Jensen
UNTITLED, 2014. Bronze cast of wolf skull. 32 x 13 x 18 cm. Christian Bang Jensen
Inquiry into Understanding
What is it that has driven me to commit (to) art? This question is one I often ask myself, and every time I try to answer, I get a new reply or at least different versions of the same response—and this leads my thoughts to Gilles Deleuze and his thoughts on repetition and the inherent displacement within repetition itself. Following my own train of thought might lead to an answer, but as the previous sentence reveals, this is both true and false. False in the assumption that the path carved out of the rock of matter always leads to a centre of zero gravity, where one’s motivations can be grasped, and true in the sense that in any attempt of self-awareness or knowledge, the inevitable confrontation and beginning are with the world outside one’s own thoughts.

The adjective “driven” suggests a compulsion of sorts, a form of desire, almost pathological. Self-analysis—staring into the darkness of one’s own proverbial belly button, that is, having a more than normal interest in one’s own thoughts—is in some ways part of being an artist. “Committing” indicates a transgression, be it a crime or the breaking of a taboo, and in the case of art it is most likely the latter. “Committing to” something is about an investment—time, energy, etc.—but also staying with this commitment and maintaining it. It seems the artists I like the most have all been immersed in their work to such a degree that I wonder if it is a specific pathology I am drawn to. There is a split, a double bind that stimulates my artistic impulses and that is the philosophical and critical part of my practice, since it is primarily focused on bodily immersion and confrontation with rationality and thus provides intellectual stimulus. This is not to be viewed simply in opposition to a more direct artistic drive, but it does provide me with an image of a snake eating its own tail, and serves to explain my continuing engagement, or rather struggle, with art and critical thought.

An answer to my initial question could be that I have always been searching for something, something I have yet to find. To some extent I know that I have looked for the unintelligible, that which was somehow out of place. A part of searching for the unknown entails developing a sensitivity to chance and coincidence: browsing the local antiquarian bookstore and finding just that one book that sparks the imagination, or the unexpected encounters in revisiting my childhood memories, wandering the time spent alone or playing with my brothers, imagining monsters, ghosts, and phantasms living in the forest close to where we grew up. I would look out at the trees outside our windows, envision them coming alive, and see anthropomorphic faces in the tree trunks, and a sudden gust of wind would animate the branches with a will of their own as dendritic nervous tissue.

Ephemeral Knowledge
I remember having a strong fever and lying in bed looking at the white sawdust textures on the wall and seeing vivid white mindscapes of strange creatures in it. Later, when trying to fall asleep, I would be able...
to recall some of these constellations of texture and recognise the specific configurations of gnomic entities again. The fights with the other children on our small suburban street assumed epic proportions. When I was later taught the systems, laws, and empirical facts of the rational world, the disappointment and loss felt was immense. It is partly this sense of loss that made me look for something that would turn everything inside out again, restoring the world of adolescent fantasy. I have looked for it in books, in states of intoxication, and in other phenomena, but it was not until a visit to the Jorn Museum in Denmark that I decided to terminate my studies in ethnography and commit to art, of which I had the naive notion as being a way to re-enchant the world. Perhaps in art, instead of consuming reality, one would be able to add to this reality in a very palpable way and even create an alternative world to inhabit. I know now that art too is a contested field and not the safe haven for outsiders and ecstasies I had imagined; yet it remains intertwined with reality in many remarkable and less remarkable ways. Art can be an instrument for looking and interacting with the world, of trying to secure a place for non-instrumentalised irrational thought, in what seems to me the hypertrophy of an abstract and mathematical rationality. The knowledge that can be gleaned from the artistic process is a certain kind of knowledge, one that does not need to verify itself. It can be a stage where the dead can return to life, where the Dionysian chorus is heard in the background while taboos are performed at the pulpit of a Western history of aesthetic development. It is disconnected from language; it can resort to intuition. It does not need to produce results—it can suppose anything and does not need to adhere to present time, but is vested in fiction, uncertainty, and poetry. Its empirical data is imagination—ephemeral, illusive, fabricated—so instead of finding leftover corn in the abandoned field when the combine harvesters of academia have left, one ideally finds empty space to grow one’s own beanstalk. There is a challenge in this knowledge. There is something in it that wants to change the orders of knowledge and understanding, by moving beyond the representational. In accepting art one also accepts the riddle of ambiguity, the oscillation of meaning and nonsense. Artistic knowledge is a place where one can make a wilful displacement of the need to understand. Where one can come close to the creative act, almost
in accordance with the Renaissance hermeticists, follow Marcel Duchamp’s formulations of transubstantiation, and at the same time know that all this is a construction.

**An Outline in the Dark**

Is it possible to change the present moment by changing the perception of the past, a lost perspective on history that we can rediscover?

You can change points of view by tilting your head to one side, like someone appraising or considering a work of art. I will argue that, in a similar manner, it is possible to change the past by a tilt. What I propose here, this specific tilt and reorientation, requires a breaking point with reality, in the same way as those who ascended from the darkness of Plato’s cave into the light were confronted with a new view of reality.

Such a tilt is commonly referred to as an altered state of consciousness and is associated with electrochemical processes in the human brain. These states are profoundly inward oriented and comprise dreamlike autistic states, such as visions and hallucinations, and are achieved by various means, such as extensive motor behaviour, sensory deprivation and stimulation, activation of endogenous euphoriant releases, ingestion of psychotropic substances, meditation, and hypnotic suggestion. Hallucinations may also result from certain pathological states, such as schizophrenia or epilepsy. Another type of intensified trajectory of consciousness is induced through self-mutilation and fasting and is also frequently employed by ascetics to attain mystical states.

These practices and the way they are entered change within different societies. Whether these states are revered as benign or even divine or if they are dismissed as negative or demonic is specific to the cultural context. In ancient Greece, certain forms of madness considered to be inspired by supernatural forces were actively sought. In medieval Europe, angelic visions were revered, but demonic possessions very condemned, “yet many who were canonised in the Middle Ages would be in psychiatric hospitals in our day.”

In the descriptions of these intensified trajectories of consciousness there are many similarities, whether it is the experience of an Amazonian shaman, a Christian monk, or a New Age raver. The states often include alterations in thinking, disturbed time sense, perceptual distortion, and a loss of control of emotional expressions. Moreover, these experiences are characterised as unfathomable, enigmatic, as a contact with the ultimate truth or a hidden reality. One of the more specific experiences within the mystical induced state is a movement through what is often described as a tunnel, cave, spiral, or swirl ending in a warm bright light. In a Western clinical context, this is described as a “form constant”: a retinal phenomena that works like a Jungian visual archetype, though in actuality is a neurological phenomena. In many religious accounts of ascensions to higher celestial spheres, the beginning of the voyage is described as going through a dark passage or tunnel—that of the neurological spiral vortex of the cave. According to neuroscientists, “The diversity of conditions that provoke such patterns suggests that form constants reflect some fundamental property of visual perception.” Inuit shamans, for example, describe a merger with the earth and the passing through the roots of a tree. When having this kind of experience, it is like your senses are running wild: you start hearing voices, you feel like you are floating, and your vision moves from blurry to acute intricacy—geometric patterns implode and explode and the world as you know it is gone and something else emerges. It thus makes sense that in many cultures the cave is identified as a place leading to the netherworld and accessing the cave means going into the lower layers of the cosmos. The image of the cave as a passageway to the world of the dead, as an access point to the spirits of nature, and as a symbol of magic potency was in this way given a topographical reality.

In the classical period, the caverns of Greece were a place of noetic wisdom, where prophets and sages would come to consult the spirits of the dead or to be divinely possessed. A large number of these caves would be dedicated to the nymphs and Pan, the deities of unrefined, wild nature who had taken abode in the pristine earthly shrines. Possession by the spirits of nature, nymphs, was often sought as a means to inspired divination. Nympolepsy, as it was termed, was connected with hallucinations and prophecy, and it thus makes sense that the nymphs were associated with honey, a symbol of intoxication. Some legends tell of nymphs eating honey to be filled with prophetic enthusiasm. In Greece, mead was thought of as belonging to the primeval past, coming before the invention of wine, and as such the fermentation of honey connects the nymphs to a very archaic tradition that links divination to the consumption of a sacred intoxicating drink. Poetry likewise was seen as belonging to the same realm as prophecy. As Yulia Ustinova outlines: “Poets describe themselves and other poets as bees, and Pindar describes his song as ‘a bee rushing from story to story’. Words flow like honey from the mouth of the poet inspired by the Muses, and the lips of the poet attract bees: a sixth-century poet pictures a bee wandering about on a bronze statue of Homer, lifting a honeycomb into his divine mouth.”

In the dark silence of the cave, only interrupted by the flicker of a candle or the faint sound of water drops, the withdrawal from the distractions of the outer world was almost total, and altered states of consciousness could develop. In the visions in the sacred caves belonging to the nymphs and Pan, deemed responsible for the state of trance, these spirits of the wild also appeared. Culture and belief inhabits and informs the hallucinations, just as culture is informed by the mental specificities of hallucinations. Once again, a snake eating its own tail emerges.
The cave experience offers an illuminating example, regardless of its ancient antecedents, of a process that seems similar to my own notions about going into the studio and of the artistic process itself. Other ways are possible. It involves dealing with the unknown, reaching for the non-knowable, trying to conceive the inconceivable, forgetting about syntax and semiotics, and momentarily in this process trying find something beyond language or new ways of communicating. These moments of losing oneself, succumbing to madness or divinity, have been pushed to the fringes of our society, confined to asylums or pathological diagnoses, functioning as a kind of societal unconsciousness, instead of being a place for uninhibited reflection. Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty was conceived to provide a similar experience, designed to shock the human body, freeing it of its habitual behaviour. As Artaud puts it in his 1947 radio play: “When you have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom.”

To be willing to partake in this ordeal of thought is a prerequisite for destabilising the conditioning of thought. It is at these limits of thought, at the threshold between light and dark, trying to conceive the inconceivable, paradoxically moving beyond the representational capacities of thought, that the daredevils of the mind reside, and it is this area I try to roam.

**Revisiting the Cave**

The cave is both literally and metaphorically an essential component in my inquiry into a space that gives room or access to a new way of looking at reality and provides a historical framework to question the present. This architecture of the introvert provides the experiences that can jolt the mundane world out of its assumed place, a site of excavation and searching, where the darkness reaches back towards the human mind, a reminder of the void, the psychogenesis paradoxically resting in the negation of the will to self.

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The cave system functions as the mapping of my artistic territory. I see the structural categories as plastic; they are a part of my material. It is not only pure matter, but also structural and mental boundaries that are my material. I try to warp and distort the categories of the museum—its discourse—not only by juxtaposing its material and collection with mine, but through an attempted fusing of its categories with my own. Maybe my own mental constitution is one of porousness; I feel that it is hard to see any boundaries between categories—they constantly meld into each other. Seven years ago, I went to Mexico alone and visited the Sun and the Moon pyramids, as well as the Palenque pyramids. It took me some time to digest my experiences. What started out with a visit to the anthropological museum in Mexico City—overwhelming in its own right—ended in another more direct encounter with screaming howler monkeys sounding like dinosaurs roaming the jungle from the vantage point of the ziggurat and armed guards at a UNESCO site in the southern jungle of Mexico.

So in a way, the anthropological museum would be one room in the cave system. Another would be the experience at the Palenque ruins; another would be all my books. The Greek cave would be located deeper than the rest because of its dependence on darkness. It is a system connected in many ways, criss-crossing chronologies and interdependent in the formation of new experiences or pathways, always linked together by earthly matter.

As art, through the continual challenges posed by different avant-garde movements, confused the line between high and low, art and reality, so too has the cave transgressed its own boundaries. From being the dark womb and progenitor of the initial trip to self-awareness, the cave is now all pervasive—albeit in a very subtle and invisible manner. The porousness of the distinction between interiority and surface, a liminality between the world of ideas and phenomena, is growing larger and more dominant within contemporary society due to increased communication and an affluence of images, a contemporary iconomania. Instead of providing shelter and refuge from the effects generated by the surface of images, the topos of the cave has become more conflicted as our mental and physical spaces have increasingly been colonised by technology, to the extent that the line between the virtual and actual has been blurred.

Nocturnal Adaptation

Friedrich Nietzsche describes the tragic backdrop of the seemingly Apollonian dialogues written by Sophocles through the example of an optical phenomenon:

When after a forceful attempt to gaze on the sun we turn away blinded, we see dark colored spots before our eyes, as a cure, as it were. Conversely, the bright image projections of the Sophoclean hero—in short the Apollonian aspect of the mask—are necessary effects of a glance into the inside and terrors of nature; as it were, luminous spots to cure eyes damaged by gruesome night.15

Following Nietzsche, we would once again need to look into the terrors of nature to change our culture, to provide the luminous spots needed in the all pervasive darkness of the expanded cave. This illumination requires a catabasis, a descent into the cave, whereby in a dialectical play the ascent has already begun with the descent into the shadows.

The movement down into the darkness, into matter, inhibits some senses while enhancing others. The obvious link between the uterus and the cave is one that builds on an etymological basis. “Matter” is a derivative of the Latin mater, meaning “mother.” It is this matter that removes you from surface society, making you an outcast, abject,16 and at the same time also that which brings you into the world. Through the experience in the darkness of the cave, one becomes a biological entity, an animal removed from human society and its norms; a gnostic transformative experience changes how the surface world of reality is perceived. To be enveloped in earthly matter and primordial darkness, to experience dissociative states, to feel the hollow foundation of the ego, is a practice that entails a becoming, a becoming other. The sojourn in a cave is a useful metaphor for these ordeals, but not the sole one—there are many other ways to lose one’s way and mind. To be lost in postmodernity’s web of incomplete conclusions and impasses, entanglements and digressions without end, in the shop window’s reflections of sunlight, silicon, plasma screens, and global trade networks. The notion of surface, the paradoxical concept of immanent materiality that has expanded the cave to encompass other topologies and boundary matter-ialism and surface together in a Gordian knot, is not unlike how the meandering of grey cerebral mass in the dark hollow of the skull interprets the light of the world. Our mental images are physical.

“For all the wisdom of the melancholic is subject to the nether world,” Walter Benjamin claims. “It is secured by immersion in the life of creaturely things, and it hears nothing of the voice of revelation. Everything saturnine points down into the depths of the earth.”17 A movement between the analytical mind and the immersed associative unconsciousness is necessary both in my writing and in my artistic production to make ideas oscillate and matter vibrate. Interference patterns arise when the movement between positions has a sufficiently high frequency and provides a sea to navigate and explore. Past and present merge in the work, both as the idea of the material and the material of the idea. In this darkness, one might move one’s hand across the moist rocky surface and find a light switch, or lose orientation completely and wander the psychic highways of modernity aimlessly, lost in the maze of the mind. Discovering a new vein or bringing a new image back into the light, discovered not by sight or cognition, but rather by haptic intuition, is the task of the artist.
In this blinding blizzard of images, it is the task of the navigator to set a course, to catch a glimpse of a long-forgotten guiding star in the sky or find new fixing points in a ceaselessly moving world of images and affect. Everybody needs a body to guide one to find the entrance, the threshold of unseen mindscapes, an orifice into the earth and inside the mind. The blank spot on the map or the blind spot in your mind.

The Immanence of Thought
What does one see or possibly gain from a sojourn in the dark? Can any of these visions have a use, or do they remain in the domain of pure interiority or spectacle? Nietzsche writes in *Birth of the Tragedy* that there is a veil, Maya, covering our perception of the world. This veil is the rational, Apollonian way of thinking about the world of phenomena, relegating dreams and visions to a subdivision of reality. A veil that can only be pierced by experiencing the orgiastic oneness of the primordial Dionysian undercurrent that also informs our culture, albeit in a subtle and repressed manner.

Often, I feel my vocabulary in these matters is limited, too religious or transcendental. The altered states I have experienced myself and those I have read about have a certain materiality to them that makes me want to describe them through a concept of immanence. The body and mind must be physically provoked, opened to affect, stimulated with the chemistry of science, the poison of nature, in order to expand the inner horizons. As in darkness of earth, the chemistry of science, the poison of nature, in order to expand the inner horizons. As in the cave metaphor, one must have a sort of profane illumination, an experience in which matter breathes and the ceiling drips, where you cannot simply go back, a state outside of known territory. In this interzone of real visceral hallucinations and sweat-dripping affects, one can perhaps encounter the ephemerality of form and materiality of thought. This is why I find that art is the most adequate medium of thought: as it is an exchange of thought and form. It contains the complexities of matter and the possibility to oscillate between the immanent and transcendent; art holds the promise of imbuing the world and the object with something from the void. Accordingly there will always be something unaccounted for in the work of art, a residue of sorts that remains unexplained. There is a clear link or chain between the materiality of the cave and the haptic experience of the artwork, its thingness, and the rediscovery of immanent thought. You go into the cave, the preposition “in” being indicative, as it is not a movement to a higher plane as in transcendental thought, but something that is innate to our world. In the experience I am trying to outline, you go into the mind of your body, but you could likewise arrive there by going into the materiality of the world, by cultivating a more haptic mode of vision. This notion is in many ways contrary to Plato’s distinction between the world of ideas as possessing the highest and most fundamental kind of reality and the material world of phenomena.18 In the cave there is no transcendence; one is not transported to somewhere, but rather into something. This does not have to lead to an essentialist argument that traits such as native language and cultural preferences are intrinsic and not acquired. I believe that a deeper and more complex understanding of the innate properties of matter will bypass essentialisms, transforming them into evanescent waves of mental projection and physical thought processes. To examine the tools of the artist and the mystic would perhaps offer, in an intersection between the two, a glimpse of a new insight into the nature of our world.

The Golden Chain
In my practice, thoughts and presuppositions are investigated by means of plastic formulations. There is room for digression, for singular trails of thought prompted by a specific ontological relation. A narrative slowly manifests—an obscure self-portrait develops in time, space, and matter, influenced in part by discursive undercurrents of certain philosophers and the chemical composition of the developer. An imagined space, highly subjective and affected by aesthetic nostalgias and preferences, a kind of wandering in a fog of indefinable objects that escape logic and deductions, collapsing in their own emptiness and expanding into a grey electrified mass. A rhizome woven from cable-like arguments, always out of focus, continuously escaping definitions, but visceral and subsumed by the spasms of entropy and desire. A cable, contrary to the chain, which is never stronger than its weakest link, allows for fragile and damaged threads without losing its function. An imagined monument for fleeting thoughts that feed on themselves and change velocity and momentum, as a drunk tragic figure on his way home from a long night out. Remembering and forgetting form a large part of this figure’s mental life. The insight found in the state of inebriation is now lost. The satyr chorus grows weaker, and after failed attempts at approximations, the figure starts looking for food and warmth. Something will be remembered, or perhaps inscribed into a bodily register, while other things will be forgotten and misunderstood. One might hope that the readers of this specific situation can recognise something in themselves, see their own thoughts in past and present. Although the art objects function as markers in a larger personal narrative, they are also detached, not as fragments that point to a former whole, but as objects with their own memory and independence. This makes the encyclopaedia hard to index. As an essay such as this, in vain, tries to conjure an adequate image, so is the *gesamtkunstwerk* or utopia also bound to fail. The all-encompassing philosophy or concept of the work often runs aground in its own universalism, as an overloaded dinghy in too shallow water. The logical solution, when realising that you are about to shipwreck, is either to throw something overboard or to perish. Perhaps in art there is the possibility to seize the unreachable, the fire on the mountain, in spite of being
doomed to fail. The challenge is to believe that there is something to reach for, a leap of faith. In this irrational quest there is a space inhabitable by rationality, which both justifies and becomes a logical reason for the existence of the work. Perhaps it is the play with metaphors functioning as a mediator or transport between the image and the idea, be it the boat at sea or the crystal, that in the end can save the overloaded boat. The danger is the cliché, both linguistically and as the divine or psychoanalytical patriarch always judging from above or below.

(The correspondence between the thingness of the work and the ideas constituting the artwork. At first glance, there is also immanent in the thingness of the work certain ideas if one looks closer. These may spur on a sort of secular transcendence, which will form one part of the dialogue I propose. The ideas also present in the artwork also have a material, a thingness, which is in part the artist and his specific language.)

(The eye becomes alive, it sees itself and when having an encounter with the art object, there is a moment in which the self can be lost in contemplation, when the thing beheld looks back, as if our animistic past reveals itself to us and we experience a part of our Dionysian being. This is in some ways also reflected in the—)

The Vault
Collectors “sind Menschen mit taktischem Instinkt,” and it is this tactility of form that informs my notion of immanence. It is also a field in which I sense a general negligence on the part of the established notion of knowledge production. Following Alois Riegl’s distinction, the haptic, in contrast to the optic, entails a sense of touch, a “closeness” and immediacy that evokes a more interior sense and seems to escape technological mediation. In my practice I try to communicate some of my experiences with objects through my collection of curios. It is a very unstable process, since it involves many elements, some of which are contradictory to one another and also at odds with the language surrounding my work. It is not a collection of purely found objects, but an amalgamation of found objects, crafted objects, or sculptures that I feel would fit the collection and my thoughts at that moment. Gleaning fragments from old books and images found online, but also from more obtuse sources such as memories, dreams, and states of becoming, and using them as sources to conjure up an image that resonates in my mind and thoughts, giving me the pleasure of being unable to take it all in, unable to solve the riddle—the enjoyment of being lost in the maze. My collection is stored in boxes in my studio and is a way to organise memory of both past and present, perhaps even the future, but is also a way of forgetting, a way of displacing affects and the joy of rediscovering them again. When an image becomes part of my archive, it changes status, becomes part of my construction material, and loses its own significance. This is perhaps most apparent with the physical cut outs, but it is true of more ephemeral items as well, such as memories or pieces of a conversation that reside in the material. Having the images in one’s collection is a way to comprehend and grasp them.

My choice of objects is guided by a principle, although not a rigorous one; it is based on an intuition of the correspondences between the objects. It does not matter in what way the correspondences manifest themselves: when a wolf skull in beeswax and a copperplate corroded by wolf urine are placed next to a parrot feather given to me by a friend and

purveyor of illicit plants, their mutually dependent narrative changes radically. It is a sort of dance, a funambulist trick of never being merely random or being too literal. It is an immersion in the spaces forming between the objects. Creating a plane of haptic reference for myself through the handling of the artworks and objects in my collection and studio allows me to manoeuvre correspondences between the interiorities of the objects and their placement in a space. A context for the objects could be the history of the development of science and its collections, whereby a gradual process of moving away from the singular object to the universal characteristics of objects is exemplified in the obsolescence of the wunderkammer. In using the trope of the cabinet of curiosities as a sort of wistful counter-enlightenment, there is a movement from the rational and abstract to the concrete and immanent. The possibility of a different sort of knowledge, one more closely linked to affects and senses and able to instil a profound sense of wonder about the world.

When I look at different objects in the Bronze Age collection in the National Museum of Denmark, I often see many correlations with some of my own experiences. For example, I believe the large silver cauldron with the anthropomorphic animals and large hollow eyes, called Gundestrup karret, and the famous Golden Horns of Gallehus contained more than mere alcohol. More likely these held concoctions or brews of the fungi and plants that are indigenous to our own hemisphere, an influence the Christian tradition has tried to suppress. This is not a fact, but there is a lot of our prehistory that is unknown. I suggest that cultivating previous thoughts and mindsets will give us an insight not only into our mental past, but also into our material past.

The artwork thus becomes comparable to a crystal ball or a scrying stone, but instead of having visions of angels, one is provided a sort of profane illumination, a look into the material of our existence. In the footsteps of Benjamin’s notion of profane
illuminations, I see the artwork as the pearl captured from the rausch dragons of obscurantism. The profane is the material, the base matter, in which is inscribed a certain meaning or coherence; herein exists the correspondences that give rise to the revelation. I envisage the correspondences as a constellation or as an astronomer finding and naming new stars in the sky from which to navigate, the equivalent of navigating a ship through a fog by night and still having the light needed to set a course and give meaning to the endeavour.

The Library
Sometimes you encounter strange beings of thought, mental entities, like when I visited the Ritman Library in Amsterdam, a library established by a wealthy businessman that contains many rare books and scriptures. I saw an exhibition of books about Hermes Trismegistus with many rich illustrations about alchemy, the great work, the mediation of sun and moon, and man as containing the divine. Though deeply immersed in these thoughts and the seemingly intricate patterns between the dictum “as above so below” and my thoughts about the earthly cave experiences and the ephemeral visions and hallucinations caused by these descents into the underground, I felt a sort of disappointment in seeing all these wonderful books. Walls filled with Jakob Böhme, Hildegard von Bingen, The Golden Bough, William Blake, the Nag Hammadi Scriptures—so many visionary writings in one place was a sort of technical knockout. What could I really add to this and how was I to read or grasp all this inspired literature? When I left, a young dark-haired girl asked me if I had found what I was searching for and the metaphysical implications in this question made me stumble. I did not know what to answer except: “Yes, sort of.” Reflecting back on this experience, what really animated my mind was the girl’s question; I had not found what I was looking for, not in the books anyway—but in the question I saw the contours of an enticing and confusing allegory. In hindsight, as I see myself missing the step down to where my coat was hanging and at the same time trying to answer the question “Did you find what you were searching for?,” I now feel more ambivalent about my initial rejection of the positive outcome of the search. I’ve come to think about a talk we had in class concerning motherhood in the academy, in which it was suggested that working inside a limited parameter could be beneficial for some (for example, Roland Barthes often would restrict himself to the local library to do research for writing). This is a tempting idea, but in my opinion, mental iconoclasm is no cure for iconomania.20

Dowsing the Promethean Flame
An illumination achieved through darkening or obfuscation is an intimidating notion. The concept of truth seems to automatically invoke scepticism and distrust. Metaphysical truth and the search for it, specifically in a Western context, seems anachronistic and outdated in a world ruled by a consumerist economy and neoliberal capitalism, where the pragmatic approach often prevails. Furthermore this vision-seeking entails a risk; it can be both mentally and physically hazardous to undertake these philosophical and transformative ordeals, even though the rewards can be substantial. It is safer to experience fantasy, horror, and hallucinatory states in the comfort of a soft chair in a warm cinema than it is to venture into the cold damp darkness of the cave. Our desires for the enigmatic and otherworldly have to some extent been colonised by the culture industry, and while Benjamin saw the potential of the cinema and collective experiences in the new film media, it is hard not to see the exact opposite in the cinema of our days. It can be dangerous to kill the projector in the dark room. Visions are not always pleasant; they involve danger, are sometimes malignant, and some people really do go mad and never fully return, but this is, in my opinion, how the world operates: we want the warmth of fire, the cooked meat, the safety, but we shy away from the risk of being burnt or injured. I feel there is a blind spot in our daily lives that conceals the way our need for security is itself entangled in violence and domination, and we close our eyes to the harmful effects of our need for comfort. Perhaps there is a need to turn off the projectors and plasma screens and cultivate other experiences, ones that do not follow the linear trajectory of cost-benefit analysis or the standard laws of science.

Crystal Gazing
Ascent and descent is movement between connected realities. In order for this movement to happen, one needs a vehicle, a ship, a lattice, a chain, a metaphor to facilitate the transport. The crystal is an enticing metaphor I often use in my practice and in the language connected to my practice, a metaphor that has many precursors. The modern age, epitomised by Walter Gropius’s Bauhaus manifesto, imagined the building of the future as a crystalline symbol of a new and coming faith: “the new building of the future ... will combine architecture, sculpture, and painting in a single form, and will one day rise towards the heavens from the hands of a million workers as the crystalline symbol of a new and coming faith.”21 I try to avoid such utopianism in the description of my own imaginary construction, which I feel has more in common with the burrows of the wasp than with the high rise of modernist architecture. Another, perhaps more adequate, version would be J.G. Ballard’s The Crystal World, in which the outcome of crystallisation is instead an apocalyptic homogenisation. All organic matter is turned into crystal by some unknown process that begins in a jungle near a colonial outpost in Africa. The process is contagious and infects those who remain too long in the fluorescent-green light of the jungle. After being released from their crystal prison, those freed wish
once again to return to their former crystalline state. The descriptions of the afflicted allude to a return to a primordial state of conflict-free bliss, a sort of regression to an infantile state, hence the danger of the crystal world. The crystal also harbours potential proto-fascist tendencies, a matter which is governed by the laws of nature following specific geometric rules of growth connected to matter’s inherent form.

It is in matter, in a slow process of stratification, that the crystal is formed. It is in this sense also a denizen of the cave. Below in the deep, in the enveloping darkness, in the mineral realm, matter often reaches a more desirable state. It coalesces: wood turns into coal, coal into diamonds, as if the earth is facilitating a process of transformation or crystallisation. A transformation sought by mystics and mining companies alike.

Ideally, I would like my work to function as a looking glass into the unknown, which can be many things: the material vibrations, ideas, my unconsciousness, the onlookers’ unconsciousnesses, the other. It is a prism that both is a fragment and fragments reality. The transportation of light in the crystal, the diffraction of the universal light into its components, can be seen as part of this metaphor. Or crystallography, a specific trope of reductionist scientism, and its diminishing of the specific crystal to a standard set of rules, which in some ways follows the universalist tendencies of modernist art, that is, the reduction of form to primary shapes as in cubism. In the photographs of Johann Heinrich Flögel, the first to photograph snow, it is clear that no snow crystal is the same: every flake has irregularities caused by their descent from the sky to the terrestrial surface of human view. This is comparable to minimalism; instead of experiencing the primary forms, one becomes aware of one’s own body, becomes aware of the irregularities in the traces of welding in Donald Judd’s sculptures. The grotesque resurfaces in our material world, and in this way the saying “the devil is in the detail” acquires a newfound weight, as if gravitation increases the closer you come to the core of the earth. Surely, the modern age could not have anticipated that the sacrament of this crystalline symbol of a new and coming faith would be liquid crystal displays, plasma screens, and the inhalation of crystallised methamphetamine fumes. The crystal holds a vast number of facets, many still opaque, foggy, and always partial.

Outer Boundaries
In the periphery of my eyesight, in the blurred field, something resides. I have often tried to determine it, but it is like the horizon: always moving away from my field of vision, like a fly disturbing my dreams. Anthropologists often do field studies in remote areas of the world. I don’t mean to generalise ethnographic studies, but rather I want to make a comparison to the field in which my own inquiry is situated, my practice as an artist. Approaching the concept of dreamtime or kinship spirits in Australia with a rationalising and binary viewpoint as emblematic of the Western approach to the Other is a cul-de-sac. What is outside the order of our own linguistic structures demands a new approach. This type of self-reflexivity has been an integral part of the academic tradition, especially in regards to that which is foreign. So how can we go about handling the foreign and the Other? By the othering of ourselves and by a purely theoretical abstraction from our own intellectual and cultural categories? I propose it is through finding an abstract

Left: *Between Heaven and Hell*, 2015. Arrowheads made of iron from the Campo del Cielo and the Canyon Diablo meteors. Christian Bang Jensen
Right: *Spore and Offset Print*, 2015. Life Magazine (1957 May 13), spore prints. 45 x 70 cm. Christian Bang Jensen
spot where there is no space below or above, a misty horizon between the North Sea and the grey autumn sky. To construct, which means to build, a concrete mental structure in the mind, and use this construction as a viewpoint from which the eye of the body has to be taken into consideration.

The function of blur in Photoshop, and the eye controlling it, is the hypothetical point of departure for a linguistic investigation of blurred vision, but it is bound to lapse into a binary futility concerning data and the rendering of information. Blurring generally entails a movement from known to unknown, between a state of clear vision and one of no focus. This hazy liminal state of inability to differentiate between object and mind is, by definition, hard to elucidate, as it entails the opposite of clarification. In many ways, it is not even desirable to find a machine or concept that is able to produce this blur, which in many respects shies away from desire itself. There is a movement from a focus to a non-focus comparable to the camera lens, including prime-, zoom-, and wide-angle lenses, as the eye as a mechanism is linked to the envisioning that takes place between the mind, the eye, and the outside. The mechanism of moving outside oneself is said to be possible by ways of mediation, but, as I see it, it is in this state of trying to lose oneself and sliding away from consciousness that one reaches a kind of barrier of transcendence. In a foggy vision quest where the outcome can only be death or confusion, the displaced and ignorant vision is the only attainable result. In any case, this is the wrong way to go about the displacement of the field of vision, as it will leave the mind blind and the eyes saturated with the writings of a different language. An artificially induced trip to the edges will still leave an unwanted focus.

The blinding light of illumination is easily, but misleadingly, confused with the blurred state. There is no insight of any kind. There is no dissolution of categories in a burning flame; there is only a dimming of all contrast and contours, the categories still perceived, but no longer with any value to attach. The blur is not blind, but rather a state of diffused light from a vague emitting source. It is not a state of undifferentiated bliss; instead, it is an uneasy position of feeling one’s way along a stony country road at twilight. A sudden exposure to elastic categories, an uneasy feeling of not being able to read the faces of the world, enigmatic expressions. The enigmatic always retains a connection to the known unknown, whereas the unknown unknown is not recognisable as such. In the strangest of ways, this links to the early 2000s speeches of Donald Rumsfeld, in which a similar metaphysics is incorporated to justify the Iraq war.22

This distortion of vision can be applied to all theories. Any theory or concept will contain a part of this outlook, as a displacement happens when you create a focus. This dislocation will be the very non-essence of the theory and the concepts it proposes and will hold valuable information about the standard formulas with which one normally approaches a philosophical proposition. Just as classical anthropological inquiry would take the periphery as its field of data, I suggest that the artist or researcher also use peripheral vision as a mode of collecting or registering the world. The advantages of being in the periphery (or having peripheral vision) is retaining the ability to see the centre from a distance, remaining unseen from the strong forces that govern the centre, or having the opportunity to write the history of the marginalised as a counterhistory to the dominant Western discourse. Writing on the periphery or the anthropological subject of the Other often functions as a mirror. It shows the fallacies of one’s own thoughts and preconceptions of the Other. It becomes much clearer when one looks at older anthropological books and theories, whereby this historical corrective lens itself becomes a validation for the discipline and its production of knowledge. Sir James George Frazer’s The Golden Bough (1890) was as much a piece of literary style as it was a self-validating empirical work on the Other. In this way, it was more honest. It was not trying to make an excuse for being written in the centre and not in the field style that had been made the standard mode of conducting anthropological research by Bronislaw Malinowski.

The Archaic Smile

“Time is but the stream I go fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. ... I would drink deeper; fish in the sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars. ... My instinct tells me that my head is an organ for burrowing, as some creatures use their snout and fore paws, and with it I would mine and burrow my way through these hills.”

—Henry David Thoreau23

Contemporary historiography suffers from a form of amnesia, but contrary to the artwork, historical amnesia is the loss of direct experience of reality. It is a sort of neutrality that values registration and sober observation more than the actual encounter. In our society, this produces an increasingly abstract and disconnected reception of time and history, whereas in the Middle Ages oral history was “not concerned with an accurate concatenation of definite events, but with the way these are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world.”24 I think the physical work holds the potential to create an intimacy with a personal history set in a larger, more global history. In many ways the oral tradition is close to my own work as it also connects to a lived life, to memory, and to death. As Benjamin puts it: “Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story as the handprints of the potter to the clay vessel.”25 What constitutes the anachronistic? I often use old, sometimes even ancient, objects juxtaposed with objects of a more contemporary era. The outdated or ancient artefact is a literal model for me to create new work that challenges the notion of contemporaneity. Looking at an artwork often makes me feel out of sync, as if something is pushing me
towards the past. I pause for a moment in my own time and connect my memory to a number of predefined classifications and to my own experiences with this material. I am dumbfounded again discovering my displacement of past, present, and future in front of this hypothetical, yet very real, object. Dumbfounded because I now am to place these artefacts in chronological order and to draw from them a certain kind of information about creation, and yet I am unable to follow my tutoring, since what I see is such a swarm of overlapping connections between memory, materiality, history, and image that my arbitrary attempts to place an artwork in any framework, plural or singular, is purely a mental construction of my own mind trying to satisfy a rational mode of thinking to which I do not adhere. My own experience of time takes place in feedback loops and resonating diffraction patterns.

Contemporary art can be a form of intervention into history with the possibility to activate or create an in-between space, where history is not a linear progressive movement but rather can be challenged and reinterpreted. A place to grasp at history ad fontes is an enticing but utopian thought; the demand for contemporaneity seems to impede the possibility for the work to contain and describe a time other than our own. Symptomatic of our time is that it continually reproduces itself in newer versions, and if one attempts to reach through history to grasp the utopian opportunity, it is to invoke unspeakable historical ghosts.

Mimetic Residue
In Benjamin’s optics, mimesis is understood as a way to conceive of the world, seen particularly in children’s imitation of adult behaviour. Following Frazer’s notion of sympathetic magic, which in short is a way to influence the original by way of a copy, art (and astrology, as shown by Benjamin) can also be seen as forming a magic of mimesis by virtue of making representations. And in Agrippa’s Renaissance work Three Books of Occult Philosophy, an entire system of correspondences is laid out as a way to influence reality. While apprehending the world in terms of analogy is of course problematic, it nevertheless seems to me that there is something to be gained from this perspective.

A question that continually informs my practice is to what degree contemporary art and its rituals are residue of a mimetic mode of thinking. I try to examine and look at these links through the creative act: art as a form of imitative magic, a chain between history and modernity. By physically making representations and copies as part of my practice, I experientially investigate the world of mimesis and its consequences. Art stands between religion and science and enjoys the freedom of not having to choose, but suffers the scorn of being looked at as an unruly teenager by its presumed progenitors.

Magical thinking, clan wars, gift economies, and ancestor worship exist as more than residue or traces in our contemporary society. Not merely fragmentary or archeological phenomena, they are embedded in the same manner as the reinforcement steel in our concrete buildings. It is not only the spiritual- or freethinkers who have been part of a recent significant discourse in Western culture; rather, everybody partakes in the fascination for the supernatural. It is not mere ripples on the surface of society, or something that existed only in our so-called primitive past; it is something that pervades every level of society, so much so that it can be hard to see sometimes. Logos, sports, brands, family photos, art, parties—all are examples of how technological progress cannot be equated with the progress of thought. Indeed, technology often contains traces of the mimetic.

And the intentions of the artist? Are they forgotten in the enjoyment of the practice of a ritual that fulfills a mimetic need, or is the mimetic part of the unknown in the riddle of the creative act? By giving the mimetic a double role by both being informed by the concept as something historical produced by materiality and unknown correspondences while simultaneously performing it and adding to its phantasms of materiality, one enters the murky waters of intention and unintention.

Inconclusive
Nearing the end of the journey, I am in the darkness of the camera’s bowels; the silver halide crystals form according to the light that passes through the lens. As our world has been populated by images to such a degree that we are living on the map of the world, as in the story “On Exactitude in Science” by Jorge Luis Borges, there is a need to penetrate this map, dig through the images, close the shutter entirely, in order to see what has been covered up. Can we learn to better navigate the darkness of our culture, or is it a trap from which it is hard to escape? If indeed we are trapped in the darkness of the cave, enveloped in the phantasmagoria of popular culture, could it be possible to discern the Promethean origin of the shadows on the wall? I am not sure, but I would propose to make allies with the shadows and shades in the cave, to use them as an antidote to our current predicament. My cave, this text, my attempt at an allegorical construction, is helpful precisely because of its ambiguous nature. It does not resolve any of the conflicts I outline; rather, it confuses and blurs them. The tension between darkness and light, material world and representation, is, on the contrary, preserved in the cave, and without this tension life would be mere matter or a pure mirror of representation. Maybe we should not look towards the sky for an external salvation, but instead have the courage to go deeper into the cave, dare to take a bite of the apple, as the first bite remains undigested in the stomach of Eve. In the recesses of the cave one might uncover the gleaming crystal needed to be able to wrest the Promethean crystal from matter itself and listen in on the galactic noise.

For example, Carl Fredrik Hill, Henri Michaux, Paul Thek, and Dieter Roth.


Ibid., Caves and the Ancient Greek Mind, 41.

Ibid., 52.

Ibid., 55.

August Kekulé claimed to have discovered the ring shape of benzene after a daydream, a revelatory state that revealed the ancient symbol of the uroboros to him.

Antonin Artaud, To Have Done with the Judgment of God: Selected Writings (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 571.


That is, collectors “are people with tactile instincts” (authors translation). Matthew Rampley, The Remembrance of Things Past (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), 142.

A gargoygle hangs motionless on the makeshift cubic wall in the gallery space. White protestant paint covers the interior; it is used to scare away malignant spirits and divert water away from the foundation of the building.


Ibid., 471.

Turning on the creative class: Mac computers powered in part by rare earth minerals found in the Earth’s crust.

“In Greek mythology, Persephone ... is the daughter of Zeus and the harvest goddess Demeter, and is the queen of the underworld. Homer describes her as the formidable, venerable majestic princess of the underworld, who carries into effect the curses of men upon the souls of the dead. Persephone was abducted by Hades, the god-king of the underworld. Demeter, when she found her daughter had disappeared, searched for her all over the earth with Hecate’s torches. In most versions she forbids the earth to produce, or she neglects the earth and in the depth of her despair she causes nothing to grow. Helios, the sun, who sees everything, eventually told Demeter what had happened and at length she discovered the place of her abode. Finally, Zeus, pressed by the cries of the hungry people and by the other deities who also heard their anguish, forced Hades to return Persephone. Hades indeed complied with the request, but first he tricked her, giving her some pomegranate seeds to eat. Persephone was released by Hermes, who had been sent to retrieve her, but because she had tasted food in the underworld, she was obliged to spend a third of each year there, and the remaining part of the year with the gods above.” “Persephone,” Wikipedia, last modified June 7, 2015, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Persephone.

Further references


Because Particles, 2015. Video installation, detail. Hand-dyed textiles, flatscreen monitor, computer monitor, mobile projector, laptop, headphones, speakers, coffee tables, sofa, bed, fountain motors, aluminum trays, water, blue LED lamps, cellophane, motor, carpet. Lily Benson
Because Particles: Episode 3: Entanglement, 2015. Still from HD video. 4 episodes. 42 min. Lily Benson
As an artist working with video, I am particularly perceptive to moments when the filmmaking sphere and the art world encounter one another. Strange activity materialises in these collisions, overlaps, creating in-between spaces. The two fields seem so similar, yet when they meet, terrible things can happen. Stupendous and miraculous things can happen, too, but we’ll get to that later. First, the bad news.

The most literal example of an ill-fated collision between art and film is the entire genre of artist biopics (films about the lives of artists). Early on in the discipline of film theory, the esteemed critic André Bazin authored an entire chapter on the collective disdain for this particular intersection, especially in regards to films about painters. He begins, “Films about paintings, at least those that use them to create something the structure of which is cinematic, meet with an identical objection from painters and art critics alike.” Bazin continues, “Even should the filmmaker wish to conform to the facts of art history, the instrument he uses would still be aesthetically at odds with them. As a filmmaker he fragments what is by essence a synthesis while himself working towards a new synthesis never envisioned by the painter.” Bazin’s criticisms of artist biopics stem from the ontological differences between painting and film. The inherent flatness of the filmic image destroys the autonomy and physical presence of paintings. While Bazin thoroughly picks apart the incompatibility of the two media in his critique, there is also an underlying tone of straight up grumpy indignation at the entire notion of artist biopics. I imagine Bazin taking a smoking break on his balcony, mumbling to himself, “Zut alors!” contemplating the best way to channel his annoyance at these films into the written word. Or maybe I am projecting.

Despite complaints from the outset of the genre, artist biopic titles have multiplied over the last few decades. I still have lines and gashes etched around my eyes generated by my own cringing during such films. I recoil at the inaccuracies of pictures like Frida, Pollock, and Little Ashes. It’s not that I am upset by chronological mistakes or misconstrued historical details, as filmmakers are not art historians. Instead, I am offended by the warped views that these films convey in terms of the essential being of an artist.

Is Bazin right when he claims that the problem stems from the essential differences between cinema and plastic works? The distance of the filmmaker to art production? But even in Basquiat, which was directed by a painter and close friend of the subject (Julian Schnabel), there is still something majorly amiss. The film focuses so much on Jean-Michel
Basquiat’s love life and commercial success that he no longer seems like a three-dimensional person. But why portray him like this? Isn’t humanising an icon a major reason to explicate the details of someone’s life for two hours?

As different forms of media further intertwine themselves with one another, and cross-disciplinary art becomes the norm, it seems too simplistic to solely blame the difference between film and painting for misconstruing the lives of artists in movies. The classical narrative structure is also to be held accountable. A lifetime of art making is neither uncomplicated, autonomous, nor nonstop valiant.

In response to our disappointment with the genre, a fellow filmmaker, Cassandra Guan, and I challenged ourselves to undo the conventions of the biopic. I will tell the story of our endeavour, as it was a necessary lead up to my most recent work, *Because Particles* (2015).

Cassandra and I considered our task an explicitly feminist project. It was an attempt to undo the patriarchal form of a linear and heroic life story. We vowed to create an alternative and queer narrative, choosing to create a complicated and open-ended plot on purpose, removing heteronormative standards and taking up Laura Mulvey’s idea that “narrative closure resolves contradiction and stabilises the energy for change generated by a storyline.” So, we set out to abandon closure and resolution in the world of artist biopics. Usually when making art, I land in a slightly different zone than I originally intended, as the project changes shape along the way, but in this case, the final result surprisingly landed close to our goal.

To begin, we formulated the structure. One of the main problems of artist biopics is that they are flattened into one narrow view, informed by the agenda of the individual filmmaker, when in fact most people’s lives could be interpreted in multitudinous
ways, especially in retrospect. So we determined that in order for diverse forms of expression and varied perspectives to be woven together, the work required collective authorship.

Our plan was to find a person of interest and then divide the task of portraying their life among many participants, so that divergent and contradictory viewpoints would meld together. The medium of video would allow for many styles and types of speech, as well as provide a way to unite the pieces as one.

We went shopping for a figurehead to portray. We first sifted through feminist theorists, like Hélène Cixous. Maybe we were being too mainstream, but we determined that these theorists’ academic lives weren’t exactly cinematically stimulating. We then explored famously “lost” female artists, such as Lee Lozano, but found that many of them had already been thoroughly re-explored in the art world, so our project could be redundant. Maybe these women weren’t so lost after all? Finally, we stumbled across a small passage about Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven in a book by performance scholar Amelia Jones. Cassandra recalled a small mention of this woman in her art-history class on the Dada movement. The Baroness’s shadowy presence drew us in.

Fortunately for us, the scholar Irene Gammel had recently discovered a treasure trove of papers and material archived at the University of Maryland, donated by the Baroness’s last true friend, author Djuna Barnes. Despite the fragmented remnants of the Baroness’s history and artwork, Gammel managed to publish a five-hundred-and-sixty-one-page biography titled Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity—A Cultural Biography. Immediately after beginning Gammel’s book, Cassandra and I found parallels between our proposed structure and the

missing sections and conflicting accounts of Elsa’s life. Men hated her passionately (she and William Carlos Williams engaged in a hate-fuelled boxing match), yet desired her intensely. She was a major artistic influence on famous artists (many say she is the true author of Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* [1917]), but only two of her physical works remain.

The final edit of our film, ultimately titled *The Filmballad of Mamadada* (2013), involved a wide range of authors. It had contributions from everyone from macho cartoonists to art historians making a film for the first time to canonical feminist filmmakers. We wove the quilted narrative together with a few segments of simple drawings and voiceover. I was really excited by the results of our experiment. It was received warmly in the world of film festivals, as well as by galleries and artists, which I hope means that we united the two worlds through our piece. But instead of feeling satisfied with smashing some biopic tropes, I began to fixate on another area of problematic clashing between art and film.

In popular culture, specifically high-budget features and television shows, fictional artist characters are often used as comedic devices or outsider eccentricities that exist to normalise the protagonist. Here are a few particularly egregious examples of this type of character in feature films: Mia’s mother (Caroline Goodall) in *The Princess Diaries,*9 who makes paintings by throwing darts at balloons and proclaiming her process to be “more fun than homework”; Maude Lebowski (Julianne Moore) in *The Big Lebowski,*10 whose work “has been commended as being strongly vaginal” (in other words, she is the embodiment of negative stereotypes of feminist performance art); Juan Antonio (Javier Bardem) and María Elena (Penélope Cruz) in *Vicky Cristina Barcelona,*11 who both make art as a release for their romantic rage towards one another; and the bloodthirsty, violent artist population of Soho in *After Hours.*12

Overall, these characters are unsympathetically abnormal and irrationally driven to create art. But one must keep in mind that there is often an honest starting point for stereotypes and clichés. The most widespread fictionalised artist characteristic is insanity, which often seems like an unfair exaggeration of creativity. Yet in 1994, Felix Post published a study in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* reporting that 69 percent of the creative individuals he studied had notable mental disorders.13 Perhaps it is an unrelated correlation, but part of the cringe-inducing and disruptive feeling I get from watching these artist characters behave all wacky is the element of self-recognition. Like when you record your own voice, play it back, and suddenly realise how obnoxious you sound to everyone around you. Since most artists strive to be original, it’s particularly vexing to see yourself as a ridiculous archetype.

I suppose I fixated on this skewed representation out of wanting to stand up for my decision to be an artist. At times it’s a difficult role to take on: it’s evasive to define, financially insecure, and hard to explain to others.

The young artist Nik Kosmas recently announced his decision to give up art, despite a successful career with his collective, AIDS-3D. His explanation for quitting focused on the difficulty of the translation of his art practice to outsiders:

> At some point, I had the feeling that I couldn’t explain what I was doing, with conviction, to a stranger. The subjective nature of making “work” in a field where basically anything goes: critical or non-critical, aesthetic or conceptual, material or dematerialized—as long as you want to call it “art.” I felt suffocated by potentials and missed having a method for evaluating options. Possibly I was also suffering from some kind of impostor complex, where I felt like anyone at any time would notice that everything we were doing made no sense.14

Maybe some of the difficulty of explanation and translation of what being an artist entails can be derived from insufficient mainstream representation, as it is one of the few bridges between the art world and, uh, *everyone else,* and it wrongly reproduces the elusive motivations for art production as straightforward mania.

Why does mainstream media need us as characters anyway? Are they benefitting economically from including flattened creative weirdos in major motion pictures? Would it be better for artistic kind if we were to scream at Hollywood, “Just leave us alone!”?

While fictional artists like Maude Lebowski agitate living artists (especially myself—I am whining) in their exaggerated depiction of artsy character flaws, the even more painful element to digest is the fake art produced by these characters. The journalist Johanna King-Slutsky published an in-depth analysis of art in television shows, tracing the sad origins of rented art props and painting commissions. She continually updates her online compendium, *Art on TV,*15 with the latest onslaught of fake artworks used in television series, keeping up with each season of imposter art. While there are many fake artists in films, they are in fact far more prevalent in television. Slutsky notes: “I have yet to encounter a TV program that does not feature at least one artist or work of art, much in the same way that sitcoms tend to oversample brick lofts.”16 TV utilises art for uninteresting motivations: as a simplistic comedic device or an efficient way to give a character a “creative edge.”

While there are endless examples of television’s fake art failing to resemble the real art it attempts to mirror, a particularly striking one is from the third episode of season two of *Girls.*17 Here, a video installation by the fictional artist Booth terrorises the character Marnie, and she becomes entrapped within his tower of monitors.18 The piece has no genuine...
intentions behind it, and instead merely acts as a humorous representation of the characters’ tenuous relationship. In this case, the art was made by a production crew whose main agenda was wiring monitors so that the actress would not be electrocuted. Writer/director/star of the show Lena Dunham is the daughter of two accomplished artists (Carroll Dunham and Laurie Simmons), yet, in a failure of translation similar to Schnabel’s in Basquiat, she solely uses art for the sake of making fun of it. Regardless of Dunham’s intimate familiarity with the art world, her fictionalised version is harrowing and distrustful.

**The good news …**

The odd thing is that when this system operates in reverse, and artists incorporate the medium of television into their work, the results are often scintillating. Artists have a clear purpose when using this format, and perhaps their use of the medium does not stray as far from its creators’ original intentions, as opposed to when television makers use “art” as a strategy. Artists adopt the image-making methods, storytelling modes, and filmic structures of television as packaging that enhances a subversive idea or agenda.

An early example of this tactic is Mike Kelley’s first video, *The Banana Man* (1983), based on an obscure *Captain Kangaroo* character of the same name. The show was popular when Kelley was a child, but he never saw it himself. He based his ideas of this character only on what his friends had described. He explains: “*The Banana Man* is an attempt at constructing the psychology of the character—problematised by the fact that the character is already a fictional one, and by the fact that none of my observations were direct ones.” Does a TV writer possess this level of self-awareness when creating artist characters? Kelley’s purposeful distance from the subject enables the character to inhabit a charged and unfixed position, begging for psychoanalytic readings. The video is full of elements from children’s TV shows, like
the yellow sailor-suit costume that Kelley dons, word games, and fantastical jump cuts, but the imagined space exposes these popular forms and renders their constructions transparent. This skewed space is uncanny and destabilising.

Then there is Melanie Gilligan’s four-part drama series, Crisis in the Credit System (2008). She uses facets of daytime reality shows like role-playing and group therapy to address and expose the tumultuous personal dramas surrounding those in direct connection to the European financial crisis. Gilligan’s work operates similarly to Kelley’s, but has greater production values and a more intricate script. Her work stems from a highly specified genre of television, explicitly employed by the artist to address a complex yet compelling real-world crisis. Interestingly, an artist character is also included in the series, Sara, who helps assists in financial-therapy sessions by visualising their memories by live sketching them. The final result of Gilligan’s efforts were generously distributed online, ready to be consumed in a binge-watching fashion, with all of the episodes released at once.

Inspired by these works, and noticing that everyone I engaged with in casual conversation was incessantly referencing TV series and rarely movies, I decided to explore the format of television as means for making a video piece. Since I have limited familiarity with scriptwriting or directing actors, I quickly realised that to make a television show I would need to work from material that I was close to, with locations I could readily access. As my current reality was being a student in an art school, my train of logic led to tackling an issue that annoyed me so dearly: art on TV.

The first solution I came up with to solve the issues of fictionally representing art was to try to incorporate real elements of art and art-school life. Upon discovering that most of my peers were very private and camera shy, I began transcribing conversations and experiences I had as an art student at Malmö Art Academy. Surprisingly, some of the moments that stood out as scriptworthy were often as absurd as the clichés in mainstream productions.

Another pattern among the moments captured in my transcriptions was an echo of my position as an outsider to Scandinavian mannerisms and ways of socialising. Upon moving to Sweden, the constant small talk and beaming smiles of America were replaced with concise sincerity and drawn-out silences. There is little compulsion to fill the air with speech. Maybe this is a contributor to the superior air quality

Because Particles: Episode 3: Entanglement, 2015. Still from HD video. 4 episodes. 42 min. Lily Benson
of Scandinavia? Here is some real-life dialogue that made it into the script that captured this culture clash:

**Episode 1. Scene 6. INT. School Kitchen.**

ALE is chopping up vegetables and making lunch for himself. He opens the refrigerator to take out more ingredients and has a strong physical reaction to the terrible smell.

JERK enters. JERK’s speech is dry and unemotional.

ALE: (startled by JERK’s entrance) How are you doing?

JERK: (beat) Depressed.

ALE: (nodding with a surprised look on his face) Oh, uh, sorry to hear that. (desperately trying to make conversation) Uh, what have you been working on in your studio lately?

JERK: (very long pause) I’ve been thinking.

JERK exits kitchen with a sandwich. Does not say goodbye.

ALE raises his eyebrows and shakes his head while continuing to chop vegetables.

While working on the script, I discovered the artist Tiong Ang’s *As the Academy Turns* (2010). His video consists of one episode (marked “Episode 17,” implying it comes in the middle of a series) of a soap opera that takes place in an art school. Ang imposes melodramatic cues and structures onto the content of art school: high drama is born out of group critiques, the admissions process (“Another girl with photographs of herself thinking it’s enough to get a degree? No! It can’t be! It’s … my daughter!”), disgruntled professors, and student-teacher relationships.

*As the Academy Turns* succeeds in exposing authentic details of the power structures of an art institution, captured by an insider. Ang’s own experience as a professor and former art student was obviously exploited as script material. Even though I enjoyed watching this work, and had the unpleasant sensation that my work had already been made, I was dismayed at how the act of art making was presented. It was not conveyed as a necessary creative act but instead as a tool for power plays.

Based on these observations, I decided to focus my show on one character’s relationship to the production of art. I set out to answer the question:

**Is it at all possible to accurately portray a fictional artistic process as a moving image?**

Seeking solutions to this dilemma became a crippling struggle. I had amassed a considerable collection of “true moments,” but floundered when stringing them together as a narrative. While making *The Filmballad of Mamadada*, I was able to link everything together based on a semi-chronological structure, but it was difficult to find the narrative arc of my own daily life.

I started to experience major writer’s block, and felt completely stuck. After a long period like this, I had the epiphany that I should use it to my advantage: I would centre the main character’s conflict on having an artistic crisis, or some kind of blockage.

I looked back on my archive of moments and found that a lot of them referenced or addressed moments of artistic struggle. In the previously quoted passage that captures Scandinavian mannerisms, Jerk’s line, “I’ve been thinking,” is also an example of the empty but strenuous portion of art making. Perhaps this invisible struggle is what’s missing in Hollywood productions! As far as I can tell, it’s only been shown as pieces of crumpled paper (rejected ideas) being thrown on the floor.

**How does one measure production as an artist? Thinking is necessary, but uncountable. But how do you even measure it in terms of physical output? Is it the number of distinct pieces you make per year? The minutes of footage you capture … or the final duration of the edit? The total terabytes needed to back it up, or what file number the countdown begins with when you select “empty trash”? A tally of unread emails you’ve been too busy to answer? An explosive need for more storage space in your studio?**

As of writing, there is not yet an Excel-able algorithm for artistic production. Yet there are steady calculations in the heads of most artists, as we constantly evaluate our own progress. Often a crisis is officiated when the productivity meter dips low. Most artists I know do not embrace their moments of low output. Instead, they search for a cause of the production lapse, like an annoy ed factory manager scowling at a rusty part of an assembly line.

Based on this, I set the central conflict of the work as an endless quest for more energy in art making (i.e., more productivity and creativity). Could Ale (the main character) heal his art practice and solve his energy crisis?

But if Ale is having difficulties with his art, does this mean I will have to fall into the trap of making insufferably bad fake art to centre the film on? What medium should he work in? An easy answer: his art will never be seen! The show will be about the invisible.

The final result of my project was a four-episode television show and gallery installation titled *Because Particles*. I worked with actors from the theatre school (one step removed from actual art students) and adopted the production principles of mumblecore to accommodate my nearly invisible budget. At least it matched the art.

While finishing the script, I developed an esoteric hydration theory as the climax of Ale’s attempts to infuse his art practice with more energy.
Ale becomes dehydrated while jogging, so his friend Malin searches the web for a quick remedy. She informs him that dehydration means his brain is technically shrinking (factually true, in case you were wondering). This sets off a eureka moment for Ale, who immediately blames dehydration for his lack of creativity. He takes the medical knowledge quite literally and starts soaking his head and beard in buckets of water. He steams his face over a boiling pot and takes long showers while rubbing the water into his pores.

In the last episode of _Because Particles_, the work ventures furthest from reality. Ale wakes up and discovers that he has overzealously hydrated, and his brain is now leaking water out of the back of his head. This is a pivotal moment in his quest, as a loop is created when he forces himself to cry it out. When I exhibited the work, I echoed the idea of “leaking creative juices” throughout the installation by making stains on the furniture the videos were viewed from.

Since the format of the videos emulates television, there is a repeated theme and intro before each episode, as well as an upbeat soundtrack (composed by Doron Sadja). In addition to the dialogue, this generates a lot of noise within each video, so it was necessary to provide headphones so they could play simultaneously in the same space. This made it so that while watching, visitors were isolated from outside sounds as well as awareness of their own noise levels while watching the work. When many people were in the space, an eerie feeling developed due to their isolation. Since there were reflections of blue water from “hydration experiment” fountains I had installed in the room, the same uncomfortable feeling of walking in a city or suburb at night and seeing people hypnotised by televisions in their own homes was mimicked in the space. The TV watchers were paralysed, transfixed, and absorbed, trapped within a flickering blue glow. I was bewildered by the strange force at play, sucking people in, keeping their eyes on the screens, making them return to the gallery to be sure they had seen every episode.

To find a name for this phenomenon, I consulted my friend Balthazar Berling, who, as a native French speaker and graphic designer, is constantly questioning and playing around with the English language. “Can you think of an official term for getting irrationally sucked into a moving image?” I asked. We first discussed the word “seduction” as a possibility. Then Balthazar exclaimed, “Ahhh, _mais non_, it is ‘fascination’! That is what it is.” He went on to explain that this term comes from the word “fascism.” Therefore, it is the perfect term for explaining both the mesmerising quality of moving-image narratives and the dictator-like command of this quality. I was overwhelmingly excited by this linguistic revelation. I felt like the entire point of my installation was justified by this little-known language history. Unfortunately, the next day I had no luck whatsoever researching the etymological connection between the two words, finding no historical link between them besides sharing a syllable.

There is surely a mega-power at play in the ability of entertainment and fascination to draw people in and form addictions to narratives. Is it about our personal attachment to the characters? Psychologists developed a “social surrogacy hypothesis” by conducting studies that determined television characters can provide the same function as social relationships in real life, and even replace bad ones. According to the study, “It appears that experiencing a lack of belonging actually caused people to revel in their favorite TV shows, as though the parasocial relationships with TV characters replaced the flawed relationships that had been recalled.”

In the current formation of television, binge watching (watching many episodes continuously in a row) is on the rise. The new preferred format of premiering episodes, as popularised by Netflix, is to release them all at once. The power of fascination leads to perfectly rational people spending thirteen straight hours consuming this media.

While it has been proven possible for art to appropriate the fascinating powers of mainstream media, it seems near impossible for the transgressive and exciting powers of art to be taken out of context. There is a powerful energy exchange between an artwork and a spectator that is difficult to emulate or take out of context. When the forces of art and entertainment manage to collide, the energy exchange is amplified, and its charged particles are emitted to the viewer. The transference is intoxicating and transformative.

“I always think if you put one hundred hours into it [making a video], then the person who sees this one minute gets one hundred hours out of it.”
—Pipilotti Rist

“The poor Mona Lisa is gone because no matter how wonderful her smile may be, it’s been looked at so much that the smile has disappeared. I believe that when a million people look at a painting, they change the thing by looking alone. Physically. See what I mean? They change the physical image without knowing it. There is an action, transcendent of course, that absolutely destroys whatever you could see when it was alive.”
—Marcel Duchamp

“We could see the energy imparted to images by capital or quantified participation very literally, we could probably measure its popular energy in lumen. By partaking in circulation, people participate in this energy and create it.”
—Hito Stereys

*Frida*, feature film, directed by Julie Taymor (USA: Hardprint Entertainment, Lions Gate Films, Miramax, 2002).

*Pollock*, feature film, directed by Ed Harris (USA: Sony Pictures Classic, 2000).


*Bassquiat*, feature film, directed by Julian Schnabel (USA: Eleventh Street Production, Jon Kilik, Miramax, 1996).


Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).


*After Hours*, feature film, directed by Martin Scorsese (USA: Geffen Company, Double Play, 1985).


Check out King-Slutzky’s *Art on TV* blog at www.artontv.tumblr.com.


*Girls*, television series, created by Lena Dunham (USA: HBO, 2012–).


Further references


Balthazar Berling

*Le fait du corps (Barthélémy)*, 2015. Stills from HD video, colour, sound. 15:41 min. Balthazar Berling
Le fait du corps (Barthélemy), 2015. Still from HD video, colour, sound. 15:41 min. Balthazar Berling
Opening New Men

The expression “new men” has been part of my activities since the beginning of the year 2013. First, the association of the two words qualifies as the framework of an artistic research. The work addresses the questioning and the redefining of the male subject. The will behind this project comes from a personal awareness regarding the importance of feminist concerns within contemporary Western history. Through the different waves of feminism, we have experienced and continue to experience the emergence of a female subject. As a male individual, I have pondered the influence of this emergence on my way of being a man. And through my own experience, I explore the effects of this evolution on the male gender at large.

As an artist, my intention is to work towards this redefinition in a particular way: by letting it feed into my works. Thus, new men is a comprehension tool, a working concept. As an expression, it participates in the questioning of the male subject.

New men unfolds within a discursive practice of art. Verbal exchange between individuals—or in other words, conversation—is the essential way of sharing and pushing forward the definition of this concept. Together, we define what new men could be, seeking out intersubjectivity. We recognise the need to speak with another person in order to bring into play our own definitions of what new men might be. This movement is an attempt at a formulation. Through language, we confront our intuitions in order to hone them and become more aware of them. Language is envisaged as a material with which one must engage, perhaps without knowing exactly how, in order to learn, gradually. Thus, we take language as a modifiable object. New men is an idea “in discussion,” just as is the word “freedom,” the definitions of which vary according to different individuals. This instability of meaning produces dynamic relations between interlocutors and relations of curiosity: “Let us see, what might this be?”

New men thus proposes to speculate on the masculine. After the role of language, this speculation extends to attitudes. What might the new men attitudes be? One must try to determine them through imagination, observation, and a putting to the test. These new behaviours would attest to one’s different relations to oneself and to others. They would be freed from the limits caused by male dominance. It is difficult to determine these attitudes precisely because they are drawn from feelings and sensations. Let us try to articulate a few examples here: openness to dialogue and compromise, the search for simplicity in one’s actions, the elaboration of tenderness, physical and mental flexibility, emotional and social ease, preference for suggestions rather than impositions, an overall moderation … These attitudes attributed to “new men” are like desires, visions of an imagined “I” or “we.” In practice, we observe ourselves and watch each other in order to find out which behaviours are already present and which ones could be amplified. We try to make them tangible through the various situations in which artistic work is carried out. These situations, often social ones, increasingly allow us to specify this vocabulary. Through this effort to define attitudes, the intention is double: on the one hand, we seek to evolve as individuals, and on the other hand, we aim towards representations that could be produced by these attitudes.

The artist Lukas Hoffmann and I have been collaborating, since the beginning, towards the development of “new men.” We have spoken together a great number of times, we have organised conversations with others, and we have created, through conversing, works that represent conversations. Here, the act of speaking is consciously approached as an act of production.

One of our first public conversations associated with new men took place during a studio presentation by the artist Jacob Raeder. On that occasion, he had invited us to participate. In front of an audience largely made up of artists, we projected and read a text that we had written. This text attempted to describe what new men was at this precise stage in our research. We had written it in the context of a slow negotiation between our respective understandings and intentions regarding the subject matter. We invited the audience to modify the text through discussion, freely. What followed was an intense conversation, which lasted an hour and a half. I remember this moment of public speech as a hesitant, tense, ridiculous, surprising moment. Through this proposition, through this gesture and moment, Lukas and I discovered that our subject matter was becoming all the more complex as it was being addressed publicly, with and by others.

I also maintain other collaborations, based on other subjects, in which conversation is similarly conceived as a work basis. At times, new men intervenes, as a subject, in these other collaborations. In this way, the theme generates continuity with the general act of conversation. It functions as an underlying
thread. To be in a conversation with other people constitutes a major part of my daily work. My artistic activity is not entirely turned towards new men; however, this framework plays an essential role in it.

For reasons of mobility and the chance encounters of friendship, my collaborators all happen to live in places where I do not reside. We exchange regularly and from a distance. Our ways of working are transformed through this experience of the faraway. I find the spoken word to be a rather good means for working together from a distance. On Skype, a person’s presence is incarnated by his or her voice more than by his or her bodily presence. In these circumstances of distance, I am also inclined towards writing. I appreciate the fact that a text is something very light and can thus easily be modified with the help of another person on the Internet. In the long term and within our networks, oral and written objects can be effortlessly circulated and archived. I like this simplicity, which allows one to concentrate on subject matter, on the topic of a work, rather than its technical means.

Lukas and I have found ourselves working on a series of short texts that we have designated as a glossary, in the shared hopes of establishing a regular exchange in spite of the distance. As we grew conscious of the fact that new men found meaning as a progressive conversation, we realised that we needed to find a way of maintaining this conversation even when we would no longer be in the same physical place. This is how we decided to begin writing this glossary, which would allow us to pursue our conversation while being mobile. The terms we have tried to define are the following: affection, bonding, force, legacy, memory, movement and new. We were each in charge of different entries, and we helped each other write them by discussing their possible definitions. This distant writing practice based on concepts was made possible because we were working on something immaterial, something light. It was our very distance that gave birth to this immaterial production and this singular mode of exchange. Distance is its cause, but also its condition. Today, at a time when the ties that link people living far apart are multiplied, sometimes even in excessive numbers, there can be a temptation to constantly untie these forming relations. Yet faced with this excess and instead of a yearning for isolation, how can one cultivate these relations in a lively, open, and moderate way? How might one transform these important, fruitful relations? Due to the conditions that encompass the conversation about new men, the project sets the conditions for and participates in an effort towards answering these questions.

Although new men tackles a deeply political subject, I wish to establish a separation between the political aspects of this research framework and my artistic production. I do not conceive of my works as militant representations, but rather as traces formed by being exposed to the experience of the real. Reality is complex and contradictory; it repeatedly resists against the limits of discourse. I intend to develop a singular understanding of this subject—new men—by taking advantage of the particular freedom granted to the artist figure. Of course, the political understanding I develop with regard to this subject influences my way of conceiving and producing works. This influence, however, is not one that I seek; within my work process, the political is not an end. I could devote
myself to it, but I choose not to. I do not wish to necessarily relate the political with the artistic. My artistic means are, among many others, sensory and sensitive intuitions (mine and those of others); daily confusing sources of knowledge; and indifference or fascination regarding my subject. In this way, I feel that my intellectual positions and understandings, both perceptual and moral, are radically different with regard to a political subject.

“New men” is also a material, a piece of written text. I look at it as a form that holds plastic power and potentiality. In fact, this is what originally sparked my curiosity for this object: the resemblance between the words “new” and “men” was visually pleasing to me. The two words look alike because of their three almost identical letters, and I like to imagine that, because of this quasi-sameness, the letters might inaugurate a movement from one word to another. There is also the space between the two words, which becomes a gap that needs to be overcome, with a possible leap from “new” to “men,” and then back again. Written in capitals, the letters “W” and “M” only need to be turned around vertically to become one another. They become hinging letters, like the two faces that establish a connection between words, namely, the knot in the expression “new men.” They signal a kind of entanglement. They could be the rotating centre for the symmetry between “new” and “men.” Let us note that these numerous relations exist only in written form; they cannot be heard.

Within these relations, I instigate a metaphor for transition. “New men” can become the metaphor for the passage from one state of affairs to another, for a generative movement, for a working process.

From a certain perspective, this general speculation centred on new men could in itself constitute an artwork. Indeed, at times I wonder whether the written expression “new men,” for instance, could not be designated as a “work of art.” Would a simple decision not suffice to make it one? Yes, but … A conversation designated as a “work of art.” Would a simple decision regarding my subject. In this way, I feel that my intuition (mine and those of others); daily confusing sources of knowledge; and indifference or fascination in the expression “new men.” At first, this pair of words appeared to be a discovery, a multifaceted finding. I found the expression to be at once visually intriguing, direct in its way of addressing the subject, and relatively comical in its provocativeness. But today, I see that the expression contains a form of excess, an overload. It appears to me that the terms in this expression are dislocated, but they do not constitute a perfect anagram. “New” indeed resembles “men,” and “men” resembles “new,” but they cannot be heard.

You can see male subjects transform. But even though this desire exists, this desire to see things turn around and enter circulation … we turn around, but we turn around in circles. The anagram is incomplete because the resemblance is inexact. The relation is imagined and the transition will not be solved. My approach to this modification thus remains contemplative. Is it moving? Not really.

I am beginning to feel the weight of the expression “new men.” At first, this pair of words appeared to be a good discovery, a multifaceted finding. I found the expression to be at once visually intriguing, direct in its way of addressing the subject, and relatively comical in its provocativeness. But today, I see that the expression contains a form of excess, an overload. It appears to me that the terms in this expression are dislocated, but they do not constitute a perfect anagram. “New” indeed resembles “men,” and “men” resembles “new,” but they cannot be heard.

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My performance work New Men (2013) was built as a presentation of new men elements. For about fifteen minutes, attempts at formally defining “new men” are presented through different modes of communication. I myself go through different “definitions”: looking at others and smilling, a statue-tableau vivant, an artist walking as he distributes his objects, a simple member of the audience among the others, a body that touches the other bodies, an orator-poet. By going through these definitions myself, I state other new men elements, which are not as related to my own body, and I put them in relation with one another. These material elements are small, portable, wooden objects, onto which the letters that compose “new men” are engraved; a video in which we can see a ballet dancer deconstructing the act of standing up while shifting position; and a text that mingles poetic and political aspects pertaining to new men. All of these elements, which I communicate through my body or through other means, are presented publicly and build as a constellation that orbits around the subject matter “new men.” Thus, these elements provide a context for the general speculation. They try to communicate the contours of an idea towards which we tend. If there is indeed a work of art, I can see it more clearly as a moment of communication between humans, which unfolds via available artistic means.
too strong, of an overflowing obsession, of a looming fatigue. After two years spent working with this object, I feel the loss of lightness in its usage. Listening to this feeling has brought me to question the expression. In many ways, “new men” has steered me towards a kind of embarrassment with regard to the subject in which I am interested.

The two words that compose the expression bear various meanings for different people. Indeed, “new” offers a general notion—novelty—but is often accompanied by other ideas. Within our imaginary constructs, novelty often follows destruction. The past is somewhat erased to accommodate the present. In this view, history would advance conflict after conflict between new and older generations. I am aware of this widely shared interpretation and I understand it, but with modern men I apprehend the meaning of the word “new” in a different way. I use the term “new” with the intention of exploring and transforming its definition.

In this redefinition, “new” does not imply any destruction. Rather, the word becomes the affirmation of a desire for renewal—but for a renewal that occurs in the long term, after a series of medium modifications. The word does not signify a brutal break with the past. New men seek slow ways of progressing. It is not about demolishing but rather about affirming alternative values and helping older ones evolve. We favour negotiation and compromise. I do not believe that male dominance is a system that can be broken all at once. This word is powerful because of the weight of significations seems too heavy to allow the meaning of the word to be set in motion or to be shifted. “Men” can mean everything and nothing at once. This word is powerful because of all the things it evokes, yet this power soon exceeds the word—and thus weakens it. Its very domination cancels it. The term is both highly ambiguous—“What do you mean by that?”—and too evident—“I see, this is clearly what you mean!” Everyone believes they know what everyone else is talking about, and hence we do not talk about what we mean. The word “men,” in effect, suffers from its function as a category: categorising, it becomes categorised in return. In a world where men dominate the determination of representations, that is, the visible, making visible the word “men” can easily be perceived as a way of insisting. It can quickly be considered brazen and insolent.

The outrageous generality of the word “men” thus appears as a provocation. Used as an image, featured as a theme, affirmed as a sign that stands for something, the word “men” is charged with tensions, with aggressiveness. On the one hand, this proves that the subject is thorny and that it must certainly be discussed—if only to try to understand each other. However, on the other hand, this shows that the terms used to designate the subject of this research are dangerously volatile. Misunderstandings emerge far too quickly among the guests. The discord regarding interpretation might be interesting for a while, but it cannot, on its own, make for a true conversation.

Thus, the expression “new men” does not succeed in laying down the basic conditions for a good dialogue. The phrase fails to calmly propose a conversation in which the interlocutors will listen to one another. Its essential flaw is both the discrepancy and the excess with which it names things. The expression becomes caught inside numerous contradictions, and this no longer encourages reflection to open up.

*  

Rosi Braidotti tells the story of a lesson during which Jacques Lacan went to the blackboard, wrote the word “femme” (woman), and then violently struck it out with a line of chalk.

Femme

Immediately, the students in the room took offense to this provocative gesture. Soon, following this first reaction, they understood the meaning of the gesture. This demonstration illustrated the fact that our language “strikes out” the subject “woman.” This phallocentric language, it was suggested, denies women subjectivity. In this view, woman is only the remainder of man, his aftermath.3

“But how is this done? Given that the horizon line is already drawn, and drawn, in fact, by the subject who defines himself at the same time, in a circularity that knows no end except the return, over and over again, upon itself/himself. The problem is to break down the walls around the (male) one who speaks, sees, thinks, and thereby now confers being upon himself, in a prison of self-sufficiency and a clarity made of the shadows of denial. The task is to go back through the house of confinement and the darkness of the night until once again he feels the light that forms and other speculative veils had shrouded from his gaze in an effort to weaken its white heat. All this left man hungry and thirsty. At least sometimes, at least in some places. Even now.” 4

Here, Luce Irigaray describes the male subject’s imprisonment in a logic he has himself put in place. This masculine “I” is thus based on two things at once: a use of the feminine as a mirror, in order to help him observe and learn to know himself, and a denial of the feminine as subject. Male subjectivity is thus made up of self-examination through the other, combined with a refusal of this other. The mirror play between “new” and “men” is suggested, in effect, as a circulation,
a shift determined by identities. Yet in the end, one must recognise that everything remains framed by “new” and by “men.” The circulation occurs between two very close entities—in fact, practically identical ones. No other seems to appear on the horizon. Has it been overlooked? Perhaps. The fake doubles “new” and “men” thus come to be confined within their own resemblance, leaving no space for a possible other.

The metamorphic others is a concept developed by Braidotti. She discusses the function of these others for the dominant subject. The dominant subject is defined as follows: man, white, Western, male, adult, reasonable, heterosexual, urban citizen, speaker of a standard language, owner. The last quality aside (if we assume “owner” refers to real estate), this is exactly what I am. And regarding real estate, it is likely that I will become an owner sooner or later. The “others” are defined as follows: women, LGBTs, natives, animals, mechanical and technological means. Braidotti uses the word “metamorphic” with reference to various representations of forms that are hybrid, cyborg, monstrous, and so on, and which man uses to delineate his own identity. The dominant subject uses these imaginary constructs
in order to channel his anxieties and concerns. The metamorphic others are looked upon as doubles, both fascinating and repulsive, like familiarity and strangeness combined. They serve as a frame and a basis for the dominant subject's identity unity.

In its own way, “new men” is also a double figure. “New,” indeed, seems ready to go ahead and undertake its metamorphosis into “men.” Yet “new” also expresses—and perhaps more directly so—the notion of a renewal. Is there not here a form escape? Is the suggestion of being “new” not too vague to hope for actual realisation? The intention seems right, but is the direction good? By reading Irigaray and Braidotti, I understand that “new men” could also be read as the metaphor of a subject blocking himself in his very attempt to transform. He may well try to explore and expose a way of changing, yet he continues to ignore those who could help him transform. Every­thing comes and goes between “new” and “men,” which might prevent this transformation from ever being great or going very far.

What this expression (and beyond it, the entire project) cruelly lacks is the consideration of a historical emergence of the others as subjects by themselves. These others would no longer be “others,” as they would cease to be defined as the others of a dominant subject. They would assert themselves, through themselves, as subjects. This consideration would become the foundation of the project, and would become visible through the shape of the said project. This consideration should also be accompanied by a questioning of the possible positions of the male sub­ject within this new context.

I would like to insist on the fact that, through this text, my general intention is to critique and go beyond “new men.” This text aims to describe and analyse the experience of this expression, then to formulate a critique of it, and finally to propose other possible formulations, with a view to pursuing the artistic work. This work is a learning process: I am learning. The artworks that stem from it can thus be under­stood as images of the different moments experienced during this learning process. I have adopted a slow way of learning in order to be able to truly feel and understand the various stages of this journey. I wish to produce genuine images, which may thus speak to other people. This thesis text, although it is not an artwork, is also part of this process. The slowness has led me to focus essentially on the reading and exploration of Irigaray's Speculum de l'autre femme (Speculum of the Other Woman), published for the first time in Paris in 1974, as well as more recent concepts developed by Braidotti, such as the metamorphic others. By discussing this thesis text with my teachers and colleagues at the Malmö Art Academy, I understand that I will soon need to return to and further explore—in a more fundamental way—the notion of gender: more precisely, queer theory and its most recent developments. Indeed, I believe that new men contains, among its starting points, queer emotions. My intuition leads me to believe that new men could be analysed as a form of queer exploration, undertaken here in a heterosexual variant.

* The imprisonment of the male subject inside his own gender, of which “new men” could be the metaphor, is itself surrounded, imprisoned inside language. The foundation of this idea is the fact that we are experiencing a codification of language. It is as if we have moved from a language whose reference was the world to a language whose reference is language itself. From this perspective, we live with a “code” system more than a language system. This language of language, this code, is thus a type of imprisonment with regard to the world. We confuse the world with a codified language: language and the world become one. In its own way, new men plays within the borders of this confusion. The project stands within this state of affairs. It revolves around language. It develops among these two words, in a framework that favours oral exchange. The overall project is fabricated inside language, by language. Finally, what does it refer to exactly? May­be to “men”? And what about the referent of “men”? Would it then be “new”? As for “new men,” what is it truly referring to?

Yet language and the world are not, in fact, one. There are other things beyond language. Lan­guage is a reassuring structure: Friedrich Nietzsche has said about this that hunger is what brings us to equate the notion of “the apple” with a truth, to consider it true. New men might be reassuring in the sense that it remains an idea. It keeps its place inside a discourse, external to the other things of the world. That is, new men maintains the logic of the idea it holds of itself. It starts by naming itself and then it asks other people to name it, to invent that which could help define it. Unfortunately, it has already named itself—and so for the others it will always be too late.

* New men behaves as a phatic expression. A phatic expression can be, for instance, “Hello?” or “Can you hear me?” Among the various functions of language, the phatic function is that which makes sure communication is rendered possible. Phatic expressions are placed before and after the message that contains information. They help to ascertain the steadiness of the interlocutor's attention. To verify that “it” has gone through. But the phatic does not concern itself with the “it.” “It” remains undefined. Thus phatic expressions do not deliver clear messages; rather, they guarantee the continuity of the conversation. As it were, the essential thing that the phatic communicates is the fact of presence.
The expression “new men” presents a similar attitude. New men is a way of signalling the presence of an undefined thing: “And here are the new men!” But who are they, actually? New men is featured as a subject prone to yielding communication: “I’m here! Let’s speak!” Yet the message is still ambiguous: “Let’s speak!” “But about what? And who is speaking?” There seems to be the will to initiate a conversation on a subject of interest, but not necessarily the desire to participate in this conversation, at least not until the end of it. The working concept “new men” participates in a kind of throwing around of ideas. It points to a spot in the picture, it is indicating something, right here, that should be considered with more attention.

Throwing ideas around or performing acts of revelation are some of the contemporary ways of encouraging progress. The new men attitude may well contain the commendable intention to take part in these attitudes. But this throwing around of ideas seems to approximate speaking empty words. New men is somehow in suspension: in language, in a gender, in its own definition. New men makes us hang on its every word; we might stay there for a while, but it is not the place where we build a conversation. We hang on to a definition project that is constantly postponed. We wish to see this promise of the renewed definition of the male subject come true, but our desire remains a desire, and our satisfaction is perpetually deferred.

The phatic function of language increasingly grows in importance in our contemporary lives. Elements designated as phatic are multiplied: among other things, there is that little green sign indicating that one of your friends is also connected, present somewhere over there. We notice the possible presence of that other person, but it does not produce anything in terms of an actual exchange. The other person does not say anything to us and we do not say anything to them. “I’m here, and you?” “Yes, I’m here too!” Present, but for what?

These ways of being present with intentions that are very vague progressively take over the referential function of language. The power of words to relate to reality or to help us act upon reality is diminishing. Political usages of language are classically illustrated of this phenomenon.12 The multiplied announcements of transformative reform actually seem to be saying, “We are still here!,” rather than announcing tangible change. In the face of this powerlessness regarding the complex realities that we experience, we reassure ourselves by saying, “We are still here!” In its tendency to broadcast a redefinition of the masculine, could it not be that new men is in fact the sign of a male subject saying out loud: “I am still here!” In any event, in its own way, the expression participates in this belief that, by modifying language, one modifies tangible realities as a result. This is not the case: words are not capable of everything as they are not everything.

What is the way out of this general suspension? It appears that new men has found a place in a perpetual, exclusive, and confining present. We must then find ways of placing ourselves back inside different temporalities. Braidotti mentions a subject that is in process, held by the will to anticipate everything it is not yet. She describes a subject who would change the conditions of the present by asserting its becoming.13 Within the framework of new men, there is an underlying intention to seek new trajectories. One way of moving forward could thus be to reconsider this intention and try to pursue it. All of this while trying not to perpetuate rationales of male dominance and simultaneously posing the question: “What types of ‘others’ would I like to become?”

Regarding the writing of the new men glossary, I had decided to try to define the word “feminism” personally, in the form of a short text. After nine months, I had still not managed to formulate something interesting. No matter how hard I tried, the task was becoming increasingly impossible. At first, I told myself that it would be a good way of taking stock, melding what I knew and what I felt about the word. My failure helped me understand that I was simply still ignorant, that I had not taken the time to learn something. Despite my conviction of being a feminist, I was incapable of formulating a definition of what it meant. Today, I relate this to the idea of taking time, of accepting the need to immerse myself inside something. My ignorance was like an emptiness, of which I was afraid. I understand today that one must move from a fear of emptiness to an outlook on this emptiness. Looking at this emptiness leads to changing one’s own outlook on the emptiness and thus beginning to see something there, beyond the “nothing.” It would then be possible to relate what is there with the “rest,” or what we would name the rest. Slowly turning it into a site of learning.

“Indeed, it is not a matter of changing such and such a thing within a horizon already defined as human culture, it is a matter of changing the horizon itself.”14

To change the phallogocentric horizon appears as a monumental task. The ways out of it will be sought slowly, attempt after attempt. In my opinion, one must seize the elements capable of supporting this research little by little. I consider it useless to reject the framework new men as a whole, as I believe we must first try to understand what the expression is striving to show. We should try to understand, while continuing to learn from other sources, in order to be able to perform a criticism of both the expression and our own relation to it.

“New men” is an expression that is too abstract, too outright. Indeed it is too clear, and this excessive clarity obstructs other ways of thinking. It isolates. Irigaray writes that man’s relationship to the “rest”—that is, what is not (what is not ... for him)—is imaginary, fictitious, and ideal.15 This imaginary
relationship allows man to ensure the systematic nature of his own logic. We should then confront the ways of abstracting that appear in new men and question them. This doubt would at once divert an idea that is too clear and bring questioning back in the context of a necessary confusion.

This confusion might allow us to leave behind the evidence of “men.” How to leave behind the essentialising effect produced by the word “men”? By using the word “men” directly, the expression seems to imply the existence of a male essence as a fait accompli. Yet the intention is other: the idea is to problematise this essence, to question it. In fact, new men confronts the problem of essentialisation: How can one call something into question without naming it directly? How can one abandon a phallogocentric system of thought without confronting directly some sort of a male subject? How can one problematise (in the sense of formulating the problem) the imprisonment inside a subject’s system of thought without designating this very subject?

*I am not a woman. Indeed, I am a man.* This could be the formulation of this new sentiment that, among others, came to my mind one day during my research. I had ultimately felt the limits within which my own gender assigned me. I thought to myself that this situation was at once unfair and prejudicial to imagination—both to mine and to that of others. It is not so much that I felt uncomfortable in my male body: I was simply discovering that, because I was a man and not a woman, I decidedly must be missing something. I also thought that, while I was experiencing this feeling in a rather light way thanks to my privileged position, other people must have been truly suffering from it, in a manner far exceeding my own. And so I drew the conclusion that our respective assignments to sexed bodies were perhaps making us mark out boundaries between ourselves, assignments against assignments. The situation—both in general and at the level of bodies—seemed to be obstructed. This rather spontaneous reasoning leads me to say that, regarding my research, one of the first things to do—or to do once again—is to begin with this corporeal fact, to begin with what is “simply there.” One must start with the sexual body and, from there, meander to find something more. Here, “to meander” means to research by taking small steps, attempt after attempt, with and through the body. The intention here is to return to what is just there, present for oneself, and try to understand that.16

It may well be that, in the end, the truth of an idea can be found more easily in the affects produced by this idea than in the content it suggests or in what it refers to. The abandonment of a confining logic of language would then come about thanks to the attention devoted to these affects engendered by ideas. The aim here is to abandon a unilateral apprehension of the world in favour of a multiplication of levels of perspective. The search for these other levels develops by following that which seems excessive, inordinate. That which appears as “excessive” as regards our body might signal the beginning of an “other.” Eventually, this “excess” comes to designate that which does not conform to a logic already defined by an individual, already contained therein.17

I would like to try to briefly summarise what I understand about the dynamics between the female and male subject, and elucidate the theoretical conclusions I have drawn thereof. Today, a female subject is emerging, that is to say it is becoming. This female subject in the process of becoming is not the female subject previously defined in a symmetrical relation to the male subject. The male subject used to hold the central role, according to which the female subject was construed. This female subject served as a support, “the other made other” to help structure the male subject. Today, the female subject situated in a future becoming is independent from the male subject. This female subject invents herself through a radical difference, without any symmetry regarding the male subject. Consequently, the male subject experiences a progressive, and involuntary, sense of loss regarding the structural support of his subjectivity. Thus appears the necessity to deconstruct this subjectivity. This process implies the acceptance that, for now, this male subjectivity is erroneous, given that it was constructed on a foundation that is progressively disappearing. Through this deconstruction, the aim is thus to envisage a man in the process of becoming.

This becoming-man takes form through a new outlook on alterity—that of others and of oneself. We must find a way of adapting to the absence of symmetry and to rethink our ways of having relationships with others and with our own other, namely the other within ourselves. Taking into account this radical difference can only be achieved by emphasising what is affirmed rather than what is defied in this difference. The male subject then seeks to position himself through the affinity with and the receptivity to other subjects.

Together, we focus on searching for the intervals that are common to all subjects. Rather than exhaust ourselves by naming our differences, we try to find that which we could share. This work unfolds through bodies, spaces, and temporalities. It is carried out in an embodied way, no longer only with words. Bodies are called back into play, in this endeavour to show shared intervals. To seek these common intervals does not imply denying or opposing the differences. Together, we search for these intervals while inviting our differences as well, in a manner that is both located and strategic.18

To open up the work that is yet to come, I will make a list here of some of the located and strategic approaches that I have gathered during my research, which are here like paths to follow. Inserted
between these approaches, the artists and artworks that I name here are meant to at once give a context to my own work and open it up to future spaces. These different elements have been put together, item by item, according to relations of proximity. It is also possible to find full references for these artists and works in the “Sources” section of this essay.

- Proceed together, through brief feedbacks or repetitions, to discuss the differences we believe we know.
- Accumulation with Talking Plus Watermotor by Trisha Brown (1979). Many versions of this work exist. I am referring to the version that was filmed in New York in 1986.
- Be with others, as often as possible, in order to multiply the moments when differences can come across; out yourself in a situation capable of eliciting these differences in the presence of others.
- Develop beliefs in an underlying imaginary, yet one that is at work within you; this imaginary would not be one that is mastered through language.19
- Jessica Warboys.
- Work with different, individual, selective memories, in a game of loss and gain through oblivion and memory; namely, find use in the inaccuracy of memory.
- Work on the relaxation of bodies. Approach relaxation as a very rich form of conscious activity because it increases the number of structures capable of approaching the world.
- Aatt enen tionon by Boris Charmatz (1996).
- Together, practise whispering and speaking in a low voice: this arouses attention and a kind of collective expectation. When we whisper, our gazes can cross again.
- I Heart Lygia Clark by Jennifer Lacey (2011).
- Speak in a befuddling way: seek conversation situations in which the uses of language can be knocked together and mingled.
- Look for ways of working without any language-based themes or verbalised rules.
- Hand Movie and Trio A by Yvonne Rainer (1966).
- Set words and bodies in a situation of negotiation. Encourage their reciprocal influences to act full throttle. Words should be able to carry bodily experiences and vice versa. It is not about rejecting language. Try to mingle words into bodies and bodies into words.
- Amalia Ulman.
- Beau Travail by Claire Denis (1999).
- Yve Laris Cohen.
- Approach any deficit of embodiment or absence of physical presence as beneficial crises, as potential occasions to explore and learn.
- Observe the hollows: What is happening when we think nothing is happening? What are the continuities between the waves, between the intense moments? Try to put yourself in the position of these hollow passages.
- Lili Reynaud Dewar.
- Faced with differences, exercise astonishment.
- Le filmeur by Alain Cavalier (2005).

In this way, I would like to separate the expression “new men” from my artistic activities. My will to stand detached is a result of listening to and analysing critically the many contradictions that emanate from the association of these two words. A welcomed transition period is opening up for me. I like the idea of no longer having a sign to characterise part of my work, as it provides me more freedom. I want to embrace this absence and allow complexities to unfold there completely, experiencing what might come of it. I comply with the idea that the exploration of subjectivities, one way or another, is “fraught with perils and paradoxes.”20 This type of research will continue to yield illusion, mistakes, and oddness. The expression “new men” has played a revelatory role in my work by crystallising specific and general contradictions regarding the male subject. This concentration of contradictions has forced me to take a closer look at and to study the expressions of others, in order to understand these tensions better. This gives me a glimpse of an attitude for work: to search within the contradictions that constitute our foundations and to test our contrasting imaginaries, to deploy our expressions, our reciprocal curiosities and misunderstandings, our reformulations, etc. It is by trying to communicate these complexities that we understand that we must, in fact, tackle them.

To be engaged in becoming-man would imply accepting the fact that “man” is a blind subject. So far, the male subject has been the central or majority subject, the one on which the “other” subjects were based. Thus it stood at the dead centre of the phallocentric system. Consequently, becoming-man is an impossible endeavour: one could potentially become anything, except for “man.”21 This is why the male subject cannot be envisaged as anything other than the object of a deconstruction, at least for the time being. However, for a male individual, being exclusively an object of deconstruction seems a deeply austere way of projecting into the future. Should we not cultivate the will to become a subject, no matter what that subject is and regardless of its becoming? Now, in seeking an exit, I hold a special feeling for the figure of the blind. Indeed, the act of becoming-man takes into account the fact that “man” is in the process of becoming, but that this becoming is deprived of sight, that its destination is obscured. However, a blind man can
listen, speak, and, more importantly, he can touch. He is given the possibility to feel around, to meander in the darkness. The intention of these gestures is to enter a space, even if it is blurred; by stumbling, the subject encounters the limits of the other subjects and, thus, of himself.

By way of an opening, I would like to say that, through this text and among the numerous directions I submit in it, I catch a glimpse of the importance of the long term. On the one hand, it is through time that the contradictions inherent to new men ripened and became apparent. It is thanks to time that I was able to look at these tensions and that the framework new men expanded. On the other hand, there is the long term of human conversations. Human exchanges take time, and co-authored works are built as though in slow motion. I have become aware that art collaborations need to be cared for regularly and over time. Conversation, the art of present time and co-presence, is an effort that unfolds through time.

Further references


Braidotti, Rosi. “Metamorphic Others and Nomadic Subjects.”


1 Gerrit Rietveld Academie Award Residency, Amsterdam, May 23, 2013. Among our other collaborations around new men, one of the most important ones was the following: Balthazar Berling and Lukas Hoffmann, Caravan, New Men, performance, Titank Galerie, Turku, February 28, 2014.


5 Rosi Braidotti, “Metamorphic Others and Nomadic Subjects,” exhibition essay (Berlin: Tanja Leighton Gallery, 2014), http://www.tanyaleighton.com/p/p000620/LARIC_Braidotti_Metamorphic_Others_and_Nomadic_Subjects464f5.pdf. This text was written for an exhibition of Oliver Laric, an artist whom I feel close to, notably because of his way of apprehending the global context and networks of representations. His work opens up a general reflection on the notion of versions, in the plural form. This produces an interesting distance with regard to the problem of perpetuating the uniqueness of the masculine subject.

6 Ibid., 3.


8 Braidotti, “Metamorphic Others and Nomadic Subjects.”

9 Braidotti, “Thinking as a Nomadic Subject.”


13 Braidotti, “Metamorphic Others and Nomadic Subjects.”


15 Irigaray, Speculum de l’autre femme, 60.

16 My work Spine (2014) anticipates this paragraph. In this video, I explore the bottom of my own back in an exercise of self-observation. The process of this work was sparked by the question “What can I do with my body that is, de facto, that of a man?” See https://vimeo.com/96085373 (password: 2014).


18 Ibid., 125.


Golden Rain, 2015. Sculpture. Latex, cotton, concrete powder. 42 x 8 x 6 cm. Marie Bonfils
Camera Obscura

motive—click—development—exhibition

“As I write, flowers grow”
motive—A picture
on its own terms.
A couple are
wearing
down
jackets
at McDonald’s.
The door opening is
bricked up on the outside.
Tulips often open themselves
nearly losing their crowns. Crane chains
in a heap looking like heavy intestines. Scaffoldings
can flutter in the wind. Then a wide-open door opens up to
nowhere. The drainpipe articulates a bend above the pipe running
transversely in order to avoid a collision. I perceive myself through the reflection, from
something else/another. The world is strange and yet it’s my home. My body is an entity
that opens itself to subjects during a period of time and processes the impression into
a new motive from something that has already taken place. The rays of the sun
shine further out into the future but their origin might not exist anymore. The
body’s internal surfaces are a canvas upon which the projection falls. It
drinks from the light beam emanating from the edge of the universe.
With the forest on the seamy side of my body simultaneously
bursting into leaf, the universe’s genesis reproduces itself, in
the image that emulsifies. If I construct, it is in order to
fulfil a motive, to achieve a picture. I long to be
a motive on my own, but instead I am
the motive’s naked receptacle.
The will, and even the
unwillingness, have
their sources in
that which is
familiar,
in a
kind
of habit.
What else
would the will
orient itself towards?
I do not trust my will for where
does it come from? The best intentions.¹
Have I been created in order for the will to
command or just to be enabled? The evocative
process is a life-conditional reflection of what I encounter.

I am continuously widening my knowledge of the physical apparatus
with which I register and of the mechanisms that assemble the various images.
I want least of all to present my opinion. Do I appear to be unethical when I use
imagination without taking responsibility for what I want to suggest? It seems
absurd to want to voice an opinion through a picture that has already arisen;
doing so would lash out at the picture by the use of attitude, assuming
an understanding of what it wants to say. The sound is of the wind
moving its way through a sheath with openings. It’s not up to
me to interpret these images already before they manifest
themselves: they have got to come into the light as raw
as possible. The organ breathes in and out
and sings. I am gorged with opinions. In peace I receive images, and across time, they unfold who they are. 

click

An opening can be the beginning of an endless repetition. The word “responsibility” in my head, has the form of a heavy rectangular box. A form so dense, I would never be able to lift it. Listening to the word and to the sound that whistles through its form, I am hearing it answering back. The box expands and swirls; it rises and spreads out. A bindweed that blows out across the forest’s innermost lakes. Form> Picture. Picture> Form. A volatile response by an image of a form that re-emerges as a picture that becomes a form that evokes an image that again becomes a picture that becomes ∞ The poetic license of sensuous nature. As I install the sculptures, I am establishing undefined scenarios within a defined space. This space attempts to frame an archive of sensations from which the carnal desires once again arise.

Being surrounded, being located some place, existing within something else, being seen or heard, standing in relation to something, a point of departure, a standpoint, becoming part of an infinitude, encountering gravity and casting a shadow. Everything consists of relations. From the innermost atom to the outermost solar system, I have been longing to be set free. I have been fantasizing about a material that would capitulate on the journey from here out across thousands of moons and suns, through an endless motion of contraction and expansion. At times, I find myself in the absolute nothing, which cannot even be named. But every time, the material returns and takes the form of a gigantic piece of chewing gum, always thinner, stretched out as something more elastic than itself, tough as all hell! For quite some time, I have been on the lookout for a point where this sticky blob could not reach. Such are the conditions that surrounds us. Infinite are the ways in which we move inside them. For it is quite precisely inside my perception of these conditions that the very conception and the surroundings from which I was born make their appearance, as well as the tracks left by my routes.

An eternal cleavage where I attempt to form a unit.

My sculptures are like harbingers from already expired stages in a bodily experience.

Inclusion unlike conclusion. My process’s inconstancy
depends on the body’s reaction rather than on its reflection.

“Foucault fever on Tuesdays. Wittgenstein writer’s cramp on Wednesdays.”

Double exposure: I see myself giving sustenance to a sculpture. It's an empty form, sewn from thin canvas, and I'm feeding it with a spoon. It grows tall and compact and yet it’s soft and susceptible to the slightest pressure. I immediately feel alienated. What is this other thing in the room? Have I created it? The sculpture stands where it came into being and I’m circumventing in order to make us coagulate. Suddenly, the other sculptures converge inside the studio and new materials are being hauled inside. I see the newcomer again after I’ve been away and suddenly it reminds me of a drawing, lying around in a stack. Somewhere in a text I cast a glance at the figure and slowly, with the passage of time, it drifts into and merges with my life.

Theory has the propensity of remaining only as structure. It stands as a leftover intransigent tripod, where these creations will only be able to lean up against, hang unto or creep in under, in their attempts to be accepted on their own terms. The structure grows taller and wider, and threatens to join forces in order to form a massive wall. The moment the sluggish and clumsy beings finally arrive, the wall falls to the ground as a mo(nu)ment. To dilute myself with another material. To smother myself in with the existing. To hold tightly onto reality in a torrential hungry embrace. “The whole world might have turned upside down! The other disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling!”

Screwing up one’s eyes or staring vacantly. Realizing her innerness makes her sure to keep this treasure well protected.

The gaze’s Hallelujah STAND BY STAND IN STAND UP The place where I find myself to be standing is the spot where I am out of sight. The absence magnifies the present. When, as a child, I had been spending time at the summer house and I had not seen myself in the mirror for weeks, and suddenly caught sight of a face that was mine, it was like meeting somebody else. I was not the one I saw. It was as if the mirror image insisted on being me and exorcising the person who was now looking. I had been spending my time somewhere other than what could be seen by how I appeared. Looking in a way that is seen by others. But it’s I who is looking. Being foreign to my mirror image disclosed the world to me as a land on which I had been washed ashore. I am here and nonetheless I am somewhere else. I submerge and I return.

In the midst of alienation, the curious takes
its source and its sense of wonder forms
new expressions. An endless stream
of experiments. We get struck
by and we reflect back.
Current-carrying
as we are.
A room
can
be darkened
like a flat in wartime.
A veritable void. As empty
as a room has to be in order
to be seen thoroughly by another,
no longer animated. A void that is left
behind like a forgotten suitcase on the platform.
The body travels further and now stands as possible evidence
of life. I recall no picture from my childhood, only vague vibrations that result
in a kind of taste glimpse or a tortuous corner gaze. I can be walking down a street,
stop up and, right there, I prick holes in something that has been labelled as a
keepsake. It splashes me in the encounter, like a faint ring in the water
from a “plop” far away. Something heavy that breaks the surface
and sinks towards the bottomlessness, as it turns around itself
in slow reproduction. Fear paralyses while doubt
carries hope. Doubt does not own a large
warehouse where faith can be stored.
Doubt lives off of excrescences,
on shaky ground. Doubt
can therefore bear
perceptions, as
it does not
denounce
either
the
lie
or
the truth.
Raising, sinking,
increasing, decreasing.
This is the living universe.
The circumference as a blazing
that passes, a horizon that curves, an edge
that fuels. The transition being fluid. Ebbing out
and flaring up. Trolling like a source, ringing like a drop.
Enormous forces over long distances, scuttling spraying
on howling swells. Beneath the surface, there is a
silent realm of temperatures and organisms.
Vital importance in the sea cradle,
humming from shore to shore.
I am literally on
the Lord’s
field.
development—
We come into the world
and we die. Along the way, we meet.
I am trying to develop pictures that already
exist. Pictures that arrive after centuries and even millennia
of travelling. I am looking through my ancestors and through their gaze;
the horizon widens with the naked eye. I have been nursed in a nest of ideology.
Containing the whole world in my head was effacing. We were sowing a seed for the
world’s very first disruption. Pressing together something so accretive is doomed to
explode. Big Bang. The world’s largest crashes crested black and white holes. They function as a million Laterna Magicas. The meaning collapses while life goes on. I’m obsessed by the fall, by the hanging, by the weight in itself. Sojourn in devotion. I belong to the earth beneath me and am held up by the strength in carrying the weight of a continent. A protracted reaction. Floating down until a meeting takes hold of me. Breaking through the image itself using the weight that I gain in the fall. Developing has to do with getting a motive to emerge and stand forth by allowing it to absorb light through an exposure. Developing involves, then, unfolding something that already exists. A picture that has already been taken now becomes a given. Developing as an autonomous term. Developing is becoming something else, another. Becoming different. A metamorphosis. A picture that deletes the previous. Developing as an alienating term. An embedded potential that can be enabled, or not. Being active. Being passive. Lying dormant. The words “passion” and “passive” share their origins from the Latin “pati”: to suffer. Passive means to endure the suffering, without changes. “Passion” is the source of vitalizing pain. Physical experience is stored as memory. Is this memory game a revealing or a manipulative archiving process? When I look at photographs of my childhood, it’s like remembering somebody else’s notion of my childhood, not my own. Scenarios hitched into stories, seen from a certain point of view. I’m working with the internal images that I am working on with language. The composition of words and materials gets a fluid substance to coalesce into forms. The pictures come, fix, develop, and reveal themselves. With the materials, I am handling reality; through the hands, I am shaping the effect of its words. Casting material. A combination of lines and mass. Of capriciousness and composition. Wobbly, I am leaning more and more on form. Form that accumulates essence. Daniel Stern was a psychoanalyst who worked with research into the infant child’s mental life. Among other things, Stern wrote about the concept of a-modal perception, which propounds that an infant (0–2 months), through its physical senses, creates an internal abstract image and thereby recognizes the object the next time it sees it, even if it cannot see the whole object. For example, there is a recognition that a cube has six sides, even though you can only see three of them, and that a pacifier is granulated as opposed to something smooth. This helps the child to understand the difference between her/himself and the other, and to know that the hand that the child sees is
something connected with what it is that leaves its mark on her/his skin, where and when it is stroked. The sensing of my own hand’s touch on my body is so different than that from another’s hand. Someone else’s touch is warm, it titillates, everything rises and starts to effervesce, and the touching activates my diaphragm deep down. I am what I feel. When I stroke my own arm, the body cannot handle it. It forms a closed circuit, where sender and receiver expel each other. They become alienated because they are the same. I can never be consciously in sync with what the body illuminates. The body is a territory created for recognition.

We say that the body is the soul’s home. But now, they suddenly change places. I get dizzy from moving around between respective exposures. From within as well as without, close up as well as at a distance. I close my eyes. A belated appearance through perception. Through it, I will always be standing behind myself.

By stepping forward into the unknown, I find myself standing before the abyss of my own, on the border that is closest of all to reality. From the frontal room, I kick in the door to a wide expanse that dimly lights up a darkness beneath the earth’s atmosphere. Inside the darkness, the distance grows in towards the light. An area appears and permits shadows under light, lines and surfaces, rediscovered anew. Every time I draw near to a coherence, the crank of a tiny music box turns and my thoughts shatter like macaroons!

The body is pain and pleasure; it doesn’t feel this way. It absorbs it and shapes itself according to it. Material is a musculature. It changes character according to use and it becomes strengthened in a context. Hanging between something, being stretched out or flaccid, in order to be able to withstand it or not. Never have I seen a stem snap beneath its own flower.

The human being stiffens up in death. It’s there in the joints that death sets in, hinged to the movable, all the detained attempts. Exhibition—Still life. Black holes. White holes. Isn’t it an illusion that we can move around inside a picture? If the image is a sight in itself, we cannot both see and be seen. To stand in someone else’s place is an illusion from where we can inspire each other and thereby render ideologies impossible. The artist her/himself must make the
image's decisions, like a photographer who presses down on the shutter button and crops the picture. Pictures are not democratic in themselves. We can only change our own image; it's not a collective affair. When the artist stands by her/his motive, this gives rise to a special ground. It calms me and allows me to be a contemplator. From there, I can forget myself for a while and concentrate on what I am seeing. “The self-experience is indeed dependent upon the presence and action of the other, but it still belongs entirely to the self.”

I have a single photograph that is coupled with my own recollection. It's a picture that was taken on an afternoon when I was playing with my mother. She was singing a song with nonsense words. I loved it again and again and again and she made me chuckle. I sat on her legs and we mimed and sang.

I have often wondered about why I can remember this game but not so much else. Maybe it's because a good game can be a dance between two souls. That we were engaged in a shared moment.

My sculptures are not communication; they might be a character that you can spend time with or a landscape that you can move your way through. When I dance, I'm not doing it to say anything and yet I am expressing myself by playing with movement. I can express myself without being communicative. I shape the dance with the music's eruptions, timbre, and pauses; I am drawing on the room's surfaces. The dance creates images to the music, to itself, to the volume of sound, time, and space. My arms fling out and at the ends of them, my hands tickle an article of furniture that stands in the way. When the bass thumps, my legs mime a tripod that alternately drops and re-emerges every few seconds; from there, my feet drag, opposite to each other, and still manage to make it to the next corner. The chest heaves itself around it with help from arms that have now become entwined like wheels that are rolling in a lopsided way. Behind the corner, the cheek frames something else. While they are mimicking each other, the hips and the hands grope backwards in order to hold tightly onto an opening.

There the whole figure can rock from side to side, as if it were swathed in waves of sound.

When I dance, I meet the world.

The precious unsaid—to be & not to be. Often the words are standing in the way of what I want to say.

I flee from the concepts. I FLEE from the concepts. Or, am I fleeing FROM the concepts? I run away, screaming, from the template. Let's meat! Yve Lomax's text in her book*Passionate Being*
is multidimensional. I am trying to understand a multifaceted concept by keeping all of
the facets in play simultaneously. I love the linguistic vision in a paragraph like this:

“To be capable of not passing into actuality, and thus not being said, is what
sustains the potentiality of what can be said. What can be said is truly
unfathomable because, as potentiality, it descends into an abyss
that is simply its own potential not to be said, which is its
potential to be said.”

My linguistic experiments are
drops on a shrunken consciousness. I wish to
dissolve it into a coral fungus to be
used again in the sea.
The language
of
language
Truth’s Monument
Language barrier FEAR—FARE
Language funk BANALITY OF EVIL
THE FEAR OF BEING BANAL
In September 1997, I was
walking through
the Grotte
de
Niaux,7
together with
only two other people; it was
one of the last visiting days of the season. The cave
paintings knocked me out and elevated me in their perspective.
I didn’t experience any expression of meaning or statement in this space,
and yet people believe that they are expressions of a collective albeit not public ritual,
the precise and almost childlike expression of hopes and dreams that unfold themselves again
and again as insistent fundamental images. On the hunt for good conditions in art, art itself
has been hijacked. We have created a monster that consumes everything we offer
and defecates it out again as a product. Just like language can do this. Taking
possession of the existing and alienating it in the name of assigning value.
Life has to return to life. Leave only the very least significant or the very
most necessary to art. The opulence is most copious on the
blank canvas, much like the sky in a puddle.
Knowledge is fascinating but it
often leaves me gloomy.
I sink down into a sense
of futility. If I know,
then why be?
To be in
the
meeting
with a picture,
a room, a creation:
the eyes wander and fix …
and wander again. I’m in the space
and ingesting the time into myself. Slowly
the flotsam comes along, sailing. I glimpse something
far away and at the same time, a large block splashes in, right
in front of me. The block can be opened and it brings along even more
associations. I lie down and close my eyes and I am struck by my inner déjà vu of that
which I have just witnessed. Spending time with a work of art is valuable in itself.
My written work and my sculptural work run along like two currents in the
same sea. They have to move along at different depths. The language
converts the sculptural work, and vice versa. A cross-pollinated
praxis. My process has been sown in the will-less potent
ground, like a plant without references.
I do not master control, but I make
use of it in the attempt to make myself heard.

With language, I can experiment with constructions in the landscape. When language becomes value generating, the sentences grow. Then the words take on a great deal of weight. They become clumsy and difficult to box around with; they are suddenly too large and monumental for the room in which I am using them. Disempowered, I remain when they take over and heap themselves up in a positioning within the world. I would like to see the world where we would have to draw instead of speak. Tableau.

The materials were using me until I started to use them. Pigment that glows. Pigment that absorbs. Paint is something we wrap ourselves in, connect ourselves with, throw around and sink down in, enveloped in another language. The contours of envy. The surface of anger. The composition of a howler. Materials that form parts of a game.

Like a child, swallowed up by itself and open to the other, the game widens the fertile condition. I become one with the studio, concentrated in one place. In a world of confrontations, I digest existence and fantasies arise. In silence, the deepest scream breaks loose. I long for a culture in which I cannot mirror myself; I'm looking for a collective ritual, not a public one. Thousands of years ago, we danced and told stories. These are rituals that cannot be mass produced for any time other than the present. The intensity of existence is a preliminary condition for the solidarity of the community. So how can we share anything? By being activated. Soma Digitalis.

Every day, I wonder about the digital consciousness in which I find myself moving around. How does this affect me? When I have my notes in a telephone, I don't have them physically in my hand. In themselves, they do not absorb time in the same way as a scrap of paper that has gotten messy or has gone astray into another folder or notebook, where it subsequently appears in an entirely different context. Digital notes are scattered around in a non-physical way. The archiving of them is fundamentally different than when I use my visual memory. The colour of the folder, in which pocket it most recently lay, the torn corner or the disposition of lines across the page. The recognition has been eliminated. Here, the archiving transpires via code: language. Such as the title of the document and the link to the “folder,” where it can be found on the “desktop.” My notes disappear into the computer's memory and down at the bottom of the telephone’s baggage compartment. I'm not harbouring any feelings of intimacy about the file: it's not about to get sucked up into the vacuum cleaner or about to call attention to itself by flying up in the air when I throw the bedspread over the bed.

When it gets
stored
on the hard
disk, it’s as if it
becomes less “mine.”
It becomes a file among
endless files. Words among
infinite words. Forgotten. Invisible.
“If you’re not seen, you don’t exist”
was a slogan used in a road-safety
campaign around Malmö
last year. The piece
of paper in my
pocket is
my
responsibility
and nobody else
can get his or her hands
on it unless I lose it. In virtual
reality, anybody can see me, even though
I do not exist … for them. It awakens a sense of apathy
in me when I see a human being situate her/himself in front of a screen.
This is an apathy that I can also awaken, all by myself, when I pull my phone out in order
to make a note. With a notebook, the consequences of what I’m doing is visible: it
discloses itself as a material, with material on top. The immaterial can be
deleted with a silent and odourless touch. If I make a mistake while
writing, and cross it out, the consequences will fill the room.
The air becomes thick with crumpled-up pieces of paper,
correction fluid, misspellings, incomplete sentences
scattered around on the sheets of paper,
and empty spaces conjoined by
nonsense. In the digital
archiving, I no longer
recognise any
original.
I can
copy
and
make
versions
incessantly.
The newborn
child and the mirroring in a screen.
We don’t meet resistance in a screen.
We can go on forever. Like in fantasy, we have
the same infinite possibilities. In reality we immediately
meet resistance of the material when we bring forth the image or idea.
In virtual reality not. If you want to create a tower of stones 5 km high, in virtual
reality, you can make it from codes and programs that fit into an existing structure. There’s
no need for considerations. The lack of density prevents us from building a relation to
the desired object. The sleekness of endless possibility. The glossy shine of
non-occurring consequences. The fundamental condition for sharing is
the relation between two presences. Reaction. If we look at the
documenting video research of Edward Tronick* with babies
and their mothers, we see very clearly the emotional
reaction to the absence of emotion. We do
not share the same reality,
the situation
seems
to
say.
Sharing
qualities. In
the technological
reality, there is a low spectral
amount of presence. This is probably
why it's being perceived as less empathetic: less human,
quite simply. In an interview,9 Mark Leckey talked about how he finds
that digital objects elicit as good and as true a sensation as if there were real objects
there. I can understand this perception, but how will future generations recognise textures
of a screen image if they haven’t met these materials in real life? So far, an enormous
variation of materials has passed the many-times magnifying “device,” our mouth
and tongue, which enables our sensory capacity to abstract the digital image
into something we can apprehend and relate to. He also mentions
Amanda Baggs’s10 video about autism, which could almost
be the body’s answer to technology. It performs
the resistance of the real.
The body
forms
a
shortened
area of its own
reachability. It declines being
erased and insists on all things’ presence.

Reading the interview made me cry. It felt like I was slowly dying.
I understood that, if digital images are the only future, I am going to be
erased in this future. I will no longer be stimulated. No longer will I meet the quality of my
senses. A newborn child reacts with all its senses in order to feel alive, to comprehend
its surroundings, and to be affirmed by its own participation in a world of living
creatures. A child that is born too early will have fewer chances of surviving
without bodily contact and breastfeeding. It’s a crucial element for
humans to survive. A computer simulation will never be able to
take the place of this. And why should it? Every time I meet
a new “intelligent” device, I’m puzzled about why.
Why do we need the car to close the back trunk
for us? Why do we need the front windshield
to know itself when to swish its wipers?
Why do we need the car to run
for us? I can’t think of a
feeling of freedom
that is more
iconic
than
the one of
driving my own car;
the essence not being the car
itself but rather the ability to move myself
from one place to the other. The euphoria of a newborn’s first steps.
Humans have gathered an immense archive of sensorial translations. We immediately
recognise the smell, the temperature, the surface, the texture, the weight, and the
taste of this material. I have a specific knowledge of the streetlamp’s metal,
its sound when I knock on it, how it feels when it’s frozen, what metallic
shade it has, and how it reflects the light at night; and of the cornstalk
in a sunny spot, the smell of it, the sticky resistance of the surface,
how it clings to its fibrous straw when I try to pick it; about the
leather inside a shoe, in certain spots, it’s well worked and
smooth, in other places, it’s swollen and dry, with
hard edges, and you can almost see the shape
of the foot that has been walking it down.
With the screen and technological life,
I feel like fantasy and reality
are switching places. We
turn into something
other than
human.
The
reality
where I feel
present is slowly
but surely becoming fantasy.
I refuse to be run by fear but I am
overwhelmed by sorrow. I must plunge myself
into grief, not fear. Because the fear of losing is already
a fantasy and because the mourning over loss is real. What makes
humans human is the devotion to keeping in contact. Fear is ultimately the
absence of a relation; it’s an assumption, whether this has to do with the relation to
oneself, to one’s family, to society, to nature, to material, or to space: all aspects
of the real. Technology is also real. But as we try to adapt, we lose our distance.
We are absorbed. Our body remains absolutely still and only a certain part
of sight and thought is occupied. A reduced presence.
The cannibalism of my century.
To be a child or a savage,
I insist on the
prematurity
of all
beings.
If power of
mastery is one of
the strongest drives, what
it adds up to could be curiosity.
Curiosity brings all systems to a fall.
If fear is what makes the world go round, curiosity is what continuously recreates it.
No humans can compete with the computer, because we compete on very specific terms.
Humans should exist on their own terms.
They must insist on their unique
characteristics. Character is
what the computer
cannot compete—
or even so
compare
with.
Den goda viljan (The Best Intentions), TV mini-series, directed by August Bille, written by Ingmar Bergman (Sweden: SVT Drama, 1992).


“Infants are predesigned to be able to perform a cross-modal transfer of information.” Daniel Stern, The Interpersonal World of the Infant (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1991), 48. As Stern himself points out, it is altogether clear that newborn babies are instinctually able to abstract some kind of supra-modal information from all their sensory modalities. These “global” perceptional qualities are said to be form, intensity, and time.

Grotte de Ninu is a Palaeolithic cave located in south-western France, which contains several prehistoric paintings from the Magdalenian era.


Amanda Baggs’s YouTube video “In My Language” is a documentation of the communication she, as an autistic person, carries on with everyday objects in her flat. The video raises the question: “Are people with autism trapped in their own world, or are the rest of us just trapped in ours?” Amanda Baggs, “In My Language,” YouTube video, 8:36, posted by silentmaionw, January 14, 2007, https://youtube/inylM1h12jc.

Louise Bourgeois, Bullet Hole, 1992, steel, glass, and wood, 228.6 x 259.1 x 180.3 cm.

Further references


Desmond Church

It could be your week, 2015. Tiles, plywood, adhesive, grout, paint. 120 x 5 x 170 cm. Desmond Church
Carnivorous Border

You’d find it difficult to traverse the modern town or cityscape without stumbling upon a children’s playground. Invisible in their omnipresence, they are typical of the furnishings of our urban environment in that they are so easily overlooked. As an adolescent, I’d spend many evenings with friends roaming the streets of our small hometown, thirty minutes from Glasgow. All innocent enough—ringing doorbells, traipsing up and down suburban streets, secluded paths, public parks. We would, more often than not, end up in children’s play parks and these spaces became the beginning, middle, or endpoint of our nightly excursions. Not getting up to no good, not really getting up to much at all. Approaching the end of our parentally allotted time outdoors, a thick dimness having long enveloped the town, the failure to have sneaked a kiss equalled yet another night wasted.

These playgrounds and the streets at seemingly permanent dusk were the setting for our teenage dramas; these were the stages, we, merely eager players.1 Theatrically lit by the orange sodium glow of the streetlights, angry red acne was subdued by a forgiving tangerine hue. The play park was almost as magical a space for us as teens as it was when we were kids, certainly in retrospect. As the child invents these spaces, I do similarly now when producing memories of my adolescence, now an adult, remembering youth with bias. The playground is a space of enormous imaginative potential, a world of ever changing landscapes where, pushing against imaginative and physical limitation, our young explorer constantly reinvents the world in fantasy microcosm. As teens, this is replaced by pragmatism; equipment, abused by bigger bodies, provides shelter from rain, perhaps a private nook for a lovers’ tryst, branded by a wasted cigarette and daubed with Tipp-Exed names spelled with a “Z.”

My memories of these playgrounds vary over time. From concrete, skinned palms, cold metal, and chain, to slightly more well-formed recollections of semi-soft surfaces, tree bark, steel, and worn rubber. Then a carpet of sand, plastic coatings, and an unwarranted nostalgic reminiscence of teen politics, bumbled flirtation, and a hormone buzz that rings in the chest.

Odd, forgotten spaces, designed primarily to develop the spatial awareness and physical coordination of children. Where kids form social skills and strategies of companionship. Where in adolescence we explore our sexuality, vandalistic urges, and political nous. And where, as adults, we enter the uneasy responsibility of parenthood. The playground is a space of juvenile instinct satisfaction. More intriguingly, it inadvertently continues to be the space in which we satisfy our basic human instincts (first pubescent then parental), even after childhood. Consequently these spaces become integral to the scenography of life. As a child, we were taken by guardians. As guardians, now adult, we take children. In the period of adolescence, we engage in and with these spaces as and when we please. Remaining a point of congregation after the playing hours of children, the playground is as good an outdoor space to linger as any, but, like the homeless person or the skater, the loitering adolescent is one who occupies urban space without engaging in the economic activity of its interiors.2 This rejection of the efficiency and logic of public space is what breeds suspicion, leading to marginalisation. In a homogenous and commodified civic landscape, play is an important but largely neglected aspect of people’s experience. The urban theorist Quentin Stevens describes it as involving “controversial expenditures of time and energy, ‘unfunctional’, economically inefficient, impractical and socially unredeemptive activities.”3 It was my initial examination of play spaces that led to my focusing on the broader constituent elements of public space. Indeed, as it tends to, play had revealed the potential that public spaces offer.4 My focus had switched to the philosophical spaces of play: the inefficient behaviour of the street and, of course, the studio.

My entire final-year project is indebted to the chance discovery of three books on a forlorn shelf in the library of the Royal Danish Academy of Architecture in the spring of 2014. I searched in vain for the missing volumes to complete the disrupted chronology: Street Furniture from Design Index, 1968/69, Street Furniture from Design Index, 1970/71, and Street Furniture, 1974/75. It was the type of fortuitous event that, as an artist, one often longs for while enduring a lull in sources of inspiration. They demanded my attention: unhumbled and overlooked for years no doubt, these crisp and browning index catalogues revealed themselves, gleaming amid the cracked spines and soiled ring-bound reports consigned to that sad disordered shelf.

The black-and-white images contained therein catalogued the latest in British street furniture design: lamppost, bollard, litter bin, bus shelter, bench, and so on. They stirred recognition of places I’d never been, while the detailed technical specifications of the elements made possible their recreation to the tiniest detail. It was like seeing the pristine utopian New Town5 promise of half-familiar environments that had already crumbled into decay by the time of my birth. A photo of your aged great-grandmother as a beautiful younger woman. My attention was initially drawn to the images of playgrounds and the play structures they contained. First, as fantastic works of unforgiving formal sculpture; then, as photographically reproduced powerful and stark imagery; and,
finally, as activated forms, softened by the clambering anatomies of grubby school-age scallywags. The brutal forms of metal and concrete seemed like sleeping giants consenting to their young tormentors.

These volumes became a lexicon of both materiality and intangible meaning for the work that has followed during my final Master’s year: a playful study of the constituent elements of urban spaces and their phenomenological consequences. Of course this is geography specific and it must be stressed that my experiences of urban spatial practices differs greatly from Scotland to Scandinavia, but it is through this available comparison that one begins to comprehend the effects of our built environment.

Control
Imagine for the sake of our discussion that there existed no items of street furniture in our city streets, no symbolic surfacing or “instructions for use.” How, then, would we come to navigate the city? Would we not move a little more freely around this place? A bus stop, for example, is undeniably an element that makes the machinery of the city run a little more smoothly. The overpass, the railing by the road—these are too, perhaps, but deployed mainly for the benefit of traffic. These are elements that control the movements of a population in such a way that ensures the speed with which motorcars are free to move through our cities. Are we not trusted to behave civilly? It would seem we are deemed wholly unreliable in this respect, for if left to our own devices, the city would come to a standstill: bikes cluttering pavements, children dawdling in the streets, people walking blindly into dangerous building sites, fighting their way to work through hellish mountains of dog turds. Would the city environment quickly descend into clutter, chaos, and anarchy? Quite possibly, yes. We have become reliant on these instruments of organisation.

It has long been recognised that architecture plays an important role in the allocation of people and in organising various flows of movement in urban contexts. From the eighteenth century onwards, there was a development of rationality in architecture that came about as a result of the aims and techniques of governments. Michel Foucault argues that it was at this time that governments became concerned with the development of urban areas, addressing what he calls the “order of society” and, in turn, how our cities ought to be structured. He recognises in certain phenomena the reasons for architecture becoming a concern of political minds; for example, the city becoming a model for thinking about larger states, effectively a testing ground for government rationality that was to apply to a whole territory. The city became an archetypal model for the organisation of man’s living space, providing a way of conceiving and constructing space based on a finite number of stable, isolatable, and interconnected properties. The city itself became an apparatus of control. Through this control and a management of movement and everyday activities, Foucault suggests that the body then becomes invested with relations of power and domination, resulting in obedient “docile bodies.” Referring to what Foucault calls “micro-technologies of power,” philosopher and feminist Elizabeth Grosz reflects: “The body is, so to speak, organically/biologically/naturally ‘incomplete’; it is indeterminate, amorphous, a series of uncoordinated potentialities which require social triggering, ordering, and long-term ‘administration.’” As a method of subjugation, the actual biological features of man thus became the object of political strategy: of a general strategy of power. From the eighteenth century onwards, modern Western societies have recognised and used the biological fact that human beings are, after all, a species, a concept that Foucault calls “biopower.”

These observations are important in recognising how power relations function in today’s society. In modern Western societies, we are no longer controlled through brute force, but through the inscription of power in the mind; not as individual bodies, but as a population. The wider operations of power have an effect on the individual body, and consequently, different discursive regimes produce different bodies. It is perhaps for this reason that I am interested in the work of artists such as David Maljkovic and Monika Sosnowska, whose work is so strongly influenced by the architectural environments in which they grew up, in the former Yugoslavia and Poland, respectively. Fundamental to both of their practices are the avant-garde utopias and Soviet brutalisms of their youth: modernist functional architecture as exemplification of social transformation and its intertwinement with political heritage and cultural memory.

It is said that we are products of our environment. Let us then, for a moment, consider this everyday environment.

On working-class housing estates of the nineteenth century, Foucault wrote:

One can easily see how the very grid pattern, the very layout, of the estate articulated, in a sort of perpendicular way, the disciplinary mechanisms that controlled the body, or bodies, by localizing families (one to a house) and individuals (one to a room). The layout, the fact that individuals were made visible, and the normalization of behavior meant that a sort of spontaneous policing or control was carried out by the spatial layout of the town itself.

A kind of self-perpetuating panoptic surveillance ensues through urban design: a system of self-regulation in which, provided with particular conditions, the general conduct of individuals is controlled to the point of self-sustenance without the need for intervention. Architecture, then, provides the particular conditions that ensure the allocation of people in space and the coding of their reciprocal relations.
Docile bodies are corralled, our movement canalised through a contemporary urban milieu by galvanised steel, cast concrete, prescriptive signage, and strategically placed islands of vegetation. As tactile pathways lead the blind, our movements are directed by a less conspicuous matrix of textural civic design. Essentially methods of pacification, these strategies are used to regulate the behaviour of populations. To provide us with the facility to vent a particular physical energy or satisfy a certain emotional whim is to disturb the natural occurrence of behaviours. Thereby, to hypothesise the necessities of a city’s inhabitants is, in itself, an assumption and an exercise in control. The assumptions of architects, urbanists, or planners preclude participatory citizenship and ultimately the democracy of public space.

We must first understand that the features of any man-made environment are inherently instructional. What could be seen as merely the facilitation of certain behaviours is in fact the suggestion of said behaviours, and, as such, the furnishings of public space act as a series of self-fulfilling invitations that reinforce accepted behavioural practices. So we must then question what it means to talk of truly democratised public space. Herein lies the dilemma: the city is a designed space of habitation, one whose many creators continuously modify its structure for reasons of their own. It is not to say that the mere design of an environment equates to a kind of subliminal autocracy, but we must consider our lived environment with more scrutiny, and a more participatory form of urban planning must be supported by architects, producers, and inhabitants alike.

“Urbanism brings objects up close, heightening people’s sensory experience of their formal properties. Urban conditions can both mythify and demythify the meanings of objects which surround us, stimulating both fantasy and memory. Through these transformations, objects become freed from their status as instruments for rational function.”
—Quentin Stevens

Left: Border Studies (I), 2015. Watercolour, gouache and pencil on original Flora Danica copperplate print. 40 x 27 cm. Desmond Church
Right: Border Studies (III), 2015. Watercolour, gouache and pencil on original Flora Danica copperplate print. 40 x 27 cm. Desmond Church
The work *Feeders* (2015) explores the post-function meanings of elemental urban fragments. In these intuitive sculptural assemblages, *bits* are combined and *bobs* are added, adorned with bird feeders; their charitable provision can also be read as enticement. They resemble the outsider art of the garden-shed recluse, the kind of hobbyist activity of the loner who functions outside of societal constructs. As in the city, there is ingenuity, creative appropriation, and the natural occurrence of play from within standardised conditions. While one perceives endless possibility in the rubble of utilitarian function, implied is the intrinsic manipulation of hospitable environments and the didacticism of public space. When the pragmatism of the urban object is undermined, we are left with sculpture.

In orthodox city planning, neighbourhood open spaces are venerated in an amazingly uncritical fashion. Open green space is a way by which the harshness of the townscape is softened, but these bleak vacuums between buildings do little to encourage use or participation. Observe the expansive acreage of the public park and you will see it being utilised to avoid unwanted interaction. On the grassy plain, people (perhaps in pre-existing groups) sit equidistant from one another; somewhat paradoxically, these have become the austere spaces of the recluse.

Islands of vegetation cover the city, dots of potted green among the greys, spread far and thin like miniature oases. Crap topiary leers over us in public parks, a Union Jack depicted in petunias, red, white, and blue, commemorates the centenary of the war, or the town, or the Queen’s jubilee, or just the fact that we’re bloody proud to be British. Colossal and voluptuous hanging baskets dangle in our streets, cheering us up no end. Local council departments make the town look garishly lovely in spring and summer in order to counter the wet, monochrome shitness of winter. Hurrah! Who doesn’t like pretty flowers? Alas, this vacuous urban decoration does little to encourage meaningful social experiences in the city.

Vegetation doubles as spatial arranger, with both public and private land often defined by leafy borders. A green wall is a wall nonetheless. We mark property boundaries with a passive-aggressive placement of planters, troughs, and hedgerows: the pavement in front of the restaurant is cordoned, the intrusive neighbour’s gaze impeded. Where urban horticulture becomes less prescriptive and more organic, city space gains meaning, and it is through this ad hoc activity that genuinely valuable green areas are created in the city. Where greenery overspills its predefined edges, it appears as though erupting through the earth’s crust. A reminder of what we’ve enthusiastically paved over.

Of course, I must concede that the hypocrisy of my stance is that, instead of making work that is community based or even that offers an alternative, I tackle these subjects from the individualist standpoint of the autonomous artist, diagnosing the crises of modernity without offering a remedy. Like an unqualified medical practitioner unable to offer a cure, but asking over and over again to see the embarrassing rash. I must then rationalise my actions by stressing...
that the role of the artist is not to offer solutions; it is merely my hope that through this repeated examination (mine and yours), knowledge can be acquired.

“The utopian impulse in thinking is all the stronger, the less it objectifies itself as utopia—a further form of regression—whereby it sabotages its own realisation. Open thinking points beyond itself. For its part, such thinking takes a position as a figuration of praxis which is more closely related to a praxis truly involved in change than in a position of mere obedience for the sake of praxis. Beyond all specialised and particular content, thinking is actually and above all the force of resistance, alienated from resistance only with great effort.”

Whereas my work holds a cynical position and I offer no alternative, British artist Liam Gillick suggests alternate possibilities for communal environments. His multifarious output draws attention to the manner in which contemporary architectural and workplace settings organise social behaviours and labour practices. Through an ongoing investigation of secondary architecture (screens, overhead canopies, wall panelling, and so on), Gillick questions the conventions of applied design to create a social critique that also contains the conditions for exploring alternative means of social exchange. He deploys these architectural elements as part of a larger formal language that examines the semiotics of the built world. It is a discursive model that raises key social questions, despite Gillick often being accused of being a hermetic artist and perhaps too cerebral. His work is concerned with the spaces of renovation, manipulation, compromise, and potential, but at the same time is involved in the “deconstruction of the tools of neo-liberal development.”

Through his own writings and the use of specific materials in his artworks (the materials of renovation: structures of powder-coated aluminium and Plexiglas), Gillick examines how the built world carries traces of social, political, and economic systems, and what we mean when we talk of “utopian” alternatives. He claims that:

In the hands of neo-liberal pragmatists Utopia has come to describe any art movement, architectural moment, political system or communal proposition that doesn’t operate within the terms of modern capitalism. Utopian is the term that refers to the desire for something that is impractical, because it levels and implies harmony, while sidestepping the generalised, lurching linearity of the dominant system.

**Agro Agora**

The notion of public space can be traced back to the Greek agora, and while being a place of citizenship and an open space where public affairs were conducted, it was also a place of exclusion where slaves, women, and foreigners were all denied participation. The history of public space is one of exclusion and struggle, and while modern Western cities have always been spaces for the affirmation of democracy, they simultaneously reinforce the reproduction of social inequality and practices of exclusion.

In Western societies, the white middle classes share an increasing apprehension about the dangers of encountering demonised “Others,” such as youths, the homeless, non-whites, and the mentally ill, and this desire to be insulated from Otherness can lead to a withdrawal from public life and the degeneration of public space. To combat this, cities implement a number of measures intended to halt this perceived decay and to create safe, more ordered environments. These include the widespread introduction of invasive electronic surveillance in everyday places, urban renewal schemes, and the privatisation and commodification of “public” space. These are measures that kill the democratic mix and vitality of the streets, and it’s argued that “these transformations signal the end of truly ‘public’ space.”

The Occupy movement, the Arab Spring, and the economic protests from Spain to Israel are a powerful reminder of the symbolic importance of public space for political protest. With the increased privatisation of public space, rights of access fall at the discretion of landowners, threatening freedom of political expression.

In the new surveillance state, if self-control is not exercised, misdemeanours are caught on camera. As of July 2013, Security News Desk published on its website that there were reportedly between four and six million CCTV cameras in operation in the UK—one for every eleven people in an encroaching state-surveillance network that, with the advancement of technology and algorithms, can actually start to predict behaviour. These intrusive powers of data collection supplement existing methods of subjugation: “There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising surveillance over and against himself.”

*Burnt Island* (2015). In the darkness, there is rustling in the bushes. A reconstructed island of urban vegetation is periodically lit by the unmistakable rectangular beacons of mobile telephones. Implied are an exponential number of open-ended narratives: of clandestine activity, disappearance, violence, lust, base human behaviours; or perhaps of collective redemption, pervasive digital devices cast into the undergrowth in a mass erasure of constructed identities. Are we witness to an uprising against the voyeurism of digital culture, or the victims of unknown injustices? The contrived island of vegetation becomes the stage on which the scene plays out, if it were to play out: an ode to state-of-the-art obsolescence.
Defensive architecture exposes our hostility to these Others. The vulnerable and marginalised groups in society are being actively designed against, making it clear that they are not members of the community who are welcome in public space. These are citizens whose modus operandi denies “the logic of the city as pre-eminently existing solely for the benefit of global forces and flows of information and capital.”22 We are reverse engineering our streets to the point that its furnishings are without function. Anti-homeless spikes and sprinklers, skatetoppers,23 and Mosquito alarms24 all symbolise the city’s barbed cruelty. A bench at the bus stop is replaced with an obliquely leaning plank on which to rest one’s buttocks (or perhaps one buttock) while standing. These measures, being unable to distinguish the “vagrant” from the “deserving” posterior, also deny the elderly and infirm. It’s a blanket stratagem that makes the city less welcoming to all humans.

So what then becomes of the ambiguous space of play when we are actively redesigning urban environments to discourage congregation and all unproductive behaviour? This is what public space, at its very heart, should actually encourage. As our socialising increasingly happens online, it is crucial to design urban spaces that facilitate meetings between people in real life. It could be said that for a space to be truly “public,” it must involve the production of unproductive behaviour? This is what public space, as a strategy of urban planning practices, meant in the past three decades.

Urban spaces are thus designed accordingly, and an increase in privatisation ultimately leads to the loss of public space. It is the foreboding transparency of this correlation that led to the work FOOTSIE 84–15 (2015). In recent months, the UK press has run stories about the installation of anti-homeless deterrents in major UK cities, sparking public outrage, petitions, activist sabotage, and, in most cases, their removal. The Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 Index (FTSE 100 or the Footsie) is an index composed of the hundred largest companies listed on the London Stock Exchange, and it is two constituent companies (one current, one former) of the FTSE 100 that have been publically reprimanded over their use of “hostile architecture.” An anti-homeless stud is engraved with the charted growth of the FTSE 100 from the years 1984 to 2015. Presented as a depressing artefact of modernity and the continuously hostile evolution of urban space (particularly in financial centres such as London), the work pertains to the negative transformation of the city in the past three decades.

“Cities are typically seen as the engines of modern economic life and are thus principally planned to optimize work and other practical, rational, preconceived objectives.”—Quentin Stevens26

Play and the City

My two-year Master’s has been a period of scrutinous introspection: the deconstruction of a practice and its reconstitution through playful experimentation and broad research. In this sense, the studio has been my ambiguous space of play, exploration, and intuitive development.

From the time I started to write this essay, my work has progressed from the study of playgrounds, but let me continue to use the history of play spaces as an allegory for the deterioration of meaningful public spaces. I therefore wish to chronicle the transformation of the spaces of play, as it is relevant to our understanding of this representative comparison.

In his Aesthetic Letters of 1793, the playwright, poet, and philosopher Friedrich Schiller became the first notable writer in Western culture to not only extol the value of play in general terms but to see it as the very essence of human nature. Schiller describes play as “a way to tame the savageness of life.”27 In Homo Ludens (1938), Johan Huizinga argues that play is not only the essence of human nature, as Schiller claims, but also of culture and civilisation. For Huizinga, play had a civilising function, and his aim was to ascertain how far culture itself bore the character of play. On Huizinga’s thoughts on play, Liane Lefaivre writes: “He saw it as a set of rules whose principle role was to ritualize and therefore undermine and subvert the aggressive spirit of competition and contest by submitting it to rules. ... To him, religion, language, law, art, and sport were all systems of rules for containing aggression.”28 In this sense, perhaps, play is then a form of self-subjugating act in itself, an instinctual human ordering brought about through the exercise of this most natural and universal of behaviours. So when spaces for play are designed, we must carefully consider the effect on the young and how innate human behaviours are going unsupported or perhaps being distorted by misguided and inappropriate attempts to design spaces of play.

As a strategy of urban-planning practices, the idea of the purpose-built, public-access playground is a relatively new one, with the first being opened in Manchester, England, in 1859.29 As part of the Reform movement, the playground was an attempt to improve the living conditions of workers and their families in the rapidly growing and polluted industrial cities of the late 1800s. While people have been making swings and seesaws for centuries, it wasn’t until the nineteenth century that Western society began supporting the creation of play spaces for children, setting aside outdoor space and furnishing it with devices to support and encourage play.30

However, the motivating factor in the provision of public playgrounds has generally always been their convenience to society, and, while initially a means of reforming the industrial city, they became more important with the introduction of the automobile. It became essential to get children, and play, off the streets so cars could be free to travel at greater
speeds. Barbara E. Hendricks elaborates further on the slightly less wholesome motivations for the growth of urban play spaces. She claims that the wars at the beginning of the twentieth century, culminating in World War I, did more for the development of public playgrounds than most of us would care to think. Boys growing up in poor areas of industrial British cities were deemed unfit to become soldiers, and the state was in dire need of young men who met the basic physical requirements for entering military service. Hendricks claims this “led to an acceptance that city living for poor children must be improved by public action rather than left solely to charitable good works and reform idealists.”

In 1943, the first junk playground was initiated in Emdrup, Copenhagen, by the Danish landscape architect C.Th. Sørensen. After observing what children did on patches of wasteland and noting they were drawn to building sites and junkyards, he proposed to enclose a space, supply it with materials for building, and allow the children to design the playground according to their own ideas and desires: a space where they were free to dig, build houses, experiment with sand, water, or fire, and play games. By creating their own play environment, the imagination at play would be that of the child, not the architect. Lady Allen of Hurtwood was inspired upon her visit to Sørensen’s Emdrup project and subsequently took the idea back to the United Kingdom, where she would develop her adventure playgrounds on postwar bombsites of British cities. The destructive horrors of war had opened up urban space for the inclusion of children’s play.

The postwar playgrounds of Amsterdam were a remarkable success story, not only in their design but also in symbolising a new approach to public space and urban planning. Between 1947 and 1978, Dutch architect Aldo van Eyck designed and built over seven hundred playgrounds, the earliest of which filled the gaping voids left by war, indiscriminate locations connected by a catastrophic history. Inspired by the COBRA artists and the geometric abstraction of Sophie Taeuber-Arp, van Eyck’s aim was to turn this available space into place. His highly original approach was a way of dealing with playgrounds on an urban scale and, more importantly, with the concept of truly public space as a distributed, polycentric network in opposition to the CIAM idea of a monocentric “heart of the city.” This was a shift from the top-down organisation of space preferred by modernist architects of the time towards “a bottom up architecture that literally aimed to give space to the imagination.” Van Eyck’s playgrounds were tremendously successful at creating a sense of community in a city devastated by war. These modular spatial arrangements of minimal, elementary equipment were designed to stimulate the imagination of the users by steering clear of hybrid, animal-like forms, as these were not part of the language of the city and, rather than activate the imagination, did more to hamper it.

Unlike playgrounds of today, van Eyck’s were also intended to attract users other than children (this would sit uncomfortably in the current climate of “stranger danger,” paedo-paranoia, and general distrust of men around children). The aim was to create open and polycentric public space by using the
web-like constellation of playgrounds as points of least resistance in the fabric of the city—spaces that would still act as aggregation points outside of the playing hours of children. Van Eyck wrote of his playgrounds: "When the children went home, they did not look like deserted amusement parks. Deprived of the children’s communion, their elementary tectonic forms constituted places with a distinct urban character, places that also made sense to adults, as a point of rest or encounter."38 For van Eyck, the idea of the city as an open-ended pattern was a way of removing the duality of interior and exterior space, with the city becoming an extension of the home and the home an extension of the city.

Unfortunately, the potential for playgrounds as neighbourhood builders has been forgotten. It is overlooked that in multicultural inner-city neighbourhoods these can often be one of the few spaces in which people from different backgrounds can meet and engage in informal contexts. The playground is a neutral ground, classless and without racial or social prejudice, at least for young children. It holds extra relevance in a time when, in Europe, there has been a general shift towards anti-immigration activities and right-wing politics. City playgrounds could have a constructive role in integration practices and be truly public, neighbourhood-generating places in our cities.

**FREE CHILDREN! DOWN WITH PLAYGROUNDS!**

The truth is that playgrounds have suffered as the victims of misguided urban design practices as well as of an increase in rigorous health and safety legislation. They do, of course, have their critics, who champion the child’s right to be able to play anywhere, loosely and freely outside the confines of the play park. In 1968, one such critic panned the practice, saying, “the failure of an urban environment can be measured in direct proportion to the number of ‘playgrounds.’”39 This was of course to ignore the discrepancy in available open public space between inhabitants of rich and poor areas of the city. But it’s true, if done badly, playgrounds offer little space and can actually restrict the essence of play as part of human nature.40 Prescriptive and standardised equipment creates a conglomeration of play gadgets like intimidating gym equipment or hacked Ikea furniture. Or they take the form of an immersive landscape—a pirate ship or a downed airplane—often with a realism that belies van Eyck’s thoughts on the literality of playscapes and therefore arguably killing the imaginative potential of these spaces.

It has been common practice to include artists in the design of public playgrounds. Generally seen as folly, with many projects ending in misuse and eventual closure, these tend to serve more as monuments to the play of the artist than the potential play of the child: art for art’s sake, without any real consideration for the needs of the user.41 To an adult’s eyes, these spaces may seem successful, but to a child’s, uninspiring and limiting.

In the 1950s, the artist and landscape architect Isamu Noguchi had a number of playground designs rejected by the New York City Parks Department for being potentially hazardous. One such decision was criticised in *Art News*, with Thomas B. Hess defending Noguchi’s design by saying, “the playground, instead of telling a child what to do (swing here, climb there), becomes a place for endless exploration, of endless opportunity for changing play. And it is a thing of beauty.”42 The architect Louis Kahn, a later collaborator of Noguchi, said of city planning: “In most urban areas, children play in the streets. ... There are too many streets anyway. So why not make playgrounds out of unnecessary streets?”43 As van Eyck’s were an exterior extension of the home, the playgrounds designed by Noguchi and Kahn were a sort of theoretical extension of the street: designed for children and adults alike, for people of all ages to find enjoyment. The sprawling landscapes the pair designed did nothing to hinder the imaginative freedom of the child, with the almost object-less environments nurturing children’s ingenuity and the limitlessness of their play. Opposition often came from residents of affluent communities who worried that the introduction of such playgrounds would encourage an invasion of slum children (Others) from nearby neighbourhoods. Noguchi never realised his vision for a playground in New York City, as street violence and crime put an end to many designs before they got off the drawing board. For all their good intentions and universally recognised merits as sculpture, his designs found no support, either in the municipal administration or among the public.

The city street has always been perceived as unsuitable for children. In her 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Jane Jacobs counters this idea and highlights that it was in fact the parks and playgrounds that, in the mid twentieth century, had become hotspots for violence and crime. “Street gangs’ do their ‘street fighting’ predominantly in parks and playgrounds,”44 she explains, referring to the worst adolescent gang violence in 1950s New York. When looking to do anything antisocial, you’d head to the park. With no grown-ups around, you were free to cause trouble, moving from the street, where there would be a fairly high number of adults, to the park, where the ratio of adults was low to nil.

Many optimistic playground visions of the postwar period were indeed built largely on fantasy. Of course today, instances of gang violence in parks and playgrounds are fairly rare. Instead, we have the comparatively harmless loitering teen, heavy petting and horseplay as opposed to knife crime and homicide.

Misgivings about the appropriateness of the city street for play and the safety of the playground have led to the monetising of play spaces. There exist hangar-sized play venues where adults pay to toss their children into a sprawling cubed prison of
interconnected ball pools, or the more grimly advanced KidZania “child entertainment centre” franchise, the concept of which is simple: a child-sized replica of a real city including buildings, shops, theatres, sports stadiums, hospitals, and traffic is populated with children aged four to twelve. While parents shop or watch over their children from a separate viewing area, the kids spend their time roleplaying by mimicking traditional adult activities. They work jobs and earn kidZos (KidZania’s currency) while performing tasks that include bottling Coca-Cola, working in McDonalds, and delivering packages for DHL. Through the integration of real-world brands, all job simulations are paired up with industry partners, so kids won’t just be working in the “Department Store,” they’ll be working in Walmart, not in the local pizza place, but in Domino’s. While KidZania’s website claims that this “creates a more authentic experience,” this new “play” concept is being used as a method of brand building and for the indoctrination of next-gen customers.

The civilising role of children’s play has deep roots in urban culture. In *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*, first published in 1936, Jean Piaget puts forth what he saw as the role of play: “an attempt to imitate the behavior of adults and adapt to grown-up society, as the basic way a child acquires new knowledge and constructs reality.” There is little in the way of pretending at KidZania. Play revolves around following instructions from adult supervisors: Back to work! Mummy and daddy have paid good money for you to be here (and they could be watching). Instead of nourishing a healthy understanding of “grown-up” society, this absurdist capitalist ethos enforces the imitation of degenerative consumerist behaviours. If it’s true that the child is “an empty vessel to be filled with society,” perhaps we should worry that we’re filling it with substances entirely unwholesome.

### Hard Landscapes

Play doesn’t change, but how it’s nurtured and supported does. Materials change. The swings and slides of the engineer, metal and concrete, gave way to those of the scrap merchant, railway sleeper, and car tyre. Chains have been replaced with ropes, bark for poured rubber: hard for less hard. Playgrounds are being designed for insurance companies, not kids. The romance has been taken out of our parks because of our obsession with health and safety and mania about maintenance.

I was smaller, rounder, and rosy cheeked. I recall skinned knees, thwacks on the nose, dry dusty tarmac, and cold tubular metal with rusting flaky paint, climbing frames shaped like caterpillars, rockets, and aircraft. The choice of specific materials and colours create a certain palette in a city, and therefore in our material memory. What to an adult is ignorable textured surface is a sprawling detailed landscape to a child. As children we have a more direct physical connection to the world; closer to the ground, the surface often turns out to be the most sensuous element of all. Social historian and anarchist writer Colin Ward...
claims that the child’s closer proximity to the ground is why “the floorscape—the texture and subdivisions of flooring and paving, as well as changes of level in steps and curves” is of such great significance. Kevin Lynch and A.K. Lukashok’s 1955 interviews also concluded that, environmentally, it was the textured ground surface of the city floor that had the most significant impact on the child. When the interviewees were asked for their childhood memories, the recurrence of descriptions of ground surface and topography were the most common answers given. The basic assumption was that adult memories reflected salient and emotionally important experiences of youth. While there were also often comments on hills, foliage, and wall materials, they rarely seemed to carry much emotional significance. We can deduce then that as gravel sticks in the chubby palm of a childish hand, the imprint is left not in the skin but in the recesses of the adult brain. Elongated, farther from the ground, I fetishise this memory and it leads to a nostalgia for the types of material experience I had as a child. I am haunted by this sickness, trying to rid myself of it by perhaps re-experiencing it through the materiality of my work. The world of the child and adolescent is full of miracles and wondrous firsts, but the adult cannot experience the world as the child does, for that which belongs to the spirit of the past can only be realised in feeling. Besides, nowhere is the nostalgic trickery of the mind more evident than in our reconstruction of the experiences of youth. Let us leave paradise un-revisited; bygones must be bygones, and we must also recognise that it is often the mere myth making of memory that makes remarkable the ordinary experiences of childhood and adolescence.

There is an innate attraction in the idea of the familiar ruin, the archaeology of the pristine present, and perhaps in our own ineluctable demise. In exploring these ruinous futures and their narrative responses, the eighteenth-century French “ruiniste” painter Hubert Robert painted the Louvre as an imaginary ruin, romantically confronting the inevitable fate of culture and architecture, creating an alternative future reality by blending accurate architectural detail with an alternative vision of decay. In the same way, the French-born artist Cyprien Gaillard works with ruined architectures and disappearing landscapes, addressing different forms of historic remembrance in relation to monuments and buildings in the public sphere. In “Entropy and the New Monuments,” Robert Smithson writes: “the urban sprawl, and the infinite number of housing developments of the post-war boom have contributed to the architecture of entropy.” For him, the entropic law of thermodynamics (that energy is more easily lost than obtained) means that “in the ultimate future the whole universe will burn out and be transformed into an all-encompassing sameness.” Gaillard adopts Smithson’s theory of entropy to explore issues such as urbanism, “the ruin,” and the decay of modernist utopias. Gaillard’s anachronistic works deal with architectural ghosts and the cultural associations inherent therein. Central is the dislocation and relocation of the monument and a portrayal of epidemic ambivalence towards cultural and architectural significance. Here, play is perhaps the act of vandalism: ruins, ruined. Meaningful sites become spaces of leisure.

Spaces of play have a specific strength in connecting people to places, and it is in this act of place making that memories are formed, giving identity to public space. As Jan Assmann puts it, memory “tends towards spatialization,” and, therefore, not only needs places but also creates them. “Memory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects,” and urban space provides us with these concrete sites of encountering the past. Playgrounds and the textured spaces of youth provide the setting for our tumultuous public emergence into adulthood, and in the minds of each of us, these ambiguous utopias become milieux de memoire, environments of personal memory born outside of official history. In Playing and Reality, D.W. Winnicott writes: “In the total unconscious fantasy belonging to growth at puberty and in adolescence, there is the death of someone. … in the psychotherapy of the individual adolescent, there is to be found death and personal triumph.” Simultaneously representing the death of imaginative freedom in the child and the murder inherent in adolescence, these milieux de memoire become spaces of memorial for us, the survivor.

So it is here I pay my respects, before these stages, demarcated by rusting iron, corroded and thinned into a crooked, brittle relic. In this act we find a sense of time passing. To suffer from this nostalgia is to live among the ruins of the city, arranged as a poem: spatial syntax, rhythm and rhyme. And in the in-between, where the smooth, brush-clean surface of the city abruptly stops, vegetation grows. These carnivorous borders, an inseparable entanglement of chicken wire and weeds, amass a physical record of our cities. As the collector categorises, the undergrowth does too, sorting through found material, accumulating and burying. Plastic trinkets corroborate countless untold stories. If a clue were to exist, you’d find it here. Snagged, the polythene bags of discount supermarkets flutter in the wind, viciously rasping their corporate message into the undergrowth. Bulbous raindrops fall harmoniously onto faded aluminium, broad leaves, and broken stone, conveniently composing the soundtrack for our finale.

Younger and smaller, my exploration of these boundaries was easier. I remember as a child burying a time capsule among a thicket in an unkempt plot behind the back garden of my house. A marmalade jar containing … something; I can’t quite remember what. I dug it up a few weeks later, unable to wait any longer, a half-baked sentimentality putting pay to the potentially meaningful genesis of memory. Two weeks buried under six inches of earth was enough to impart significance on its contents. Contents I no longer remember, nor care to.
“All the world’s a stage. And all the men and women merely players” from the “All the world’s a stage” monologue, William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and John Dover Wilson (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 38.


Ibid.

The *New Towns Act 1946* was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom that allowed the government to designate areas as new towns, thus passing development control functions to a Development Corporation. The act was replaced by the *New Towns Act 1965* and, later, the *New Towns Act 1981*.


Jeremy Bentham’s prison, known as the Panopticon, had a circular design to ensure that all the cells were under potential constant surveillance from a central watchtower, although the occupants of the cells could not tell if, or when, they were actually being watched.


Stevens, *The Ludic City*, 194.


Borden, *Skateboarding, Space and the City*, 232.

Skate deterrents are specially designed brackets that deter unwanted skateboarding/biking by eliminating the long, smooth edges that skaters and bikers seek out.

The Mosquito alarm is an electronic device used to deter loitering youths by emitting sound at a high frequency, typically only heard by people under twenty-five years of age.


Stevens, *The Ludic City*, 5.


Ibid., 43.

Ibid., 14.


Ibid., 25.

COBRA was a European avant-garde movement active from 1948 to 1951. Their working method was based on spontaneity and experiment, and they drew their inspiration in particular from children’s drawings and primitive art forms. Their name derives from the initials of the members’ home cities: Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam.

Congrès internationaux d’architecture modern, or International Congresses of Modern Architecture, was a leading organisation in international modern architecture. Founded in 1928 and disbanded in 1959, it was responsible for a series of events and congresses arranged across Europe by the most prominent architects of the time.


Charles Forberg’s 1967 Cypress Hills Playground is a famous example of this. Designed to be a playground for children by day and a sculpture for adults at night, its stark concrete forms and maze structure quickly became the ideal shelter for the shady goings-on of dealers and neighbourhood thugs. It was closed a few years after completion.


Louis Kahn, quoted in ibid., 51.


This is a line from the “classical child development theory” that prevails in government institutions in Western society. Hendriks, Designing for Play, 43.


Ward, The Child in the City, 22.


Nostalgia—“From Greek algos ‘pain, grief, distress’ + nostos ‘homecoming,’ a term originally used to describe sickness, a painful longing for an absent home.” Online Etymology Dictionary, s.v. “Nostalgia.”

Here I am misquoting Wassily Kandinsky’s Concerning the Spiritual in Art (1914).

Robert’s Design for the Grand Gallery in the Louvre (1796) and his An Imaginary View of the Ruins of the Grand Gallery in Ruins (1796) manipulate a dual vision of the future: one image presents a new and ideal view of a Republican art institution, the other represents a more ruinous and terminal condition.


Here I make specific reference to Gaillard’s 16 mm film Cities of Gold and Mirrors (2009).


Ibid., 7–24.


Further references


Etching, weaving, building, composing II. 2015. Installation, detail. Sound, felt rolls with leftover ink from cleaning process at newspaper printing house, plexiglas. Dimensions variable. Karin Hald
Weightlessness arises in the fall towards sleep or in the second where I realize that you are nothing more than a holster for my illusions.
Decreation

/all is said/now we live through the words/

THAT, WHICH WAS / entredeux — a nothing that changes everything?

THAT, WHICH IS / sections 1–46

42. “We do not know how to suffer, this is perhaps the worst. It is our greatest loss. And we do not know how to enjoy. Suffering and joy have the same root. Knowing how to suffer is knowing how to have joy in suffering. Knowing how to enjoy is knowing how to have such intense joy that it almost becomes suffering. Good suffering.”

The waves arise in harmony with the wind but the two enormous elements do not change at the same rate of speed; you sense how the sea is its own; the waves possess an intrinsic power, a control. The sea belongs to the earth, the wind to the gods.

Do you know the feeling of walking up a flight of stairs leading up to the deck of a ferry, if possible a relatively large ferry—and preferably on a late afternoon, or maybe even in the evening hours, any season except summer. You walk over towards the gunwale, and you position yourself, holding firmly onto the railing, and you peer out over the sea, down into the water. You hear the very loud sound of water being pushed aside by the propellers. The ship starts to move and you don’t know why, but suddenly you feel like jumping in. You know that you then will die; they will not manage to find you before you sink because you have become filled with water. It’s not an easy death. It’s like being alive. You will know that you are about to die. And while you’re standing alongside the gunwale and all these pictures are tumbling through you, towards you, from you, you don’t understand why. There’s nothing wrong. You’re on your way home, on your way to a vacation, on your way over, across, why this sudden death wish?

The waves are their own, I am a part of so much that I cannot escape, maybe it’s because you want to be a part of this sea, relaxing your way around the whole earth, being a part of nature, no longer sensing the separation between you and the other. The sea reflects the sky, or is it the other way around? Or is it possible that it’s both, at one and the same time? If I lie down on the bottom of the sea, I become a part of the wind, the sky, and thus the gods. Then I would feel the silent swaying that makes small furrows in the seabed, my skin would become wrinkled and soft, just like when I lie in the bathtub and hold my breath for as long as I can under the water, having practised how to do this by opening my mouth, taking water in, and feeling it come down into my lungs, and then I can no longer control that the body reacts, I cough, it is involuntary, it is necessary, and there’s nothing else that can be done, once again, other than to come up and take some air, walk back down the stairs, find the right flight of stairs leading down to the automobile deck, remember where the car is parked, open up the door, sink down into the seat, and smile at you, who has been sitting and waiting for me.

3. Is the work always the secondary, while what has been lived is primary, meaning the experience of being in the world, the blood being pumped around? The work, in this way, is not a necessity but a gift, which is given by the heart every time it’s still beating.

1. “The world is everything that is the case.”

“Work on good prose has three steps: a musical one when it is composed, an architectural one when it is built, and a textile one when it is woven.”

In this text and in my exhibition Palimpsest (2015), perception and the use of language are of vital importance. I regard this as a substance that can be shaped. As Ludwig Wittgenstein points out, thinking is characterised by language and language-games. When a thought is created, internal sentences are formed. The brain speaks, the body senses. In my exhibition, I show the abstract returns of a process of words and language that, in its point of departure, is rational and promises to be factual and veracious, namely the daily newspaper. But behind the words is the language-game; here are nuances and colours. Art is visual information, and art creates an opportunity to be present inside a space that does not revolve around logical thinking: accordingly, there are constant constructions of language, but it is rather a place where sense perception can come forward. In this text are all the impressions that have been present in the process around my new works, described in words. My thoughts, sentences, and works call Robert Smithson’s...
land artwork *Spiral Jetty* (1970) to mind: a movement, not a sojourn, a moving towards a kind of centre, in an attempt to reach a core. I turn around and walk back the same way, but with a different outlook on everything that has happened and everything that has been thought.

43. “Everything has been told
the author is hunter and collector
I open corpses”

8. “Let us compare the screen on which a film unfolds with the canvas of a painting. The painting invites the spectator to contemplation; before it the spectator can abandon himself to his associations. Before the movie frame he cannot do so. No sooner has his eye grasped a scene than it is already changed. It cannot be arrested. … The spectator’s process of association in the view of these images is indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change. This constitutes the shock effect of the film, which, like all shocks, should be cushioned by heightened presence of mind. By means of its technical structure, the film has taken the physical shock effect out of the wrappers in which Dadaism had, as it were, kept it inside the moral shock effect.”

My piece *Etching, weaving, building, composing I* (2015) is a video work created of scans from newsprint rolls that have accumulated the day’s leftover material from the press and which are displayed frame by frame. There are twenty-four frames shown every second; this corresponds to the original use of time in connection with motion pictures. The scanned rolls guard the monitors, which are stacked as if they were a pedestal.

The temporality that arises with this kind of speed entails that the eye just barely manages to perceive each frame but cannot separate them from each other. In much the way that the flow of information today is moving at a speed bordering on the inhuman, art is being subjected to and controlled by the same requirements. This is something that Walter Benjamin already pointed out in *The Arcades Project*:

*From a European perspective, things looked this way: In all areas of production, from the Middle Ages until the beginning of the nineteenth century, the development of technology proceeded at a much slower rate than the development of art. Art could take its time in variously assimilating the technological modes of operation. But the transformation of things that set in around 1800 dictated the tempo to art, and the more breath-taking this tempo became, the more readily the dominion of fashion overspread all fields. Finally, we arrive at the present state of things: the possibility now arises that art will no longer find time to adapt somehow to technological processes. The advertisement is the ruse by which the dream forces itself on industry.*

The aesthetic that is created in Etching, weaving, building, composing I is reminiscent of analogue film rolls, and the projection itself can bring the mind back to experimental film, in which it is most often the case that there is no linear narration and no music or soundtrack. The fact that such a clash between genres can be generated in a work is an approach that I expressly aim at. With this clash, I experience a feeling of space to create new possibilities and narratives, since there is really no fixed anchor, but rather an interweaving of many different layers of narratives that is happening.

11. In his essay “The American Action Painters,” Harold Rosenberg wrote about abstract expressionism, which evolved into, among other things, colour field painting, and he wrote about how this new form of painting broke down the boundaries between art and life. It is from this essay that the term “action painting” stems: “What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event. The painter no longer approached his easel with an image in his mind; he went up to it with material in his hand to do something to that other piece of material in front of him. The image would be the result of this encounter.”100 Rosenberg continues: “If a painting is an action the sketch is one action, the painting that follows it another. The second cannot be ‘better’ or more complete than the first. There is just as much in what one lacks as in what the other has.”11 In the work Etching, weaving, building, composing II (2015), I make use of felt rolls, as drawing, as painting, and as sculpture. This is achieved by aligning the rolls behind Plexiglas, albeit inside a frame that does not have a bottom, with the upshot that the rolls continue on their course all the way down to the floor. I am painting with Plexiglas; shaping each roll with regard to different techniques. Each and every one of the rolls is unique and my re-adaptation of them transpires through an understanding of the material and contextualisation that arises in a specific hanging and a specific choice of title. In the work in which the rolls are placed behind glass and frame, I see a resemblance to Agnes Martin and to her drawings, which situate themselves somewhere between minimalism and abstract expressionism.

“Inspiration and life are counterparts and they come from outside
Beauty is penetrating
inspiration is penetrating”12

Karla Black is another reference that is important to me. Black is often described as an artist who situates herself between land art, expressionist painting, performance, and formalism. I saw her for the first time at the Venice Biennale in 2011, and I was fascinated by her way of working with tactility, through materials that evoke memories and associations. She combines everyday materials like cellophane with pigment and make-up, and in this way she creates works and spaces that possess a kind of intertextuality, whereby the various references play with each other to create a new language.

In relation to Black, I will also mention Roland Barthes, who is also an important inspiration for my practice. Julia Kristeva coined the term “intertextuality” in 1966, in her essay “Word, Dialogue and Novel,” and Barthes worked further with the concept, and writes about “a tissue of citations.” Barthes speaks about a context in which the meaning of the piece is not necessarily located within the work but rather with the viewer or the reader. In Barthes, there is no definitive meaning in the text, and because the text is a multifarious accumulation of voices coming from elsewhere, it has no genuine originality but becomes one long imitation of the world. This is what Barthes means when he says that language places a question mark beside any origin inasmuch as language always bears, in advance, a significance, and this leads, in principle, to an endless chain of meanings. The text contains an ultimate freedom but no ultimate meaning: it is pluralistic and unstable. This entails that the process of interpretation become a question of unravelling the writing more than a question of decoding it, and also that the text is addressed to a reader. For it is precisely towards the reader that this multiplicity is directed: “the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination.”13 The monolithic creator is gone; everything is linked together.

18. A work is a poem; an exhibition is a suite.

last night I dreamed that you came over to me and said I HAVE DECIDED THAT I WANT TO DIE / the plan was that you were supposed to get on a plane together with a group of other people who had made the same decision / you all had to take one person along / the one who meant the most to you / who would be with you on the plane when you all jumped out / and fell towards the ground and felt the wind against your faces and all together clearly looked death in the eyes / and in this way you were saying a clear “yes” to the choice you now had made / I tried to do everything I could to persuade you to remain in this life together with me / but you were determined / I pleaded with you / crying and screaming / but nothing helped / on the following day we were supposed to get on the plane / we walked along the runway / the sun was shining fiercely and was reflected in the asphalt that was marked by rain / it was a small propeller plane / it was filled up / I hated all of you / COME ON, FIGHT, is what I wanted to shout but I held my tongue / hoping that if I, for one time’s sake, was complaisant you might change your mind and remember that it can be easy to live with me / I start to cry silently / and as the plane starts up / rolling down the runway / accelerating / the crying gets louder / and by the time the wheels lift off from the ground I can no longer hold it back / I yell and
scream / crying very loudly / sobbing / snot runs down my throat / I hammer my hands into the chair in front of me / I want to tear the plane apart / I want to have us back down on the ground / before we get too high up / people intervene and push me back down into the seat / saying that it’s too late / that nothing can be done now / I calm down a bit and turn towards you / you are sitting quietly and are indifferent to my pain / At this point you awaken me in the bed. I lie and scream from my lungs full force out into the room. You are terrified. I cannot stand lying in this bed, which has only been ours, I get up, drink milk, black milk, cry, and then return to you in bed. You say that you think it would be a good idea if we hold each other. I lie down, on my back, staring up at the ceiling. You lie down right next to me, placing your arm over my stomach. It’s clear to me that it’s a feigned movement you are performing, a performance of doing the right thing, and you say that everything is going to be all right. We have gotten good at lying. That same night you dreamed that I was thrashing you, and just kept on doing it over and over. You couldn’t stop me, that was the only thing there was to say about this, you said over breakfast.

4. “No dependence on letters or words.”14 How can you start a book full of letters and words with this quote? What bravery!

Is everything that is written something that has, in some sense, already been experienced? Or can that which is written give rise to a new kind of now, a new opportunity, a retelling, which can even change what has happened? Isn’t this just what Peter Waterhouse is pointing at in the quote above? In his book, Language Death Night Outside, Waterhouse has created a work that is equal parts poem and novel. Novelist Laura Moriarty notes: “I want to make the point here that the experiential aspect of Language Death Night Outside is often in relation to a kind of abstract thinking or reading that is as compelling a part of the non-narrative as cityscapes, colours, art, people, the seasons, meetings.”15 Waterhouse makes an aggressive use of the “I” in the story; everything springs forth from this constant I, in short staccato sentences: “I looked into the night. I very slowly fell asleep. I spent the night in the night.”16 And he is able, in precisely this way, to open up a recognisable tale about the city, art, sorrow, and love. A truth told by the individual can apply to the majority if the story is truthful.

9. My works are not objects. They are installations. I cannot imagine that one of my photographs would hang alone on a wall or only in conversation with other photographs. There will always be a span: other elements, other cells. For me, installation art is a concept that, in practice, signifies freedom. Why did Louise Bourgeois feel a need to call her works “cells”?17 Why these words, which classify? Because a word that describes, which is precise, does not close but rather opens up the story. Many of the painters who worked with abstract expressionism felt just this need to formulate themselves around their work: to write, to aspire towards some kind of conclusion. An important point: abstraction is bound up with language.

10. If what is written is secondary, then it loses all of its meaning. That which is written must have autonomy; it has to be an entity in itself, it has to be able to stand alone, in order to be equal to everything else.

11. I scream, COME ON, FIGHT with abstract expressionism felt just this need to formulate themselves around their work: to write, to aspire towards some kind of conclusion. An important point: abstraction is bound up with language.

17. A forgetfulness that is not available to you on command, a new room that you step into, both out of necessity and in search of freedom, investigative, playful, without expectations. Always without expectations. Equally important is the permission: always with permission that can only be granted by yourself, to yourself.18

throwing the glass / discovering only now that there’s still some water in it / raised the glass up over the head before it was thrown / half of the water consequently runs down over my forehead in this movement from lift to throw and continues down over my face / as a harbinger of all the tears that are now going to be cried, and cried for a long time / the glass hits the wall and doesn’t break / it’s too thick / it’s actually a jam jar / I manage to think about the fact that it’s incredible that it didn’t break into smithereens / to think that you cannot smash a glass even when it is thrown with full force / is there anything whatsoever that makes sense anymore / while you’re screaming / but we’ve been capable of smashing the greatest love we’ve ever experienced / the forces have obviously been administered incorrectly /

sensing my weight very clearly / the whole body / leaning in over you / screaming from my lungs’ full power / what a precise proverb I manage to think / and then thinking: how are you able to think about a proverb’s correctness at the present time while the whole world is falling apart / shouldn’t my language also collapse / shouldn’t I be without words / shouldn’t I be lying on the floor instead of being able to stand up / I scream, COME ON, FIGHT / you’re sitting petrified / yeah, like a stone, you’re sitting / no, not like a stone because you’re trembling / and now I hate you, only even more / because you’re not capable of doing anything other than being afraid of me and for this reason my anger becomes even stronger / sympathy ends, along with respect /
to me by the school’s female rector, who had been a practising artist herself and who had ushered in her own career by working with this complex of subjects. Back then, she made a piece in which she paid a male prostitute to go on a date with her, during which they were supposed to act as people normally do on a date: conversing, eating, drinking, and flirting. She would, then, during the time spent sharing the meal, decide whether she wanted to have sex with him. She wanted to and they had sex. As soon as this piece was shown, she got the feeling that the art scene, which she was part of, had numerous opinions about her and her sex life; she experienced this as something negative and accordingly started to lose her drive to create art. The private and the political were no longer separate, and she could not live in this state. Instead, she became a teacher and a curator.

When her advice was offered to me, I followed it. I was desperate to get into an art academy. Unfortunately, what happened was what always happens when you make compromises regarding your interests and your values: nothing worked out as it should. I did manage to gain admission, and as soon as I was assured a place at an academy, I went tooth and nail into feminism. This continued for two years, with works like a performance in which I was naked and poured a white paste-like substance down over my exposed breasts: obviously, the classic attempts to enter into a discourse that is characterised by rigorous political correctness, where the response turns into a provocation. I reached a point where I came to understand that my interest in the construction of gender and feminism did not need to be enacted artistically. However, it had been necessary for me to undergo this process in order to find my own body and to find, through this means, a freedom and a tactility that is present today in the works I create. Especially when discovering écriture féminine and finally finding a way to combine my pieces with text, both stemming from the body, the puzzle finally got its centre. Understanding feminism and understanding how our society has been constructed in relation to gender is something that I regard as a necessity in order to become one’s own individual and to find one’s own voice.

38. As an artist, you’ve got to be able to concentrate on something that does not yield any immediate profit: this needs to be safeguarded; it is in this space that art is created.

My life collapsed. I collapsed, in much the way that can be seen every now and then, when you see, in rare instances, another person’s body fall to the ground. All of the bones disappear; the muscles give way; there’s no resistance left. I laid down and got kicked. For a long time. I couldn’t stop. I was too loyal. I had made a promise and I was too proud to break it. The other person went away and a new life started up while everything was still in a fog. It was not until then that I saw everything exactly as it was, especially the pain.
I awoke from a sleep that did not belong to the night. I sat outside in the summer in the night-time, on the curb, and smoked. The fog lifted and I saw how beautiful everything was. The street lamps were illuminated; they had their own light. The trees spoke; they spoke to each other. The cat sat and looked at me. We could see each other, and greeted each other cordially. And this new gaze; this is what I see everything through now. I had been living in an illusion, on many different planes. And all the blows that I was suddenly dealt put me in contact with the body and thereby with a truth that is still growing larger inside of me.

28. Our desire for civilisation transpires at the expense of a corresponding loss. In exchange for civilisation and rational understanding, we lose our senses. We make a distinction between us and the animal. This distinction is unnatural. There is no difference between us, me, and the animal.

5. The finest thing art can do: to allow us to find our way home, to a home that we did not know existed until we found it. This way of seeing art and the artist is, of course, romantic, Teutonic mindset that believes in the immanent self but that, at the same time, is a part of a whole. “I gave myself no cue, I got along without difficult words. I took a risk. There was nothing to describe. Visibility was high. I lived in visibility. I opened up the language. I tried to make language attentive, spare. I was amply rewarded. I could not know. Everything was center. Everything said: yes. I answered to the yes.”

A hitherto unknown amount of grief throws up inside me / how is this going to come out / what will it look like / what is it, really, to cry / it’s just as absurd as laughing / and as I face you in this situation / and scream / and see a pronounced fear in your eyes / then I suddenly get the urge to laugh / and I imagine how you start to laugh, too / and now we can be decent / we have gone too far, that one has transgressed one’s own boundaries, that one, in the attempt to be strong, wound up damaging a logic around how the world should be, and then understanding that the action must now be consummated, this is the loss of innocence, the action cannot be stopped anymore, it cannot be undone, you’ve done it, you can wash your hands, but the hare’s blood is inside of you now, more than ever before, I resembled the animal, and the animal resembled me, we were both flayed, of other people’s perception of right and wrong.

22. The body is working. Constantly. I don’t have to do anything. I cannot stop this movement. It destroys itself. It builds itself up. I’m watching. I have been watching. I just don’t want to just watch anymore, I want to feel how I’m slowly dying: death is the only thing I own. Cadavre exquis.

When the one falls, the second falls thereafter, and finally the third. This naive sentence is necessary for the one who experiences it while it is being read. Who knows the feeling in this present, in the body. Otherwise, it seems absurd to tell the most naive, the most simple. This is the language of grief.

7. The word “palimpsest” stems from Latin with two Greek roots, “palin” (again) and “psén” (to rub or scrape). A palimpsest is a manuscript, a parchment scroll, or a book that has been erased or scraped clean, erased, and used again. The Romans wrote on wax-covered tablets that could be reused, and Cicero uses the word “palimpsest” to describe these. There are two different materials in the Palimpsest exhibition that stem from the same process: a newspaper cleansing process. The first material is the felt rollers, which are always inside the machines and which accordingly constantly absorb colour, day by day. These rolls are colour coordinated. The second material is clean newprint paper, which is run through the machines about once a week for the purpose of doing a thorough cleansing. These rolls of paper absorb a mixture of all the excess colours that are used to print the newspaper.

12. “Only one thing remained reachable, close and secure amid all losses: language. Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained secure against loss. But it had to go through its own lack of answers, through
terrifying silence, through the thousand darknesses of murderous speech. It went through. It gave me no words for what was happening, but went through it. Went through and could resurface, ‘enriched’ by it all.”

Paul Celan lost his family to the Holocaust, and for him, this simultaneously meant losing his language. His mother tongue was German and this was now connected, for him and for the rest of the world, with destruction, hatred, and violence. Celan needed to write his way through grief. He needed to process, experiment, and understand the incomprehensible. He felt compelled to rediscover his own language. He had to rediscover himself, with the new knowledge that he had acquired through the war. Celan made use of poetry as a tactile language: “In this way, too, poems are en route; they are headed toward. Toward what? Toward something open, inhabitable, an approachable you, perhaps, an approachable reality.” Celan was standing outside. He had to come back in, back into his own life, through his language. Language has to belong to the individual, not to the majority. His poetry is almost a non-language: you can feel the resistance, the constant threat, which he tries to keep at bay, and this can only be done by continuing to write.

29. Everything began with the eyes, and the hands. The eyes saw, read, observed. The hands held. The hands glided around, felt, and shook. Everything was accumulated in the throat and in the chest. A pain was growing. The energy couldn’t run inside the body. I needed to read with my knees, with my elbows, with my toes. My feet didn’t do anything but tap nervously, back and forth, impatiently under the table; they weren’t included in the head’s thoughts.

The body comes before the mind.

The mind can be bridled; the body is a beast.

Magic comes before science.

32. Everybody knows darkness. We know the darkness that exists outside of us, which comes like a blessing on a warm summer’s day, or which is constant in the grey winter, when the tones remain the same throughout. But the most interesting darkness is that which exists while your eyes turn towards it. You don’t think you will ever be able to see through it or even to understand that you are in the darkness, that you are part of it. But slowly, your eyes become accustomed to this state. The world still exists; now you see the contours of everything. The connection between everything arises in this darkness. As the individualistic features come to be removed, a person becomes the person that is standing, obscured and eclipsed, right in front of you. Darkness is the absence of light. But it is not the antithesis of light. They are simultaneous and cannot exist without each other.

You wake up at night, and move your way around inside your childhood home. You don’t bump into anything because this is your first home. It’s never going to change. Nobody can take this away from you. In any case, you’re holding your hands in front of you. You do not wish to be arrogant towards the home and the articles of furniture; there’s a mutual respect. The same respect should always exist between two lovers. You shield yourself, not to repel but because you come in peace. You are turning your palms up. You are open. You are allowed to see my palms—and the lines that tell all: my own book. These are what I show, to the darkness.

You will not take responsibility and back up the meaning of your words / even this I have to help you with / to leave me / you remain sitting / and staring / green eyes dark hair / I understand that there’s no more to do / and no longer have a need to shout / say to you in a normal tone of voice: go in and pack your motherfucking shit / you start to breathe again / stand up / go into the bedroom and lay things in bags / I stand in the living room / don’t know what I’m supposed to do / refuse to go along with this / watch you remove yourself from our home and from the person you have been / walk out into the hallway / put my jacket on / shoes / pick up keys / you stop your movements / I can feel how you are looking at me / I don’t know anymore what you’re thinking / that’s the most intimate thing one can know about a person / it’s a mistake to think that it has something to do with the sexual / what you’re thinking is that which can be concealed / I walk out the door without turning to look back at you or say anything else / I walk around in the streets and shout and cry / the snow falls silently and the flakes land tenderly on my cheeks / only to melt and disappear / come back later to the rooms that now are not a home / you’ve gone / tinnitus starts ringing in my ears / it increases in volume / I call my mother but cannot hear what she is saying / the floors are coming towards me / the sky is falling / god holds me by the hand / I let go / everything stops making sense / I haven’t seen you since /

24. If you touch a person’s language, then you are essentially touching the person’s self, and touching how this person experiences the world and carries on in relation to himself or herself. If a person experiences a fundamental crisis, the language will be broken down, albeit only temporarily, perhaps; this depends on the extent of the pain and the person’s character traits.

13. “How many people live today in a language that is not their own? Or no longer, or not yet, even know their own and know poorly the major language that they are forced to serve? This is the problem of immigrants, and especially of their children, the problem of minorities, the problem of a minor literature, but also a problem for all of us: how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it follow a sober
revolutionary path? How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one's own language? Kafka answers: steal the baby from its crib, walk the tightrope.”

14. Can I write in such a way that language, that is to say the letters, are woven together, word after word, and wind up in a sentence that translates into a text? And that this process will crop up on its own steam? I want to write so that I will be surprised by what stands in front of me: the text has to open my own world for me. This can only transpire through an exchange of respect between the sentences and me. This respect can be found in a realisation that I am equivalent to that which has been written: I am not its master. Can I create in such a way that the material is woven together, action after action, and eventually winds up in an approach that translates into a work? And that this process will happen by its own force? I want to create so that I will be surprised by what appears in front of me: the work has to open my own world for me. This can only transpire through an exchange of respect between the work and me. This respect can be found in a realisation that I am equivalent to the material: I am not its master.

20. Poetry is resistance against time. You force a concentrated thought into what is most often an immensely small form; the reader is required by the poem to turn her/his speed down in order to be able to understand the truth, the truth that has been written on so few lines. Art does exactly the same: compresses the impression; sharpens the vision, asks for time in the encounter with the work, giving a narrow framing that can contain everything if it is executed accurately.

25. The experience that has been described in the section “THAT, WHICH WAS” was an extremely traumatic experience for me. What happened in the ensuing period was that I lost my language. For a certain period of time, I could neither read nor write. I’ve found myself inside a vacuum, where time as well as my primary sources of inspiration. When I suddenly found myself inside a vacuum, where time as well as language became dissolved, I was horror-stricken, to put it mildly. At this point in time, I chanced upon the material that is being shown in my MFA exhibition, Palimpsest. I understood this material, which quite precisely depicted the rational world sensuously rather than logically.

16. A Room of One’s Own by Virginia Woolf deals with the necessity of independence for women to be able to write. Having your own space, both mentally and financially. Woolf points out women’s and men’s different conditions and opportunities when it comes to writing fiction. At the same time, however, she also writes that “poetry ought to have a mother as well as a father.” Accordingly, a fully developed consciousness does not think specifically about gender. A woman, in her literary works, should not call attention to the fact that she is a woman, and that she is being treated unfairly. Not even if she really is. Because if she does so, her text will be doomed: it will not be able to live. These thoughts were unfurled in two different lectures that Woolf held at Cambridge University in 1928. In 1975, The Laugh of the Medusa by Hélène Cixous was published; this book takes a different approach from Woolf's, an approach that is more militant, although both books do share a connection with poetry. Cixous writes: “What is most true is poetic because it is not stopped-stoppable. All that is stopped, grasped, all that is subjugated, easily transmitted, easily picked up, all that comes under the word concept, which is to say all that is taken, caged, is less true. Has lost what is life itself, which is always in the process of seething, of emitting, of transmitting itself. Each object is in reality a small virtual volcano.”

Cixous encourages all women to write, emphasising that this is a way in which one’s own identity can emerge and likening it to, among other things, masturbation; the woman has to remove herself from the shame that the society has internalised and take back her body and accordingly her language. The text and the work have to arise in a way that parallels the female orgasm: the space where control is lost. The orgasm is equal measures of overstimulation and primal function, as you can no longer define how many places on the body pleasure can be enjoyed: the awareness of the fact you have a body is brought to its consummation. You are the body and the other person’s body is no longer separate from yours. Everything flows together into one unit. And it is from inside this unit that the text is written: the orgiastic loss of control. In The Laugh of the Medusa, Cixous introduces the expression écriture féminine, writing as a woman, through the gendered body. Cixous underscores that virtually all of literature up until this point has been written by men, for men, from a phallocentric worldview. This will have to be changed, quite precisely, by owning up to the difference between men and women.

The way in which these two women manage to be political while simultaneously being poetic and also creating, with persistent diligence, works that still resonate today, both in relation to feminism and to art, is extremely admirable.

My political action arises in my constant attempts to give myself time to go in depth with thinking, with writing, and with the artwork, and to dare to dwell on and live with that which cannot be understood, to dare to dwell on and live with that which is seen from the corner of the eye. Today, an insistence on time is crucial.

27. Empathy requires imagination: when I say that I understand you or when I trust that you understand me, this is a manifestation of imagination. Being an artist is an emphatic act.
Thinking rationally. This is not a job for an artist. Or for lovers. The most important thing, the magic, is something that we cannot explain to each other; it arises, it passes away. It’s that simple.

41. “I am a woman without secrets. Simply because my life every day is a liquidation of the past.” Louise Bourgeois. Virginia Woolf. Barnett Newman. A common feature, in my optics, is a physical presence, which is unprecedentedly strong, and a romantic faith in the notion that one can use her/his personal experience of being human and simultaneously tell a universal story in one’s art. I mention these legends because they were the forerunners for many of the younger artists who also are my sources of inspiration today.

In his essay “The Sublime Is Now,” Newman writes: “Instead of making cathedrals out of Christ, man, or ‘life,’ we are making [them] out of ourselves, out of our own feelings.” When it comes to both Newman and Bourgeois, I am reminded that I am standing with one body in front of their works: that I have a body, and that it’s standing up and articulating a line in the room. I have never read Woolf while standing, although I have taken the extra time needed to read her books aloud, to myself, and the experience of her texts has, consequently, like Newman’s paintings and Bourgeois’s sculptures and drawings, anchored me firmly in an altogether concrete and poetic world, where my own voice retells her words. And in this way, when we see their works, when we read them to ourselves, we bring them into the living world once again.

Newman wants us to move up close to the work: there, you can see the individual brushstrokes; you get ensnared by the colour; you get the chance to coalesce with the work. Bourgeois’s surfaces are reminiscent of my own skin: even her marble sculptures are allowed to breathe. Woolf lies right next to me in bed and embraces me through the sentences.

These three artists all have an oeuvre that has inherent pain. This is especially clear in the work of Woolf and Bourgeois, while in Newman’s oeuvre there is an existential dread explicated through the meeting with these gigantic (in more ways than one) pieces. In some way, you get lost in them. Who’s afraid of red, yellow, and blue? Obviously, somebody who carries a knife inside the museum. But Newman himself talked about his paintings as being hostile to the room. He creates a resistance. Pain is resistance. Art is resistance.

In this essay, I am circling around pain, as a possibility, in connection with writing and creation, as does Rainer Maria Rilke in his novel The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge. Rilke describes a young man who is capable, through the vehicle of his sensations, of transforming what he experiences into art:

Your theatre came into being. You couldn’t wait for this almost spaceless life, compressed into drops by the centuries, to be discovered by different skills and become liable eventually to be stumbled upon by a few individuals who little by little come to share the same realization and finally demand to see for themselves these very grand rumours confirmed in a metaphor of the scene that they were presented with.

For Malte, the pain becomes the indicator that he is alive. He cannot command his impressions. He cannot control his sense faculties. This is both his godsend and his problem. The following quotation from my private diary was used to usher in the text of my Bachelor’s degree essay: “I’m paragliding in and out of realities. When I walk, I sometimes have the feeling that the world is falling into me and I have to stop in the street and remind myself that this cannot happen because it’s not possible; gravity exits. Sometimes I choose not to reassure myself, and I let the world collapse on top of me. That’s a feeling that also makes sense.” A hypersensitivity, an attention that captures the details, see the possibilities in the overlooked, a need for transposing what has been experienced. Actually, I believe that I have spent the last two years understanding the quote above: now there is no longer a separation between different realities, there is reality, which is manifold; it tumbles around and weaves itself through me, constantly; it cannot be otherwise: the fight is over.

31. I do not think that one can repel without an enormous force. Without an enormous will. It means something when you and I are repelled and repel: you mean it; I mean it! One can only repel something that one loves. One cannot find the will, the force, unless there is initially a will to love. It’s difficult to hate.

How does one repel?
repel
repulsion
repelling
repel
push
push
absence
groaning
moaning
strange
stranger
estranged
stranded
found
finding
dancing
done
dead
39. “Fifteen days after we are born, we begin to discriminate between colors. For the rest of our lives, barring blunted or blinded sight, we find ourselves face-to-face with all these phenomena at once, and we call the whole shimmering mess ‘color.’ You might even say that it is the business of the eye to make colored forms out of what is essentially shimmering. This is how we ‘get around’ in the world. Some might also call it the source of our suffering.”

40. “To write. / I can’t. / No one can. / We have to admit: we cannot. / And yet we write. ...Writing is trying to know beforehand what one would write if one wrote, which one never knows until afterward; that is the most dangerous question one could ever ask oneself. But it’s also the most widespread. Writing comes like the wind. It’s naked, it’s made of ink, it’s the thing written, and it passes like nothing else passes in life, nothing more, except life itself.”

46. I peer inside. I saw a reality that I did not want to be a part of. But by finding my language, both the internal and the enunciated, I can become a part of the reality, which has now changed because I am inside of it.

45. “I imagine the book as a building. A page is a room. The front page is the cover. If what follows is to be read by itself on a page.

loves

“Then there’s nothing else in this room. You can remain standing and mull this over or you can move on. Pictures in other rooms will shed light on pictures in yet other rooms.

does not love

“It’s not about prose, but rather about the poem, and not the isolated poem but rather the collection or the suite.”

I wake up / I only know that it’s morning because light is coming in through the windows / I’m lying completely still and listening / H. is not awake yet / that can be felt through the rooms / I’m lying on a mattress on her living-room floor / there are no curtains in this room / I feel how the body starts to understand where it is / it starts to hurt / another person’s language has forced me out from my own / and thus from my world / which no longer exists / everything has to be created anew, now / the body has no place to be any longer / it is owned by memories that cannot be abandoned until they let go / it takes time to forget / it’s not a job that can be done with the head / one cannot say, FORGET IT NOW / because then you’ll remember / the hardest part is the most banal / you have to forget in order to forget / I turn around and look over towards the window / it’s getting warm outside / spring is on the way / today, there are grey skies / there are no notations in the colour / no clouds no wind nothing / it’s like the sky has forgotten the sea / and it occurs to me that when I observe the weather, I am closest to you / again / for the only thing I have left / the only thing I still know / is that we are under the same sky / and share the same sea /

THAT, WHICH COMES / decreation

“Are you going in / into the soul / are you going in as you are”

/ “Whom are you speaking to / the soul I am trying to speak to / my soul”

Summer is hammering its way into me with every step I take / I have put too many articles of clothing on in order to preserve my senses / I cannot find the right door / I’ve never been here before / I am going to have to ask down at the front desk / the room is far away / I move like a frightened snake / from side to side / do not know where I am supposed to place myself / the only other person who has arrived is you / you walk forward, towards me / staring me down, with interest / big blonde curly hair, which turns into one radiance around your strange face / a beauty that is not classical but is genuine / the bluest eyes I’ve ever seen / you hold my hand a little too long when we greet each other / the senses convey the undeniable / we cannot hide from each other / a new home arises / and I’m thinking: oh god, here we go again /

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The text is dedicated, with thanks, to Mads, for the destruction.
The term “decreation” is here used as Anne Carson uses it in reference to the writings of Simone Weil: “decreation is an undoing of the creature in us—that creature enclosed in self and defined by self. But to undo self one must move through self, to the very inside of its definition. We have nowhere else to start.” Anne Carson, *Decreation* (London: Random House, 2006), 179.

Hélène Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber, “We are already in the jaws of the book,” in *Hélène Cixous, Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* (London: Routledge, 1997), 9. The term “entredeux” is employed here in the same context as Cixous makes use of in her conversation with Calle-Gruber. Cixous describes *entredeux* as an in-between place, a moment in life when you are not fully alive, when you are almost dead, and when you have not yet started a new life. This mental place exists because the word exists, but at the same time, it is nothing, a no man’s land.

Cixous, ibid., 12.


Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings* (New York: Schocken Books, 1987), 77. To usher in my essay with the same starting point that Ludwig Wittgenstein employed in his masterpiece, and to continue immediately thereafter by citing Walter Benjamin, must not be misunderstood as positing an equality between my thoughts and that of the two philosophers, but should rather be understood as a tribute and as an elucidation of the fact that I am partly borrowing Wittgenstein’s and Benjamin’s structures in connection with setting up this section. Like Wittgenstein and like Benjamin (especially in *The Arcades Project*), I refrain from writing long, coherent, novel-like texts around theory but sometimes leap from point to point and hope that the reader will be able to follow the stream of thoughts. Wittgenstein’s way of thinking does not lend itself to being reproduced in books: his terse and clear insights are best unfolded in precise aphorisms and notes. In a note from 1948, we can read the characteristically terse: “Where others go on ahead, I stay in one place.” Wittgenstein’s point is that extensive and coherent reasoning does not necessarily move thought forward towards the ultimate insight, but sometimes rather away from what is essential. For Wittgenstein, it is paradoxically enough, not a matter of moving forward in thinking and thereby turning earlier thinkers’ conclusions into premises for new investigations. It’s more a matter of remaining in one place and sticking by what is most simple in one’s own thinking.


Ibid., 26.


A special thanks to Gertrud Sandqvist for setting up a school where the hallways resound with trust and permission.


Tøjner, *louisianaabc*, 46.


Further references


Niilas Helander

Installation view. MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2015. Niilas Helander

In the summer of 2012, I created a walk through parts of Berlin by using a quote by Bertolt Brecht and making an open Google map. I took the quote—“Of those cities will remain what passed through them, the wind!”—from his poem “Of Poor B.B.” and spray-painted one word on eleven different locations. One could then follow a route from point one to point eleven and collect together the whole quote. Each location is marked by a personal significance, and as such becomes an attempt at making an alternative map over Berlin. In this walk I draw on personal and historical traditions that take my grandfather, as well as the notion of the flâneur, as a point of departure.

As was an “obligatory” tradition when I grew up, all of the kids had to follow our grandfather for walks in the mountains. It was a basic introduction on how to navigate nature, using nothing but the elements that were already there such as rocks, trees, mountains, and trodden paths to guide you. Certain rocks located us at specific places, and functioned as spots on an invisible map. They were also places for resting and contemplation, for silence and attention. To sit watch is to observe; take notes of the traces in the earth. This constitutes most aboriginal culture: reading traces like a detective, searching for clues.

"So when Deleuze spoke about becoming animal in the way he developed the idea with Guattari, he meant it in this sense of sitting on watch. It’s not only the predation—the fact of trying to catch prey or to be aware of not being caught. It’s also about knowing how to read traces."1

However, I do want to point out, as has Jelena Porsanger, “that indigenous concepts of tradition do not seem to be related to any kind of ‘opposition’ to something that is ‘non-traditional’. Rather, tradition is understood as a many-faceted entity which is in constant process of change and which stems from indigenous concepts of time, space and knowledge.”5 An example would be the traditional Sami concept of time, “which seems to be cyclical, and in a constant movement without end, at least according to some explanations of the star constellations.”9 Walking with our grandfather in the mountains, as opposed to just being told where the rocks were and what paths to follow, was a way of physically engaging with history while also maintaining a tradition that was rooted in an oral and therefore immaterial cultural tradition. On these walks then, what was “transferred” from one generation to another was not only information but also stories and anecdotes about the immediate environment, which could not possibly have been given away as pure information.

Porsanger has in this respect come up with the concept árbevierru, instead of “tradition,” “to better express the indissoluble ties in tradition between the past, the present and the future. Árbevierru indicates the continuity of the ways people do certain things and adhere to certain values (vierru), which are strengthened and validated by árbi (heritage; inheritance). Customs, innovations, wisdom, knowledge, values, heritage and continuity are inseparable from each other in this way of understanding tradition.”7

In his text “The Importance of Literature,” Luis Camnitzer attempts to locate the specifics of a Latin American conceptualism distinct from one based in the West (read: NYC-centred). Using the notion of a minor literature, he writes how Latin American conceptualism drew from local traditions and histories more than canonical forms, and how in doing so it also served the local collective. In my practice I also draw on and make use of my own background as a Sami; it is a way of not letting old traditions and histories disappear through the modernisation and homogenisation of all culture, but also, and maybe most importantly, it is an attempt at translation. On the other hand, my aim here is not to locate my practice in what is to be considered indigenous culture; instead, I think of these traditions and histories as informing my work much like art history is a toolbox for exploration.

“I search, I begin, I try, I venture further, I run ahead, but I never know that I am ending: it is never said of the Phoenix that it dies, but only that it is reborn (then I can be reborn without dying?).”
—Roland Barthes1

“The man in the street is always on the verge of becoming political man.”
—Maurice Blanchot2
In a work of art, ideas perform the methodology, from a narratological perspective. From this, “one can see how the work is a more or less clearly composed sequence of actions, which takes the shape of, or results in, either a more or less solid physical object, or time-based work (video or film), or an event that is documented.” In the art world there is a strong tradition of an oral history. Works of art are mediated as stories and, as such, receive “a place in the circulation and reception first and foremost as the story of a series of actions.” As Magnus Bärtås further notes: “the story is told and retold, and as in any other oral culture, there are misunderstandings, adjunctions, displacements and falsifications.” Regarding my “actions,” I prefer not to document them in any form other than writing, usually a short description stating my doings. Photography gives a false sense of presence, of having seen or participated in something you didn’t: “We should have a problem with photography, that’s all I know.” Keeping the event as a note in a notebook, eventually transcribed into PDFs that circulate in the information economy, makes for a better way to preserve the lifelike quality accomplished in the first place. To insist on the story for the circulation of the work, then, is also to allow for falsifications and displacements or, to put it in Walter Benjamin’s words, for the miraculous to occur.

In June 2013, I began to perform readings in public spaces. I tell stories, both those of others and my own. The readings are attempts at weaving together different histories and traditions, both personal and historical, while at the same time incorporating the location into the larger narrative that is told. But, as Benjamin has said, “it is not the object of the story to convey a happening per se, which is the purpose of information; rather, it embeds it in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. It thus bears the marks of the potter’s hand.”

When Allan Kaprow brushed his teeth as art, he noted: “my awareness and thoughts were of another kind. I began to pay attention to how much this act of brushing my teeth had become a routinized, non-conscious behaviour, compared with my first efforts to do it as a child.” Telling stories as art can be a way of drawing attention to the way history has been replaced by information, and also how our ability to exchange experiences is about to disappear in the noise of neoliberalism and Facebook. The flip side to these forms of practice, their inherent paradox, is that “an artist concerned with lifelike art is an artist who does and does not make art.” Brushing your teeth as art is one way of raising something from the level of the mundane; another is by adding miraculous details to an otherwise boring story you are about to tell. This is what distinguishes stories and artworks from information. They have the ability to raise the lifelike to another level, so that the viewer or listener in turn can make what is told or shown into a part of his or her own experience. The artist as a storyteller can then use the position that a neoliberal economy has granted him or her: “the position as a creator and spreader of value.”

Though I am evoking the image and the role of the storyteller, I have no expectation that an audience will participate and no need for someone to fully understand the things I show. Acknowledging, like Cathy Wilkes does, “that the separation between artist and viewer has remained unbridgeable” opens up the possibility of developing a language that is not concerned with being understood, but felt, which “constitutes part of an imagined but unrealised social system in which its particular language, dependent on shared experience, addresses a community that has perhaps yet to be brought into being.” On the other hand, one can think of it as a network between objects, culture, and a personal mythology—nodes that link to other nodes in all directions. It then follows that there is no such thing as a fixed meaning, or one particular reading that will open the work to its viewer. Instead, there is a multitude of meanings, some outside of the work itself, while others, again, reside in the object’s use (value). Jason Dodge has also emphasised the role that feeling plays in relation to his work—how seeing is a process of feeling as opposed to looking, and that his work is (also) about learning to see. As he goes on to say: “It is about looking (inward) without rendering something, as each thing has meaning which is not immediately available.” In Yupiaq epistemology, the concept of tangruarluku might describe this idea more clearly, as that which “transcends that which we can perceive with our endosomatic sense makers and illustrates how a Native perspective may provide a way of bringing the so-called mythical subjective world and the objective scientific world together.”

If it is impossible to achieve communion with the viewer, art can at least create conditions so that all objects have the potential to become transcendental; as Hamza Walker puts it: “whether one uses a painting or a dirty dish to signify some aspects of the divine, relative to the subject both are mere base matter.” Though I might not be particularly interested in material in the way a craftsman would be, I feel an affinity with Carl Andre in the way his “pigment” is matter, which he uses in a way society doesn’t. As a rule, I try to consider the economical aspects of my practice—that is, how to make sculpture without a strong economic factor. For me, as with Andre again, I find it necessary to return to this state and to make sculpture as if I had no resources at all except what I could scavenge or beg or borrow or steal. An example would be the exhibition nothingdoing in 2010, in which I removed all the tiles from the suspended ceiling and placed them on the floor in a square, cube form. Except for the cube on the floor, the gallery was empty for the entire exhibition period. I did not add anything to the space; I simply worked with what was available. Developing this gesture as a form in itself,
Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2015. Niilas Helander
I often aim at making work that exists only for the moment of an exhibition, and as gestures “they can only be done once, unless everyone agrees to forget them. It is not art, perhaps, but artlike and this has a meta-life around and about art.”

Although different in look, I still find similarities in the practices of Andre and Ad Reinhardt, as both attempted to reduce the phenomenological experience, and also, in Reinhardt’s case, to negate the painterly space, which again goes back to the experience of looking. As a matter of fact, Andre credits the visually demanding experience of living with one of Reinhardt’s black paintings for giving him the tools with which to look at all art. In his “Twelve Rules for a New Academy,” Reinhardt outlines some of his main “rules” by which to go about painting: “No texture. No brushwork. No sketching. No forms. No design. No colors. No light. No space. No time. No size or scale. No movement. No object, no subject, no matter.” And in the end, he writes, “no chess-playing,” referring humorously to Marcel Duchamp.

In an analogy that is hopefully not too far-fetched, I often like to think of the imagination in terms of a photographic process. That is, the moment of waiting for an image to occur while developing a photograph in the black and white darkroom is like the moment when imagination is put to play: something gradually develops, from the first state of blankness to spots that multiply and then in the end become something. This process is not always translated into words, but continues to live as images.

A friend of mine, in talking about new people she meets, and making clear that they are “one of us,” always justifies this by saying, “They are on the street, they know what’s going on, on the street.” She finds them there, at demos, in cafes during the daytime when other people are working, at political meetings in which people in solidarity intend to send weapons to Kurdistan, at Café Kotti, in a refugee camp at Oranienplatz, at a club on a Thursday night under Jannowitzbrücke; the street is not linear. To me, it indicates another knowledge of things and people, neither better nor worse than another form of knowing; it simply situates itself on the horizontal level of everything that exists. I quote David Hammons: “I like doing stuff better on the street, because the art becomes just one of the objects that’s in the path of your everyday existence. It’s what you move through, and it doesn’t have any seniority over anything else.”

This makes me think of Susan Buck-Morss’s “definition” of political art as that which moves into spaces where it isn’t allowed—“such art’s place is displacement.” No longer exhibiting in a place, but exhibiting a place. But, as she says, political art is admittedly temporary, always in danger of co-optation by a system that thrives on the new. However, if the street is a place where art isn’t supposed to be—that is, because it belongs in a gallery/auction house, for sale, for capital accumulation and speculation, and it is situated instead in and along the street/the cityscape—it naturally becomes harder to appropriate. You cannot sell my readings or my interventions on the street. Not only are they difficult to come by as you wouldn’t be able to distinguish the art from the debris, but if you happen to come by, next to, or right in the middle of it (a happening, a sculpture, a biennale, an event, an action, a reading), it wouldn’t last long enough for you to picture it properly. Besides, instead of being clearly available as visible evidence, art can also exist “as innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances that are meant to be interacted with by those within its epistemological sphere—while evaporating at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility.” The street is important, in work and off work; like writing; a temporary place that is always changing. I meet people here, a community yet to become. Sculpture is whatever I can find. The form is not specific, but the object is. I see something on walks—an object I did not know I wanted. I might walk past it ten times, if it’s on a regular walking route, before I finally pick it up; it convinced me, it called on me, as Jane Bennett would say. Other times again, it’s immediate. Gathering, collecting, hoarding—call it what you want, but it’s a specific form of collecting. It might look random, but it’s not. It follows an order of things, if you will, an order that claims that all things are connected and, as such, function in a reciprocal way. As the title of one of Annika Von Hauswolff’s pieces claims: “Everything is connected, he he he.” However, I completely refrain from those discourses that give life (a somewhat contested term) to brands and consumer objects such as Nike shoes and Apple computers that perform their own destruction. In this scenario, there is no distinction between sacred objects, animated objects, and everyday consumer objects; there is only thing-power and Disney on speed. Along the lines of Theodor W. Adorno, who reminds his readers that objects are always “entwined” with human subjectivity, I find myself unwilling “to place the object on the orphaned royal throne once occupied by the subject. On that throne the object would be nothing but an idol.” Bennett would call this the opposite of vital-materialism. But one could—if we follow Adorno’s claim a bit further (though, he would probably reject any claim to spirituality)—perhaps still say: “things absorb personhood (or spirit) and thus become persons with whom one engages in social relationships that carry moral weight. At the same time, persons are constantly rubbing off onto the things around them, such that their personhood is objectified and stored outside their bodies.” Is this not an indication of what Adorno claims as being entwined with human subjectivity? Not everything has thing-power, and what does and what doesn’t might be hard to distinguish, if not straight up impossible. So how do we solve this?
What artists, to my mind, often do is actively engage in and with materials: things and objects. Like Andre, who used material in a way society didn’t. In this way, perhaps one can access and unlock the “silent and hidden” qualities that an object comes to carry with it. Andre once wrote of linguistic terrorism and how we are surrounded by it. Bennett would argue somewhat similarly that grammar is organised against things and their uses and, as such, brings out their passive qualities.

But in all this talk of thing-power, vital matter, and anything ontological, let us also not forget that, as many an indigenous scholar has (rightly so) argued for and about:

The so-called Ontological Turn, and discourses of how to organize ourselves around and communicate with the constituents of complex and contested world(s) (or multiverses, if you’re into the whole brevity thing), was spinning itself on the backs of non-european thinkers. And, again, the ones we credited for these incredible insights into the “more-than-human”, and sentence and agency, and the ways through which to imagine our “common cosmopolitical concerns” were not the people who built and maintain the knowledge systems that european and north american anthropologists and philosophers have been studying for well over a hundred years, and predating their current “aha” ontological moments (or re-imaginings of the discipline) upon. No, here we were celebrating and worshipping a european thinker for “discovering” what many an Indigenous thinker around the world could have told you for millennia. The climate is sentient a common organizing force!

The author of this blog post, Zoe Todd, who is Métis, is referring to Bruno Latour, who she in no way opposes, as further reading of the post’s comments section makes clear. Rather, she opposes a system that consistently continues to ignore indigenous thinkers and their respective epistemologies, which often goes against the Eurocentric one that privileges different methodologies and epistemologies. Her point is that indigenous peoples, all over the world, are “fighting to assert their laws, philosophies and stories on their own terms. So when anthropologists and other social scientists start cherry-picking parts of Indigenous thought that appeal to them without engaging directly in (or unambiguously acknowledging) the political situation, agency and relationality of both Indigenous people and scholars, we immediately become complicit in colonial violence.” In citing European thinkers who discuss the above-mentioned topics, but in no way acknowledge their indigenous contemporaries who are writing on the very same topics, we are indeed, as the author reminds us, perpetuating white supremacy.

Moving now from one topic to another, away from the outlines of what could perhaps be seen as my base—that is, how material is used, unused, engaged with, and thought about in my practice as an artist. I want to turn here towards the artist role, its history, and my own location and continuation of that specific story. To me they are enmeshed, but this is not necessarily true for everyone else. I mentioned Allan Kaprow earlier in my text in relation to storytelling and Walter Benjamin invoking the image of the storyteller, and now I want to direct attention to the ways in which the artist also unworks work, and how this is related to Kaprow’s art-life quest(-ioning).

In 1825, Henri de Saint-Simon coined the term “avant-garde,” which comes from a series of essays he wrote at the end of his life. Writing in the wake of the French Revolution, he essentially asked what had gone wrong. His conclusion was that modern industrial society lacked any institution that could provide the ideological cohesion and social integration that the medieval Catholic Church had in feudal society. Following from this, Saint-Simon ended up proposing a new religion: the New Christianity. What is so peculiar about this proposal is the way in which artists were to play the role of the priesthood:

Saint-Simon made an imaginary dialogue in which a representative of the artists explains to the scientists how, in their role of imagining possible futures and inspiring the public, they will play the role of an “avant-garde” a “truly priestly function” in the coming society and how artists will hatch the visions that scientists and industrialists will put into effect. Eventually, the state itself, as a coercive mechanism, would simply fade away.

My goal in bringing up this backstory for the avant-garde is to point out how radical artists invariably saw themselves as exploring new and less-alienated modes of life, and not so much as the political vanguard that would lead the way to a future society. In this respect, it might also be helpful to remember that both “vanguard” and “avant-garde” originally were military terms, referring as they did, to spatial, not temporal deployment. As Buck-Morss contends: “If we hold ourselves to this original meaning behind the metaphorical one, we will not be misled into equating the avant-garde with history’s so-called progressive forces.”

Another point of reference can be seen through the lens of the traditional avant-garde mythologies, as argued by Fyodor Dostoevsky, for example, through his character Raskolnikov: “the artist (or intellectual) enjoys an exemption from certain laws to which non-artists are beholden. In other words, he or she lives outside the law; is, in short, an outlaw.” Under a neoliberal politics, work has now become one of society’s defining characteristics; that is, self-realisation through work in a society of workers. It then
makes sense that the law *is* work, or that which maintains the protective order. Now, if work is the law, then what artists have been doing for two hundred years (at least)—that is, creating spaces where they can experiment with "forms of work, exchange, and production radically different from those promoted by capital"—means that an artist is an outlaw, i.e., one who breaks the current order of things. The artist role, then, can become an alternative ground onto which we can project and try out other alternative ways of thinking about work and life. As Lars Bang Larsen also has pointed out, it is in the relation to labour, and in particular affective labour as well as forms of self-domination and self-exploitation, that art possesses its critical potential.

Art is anti-work. In my own practice, “I ... refer to the kind of work I, and others are pursuing—others only insofar as I speak to them, and others insofar as they are not yet together—as anti-work. What binds us, an irreducible refusal of the real, is what also gives our invisible community its form and its point zero.” Art *unworks* work through a process that’s not always logical. Sol LeWitt would probably say something along the lines of: “It doesn’t
really matter if other people don’t understand what the anti-worker is doing. Different people will understand the same thing in a different way.”52 To me, conceptual art opens up no-work, or rather, the opportunity of no-work, of wrestling with the concept of work and not work itself. It feeds the flâneur in me and makes me do lazy things during the daytime.

A while back, I came across an article in Sydsvenskan that told of a situation that bore striking resemblance to Plato’s ideal society, one in which the poets would have to leave as they would raise supporters of free speech: Iranian poets were jailed because their poems posed a threat to the current regime by openly supporting the green movement. In a time when journalism and most media only provide us with fuzzy information and very few questions, “perhaps the truly dangerous classes are not so much the uncivilised ones thought to undermine society from below, but rather the migrants who move at the borders between classes, individuals and groups who develop capabilities within themselves which are useless for the improvement of their material lives and which in fact are liable to make them despise material concerns.”53

I write less and less with my hands, as if they are slowly going blind.

In one of his letters to a young poet, Rainer Maria Rilke writes that he has copied the young poet’s sonnet. He has done this in order to let the boy rediscover a work of his own in the handwriting of someone else. Rilke writes further: “Read the poem as if you had never seen it before, and you will feel in your innermost being how very much it is your own.” On May 7, 2012, I started to transcribe Letters to a Young Poet by hand, and as each letter was finished, I posted it in the mail: “the act of copying something allows the use of things as they are, without altering their original nature.”54 In transcribing Rilke by hand, I was thinking of handwriting as a disappearing language and as being a language in itself. As the computer becomes the preferred mode of writing, yet another function of our hands is about to transform and become lost. But “when cyberspace threatens to make our bodies obsolete, art resists by insisting on the body, fashioning the sensate body as itself representation. This is my body, this is my software.”55 Giorgio Agamben writes:

Life, contemplating its own capacity, makes itself incapable of performing any of its functions. An example will illustrate the way this “inoperative operation” should be understood. What in fact are poems if not a linguistic operation which renders language inoperative by de-activating its communicative and informative functions in order to open it to new possible use?56

The act of copying and appropriating—unoriginal and unproductive procedures—is a way for me to undermine productive and creative procedures, and this (possibly?) carries the potential to become an act that contemplates its own capacity to act or not.

Maurice Blanchot would say that writing is “without a why, an event more than an action, as much an interruption of discourse as a species of it.”57 I find the same event to be possible in art, as it also, more often than not, follows without a why. If we read “praxis” through “axis,” it becomes “an imaginary line above which the body rotates.”58 Praxis can be an act of surrendering, a venturing into the (known) unknown, a search without an end: “It is not a matter of devoting time to the task, of passing one’s time writing, but of passing into another time where there is no longer any task; it is a matter of approaching that point where time is lost, where one enters into the fascination and solitude of time’s absence.”59 When I walk, this time is often made possible, and I guess it’s in this crossover that writing and walking can meet, in this specific time and space outside of work and duty.

In my text Interpretation of Class Situation Today (2013), which is based on a text with the same name by Antonio Negri, I have “cut” into his text, much like Andre did with his poems. Meaning, I picked and used only verbs from Negri’s original text that could fit the noun “hands.” The piece, which takes the language that surrounds our bodies when they are at work as its point of departure, is a linguistic exploration of the language of (immaterial) labour. The same attempt is found in my poem “Assembly Line Poem,” which uses codes for vegetables and fruits from the supermarket as its material in order to render visible menial (labour) operations that are for the most part hidden from plain sight.

When moving from abstract and concrete labour to immaterial labour, a transition Karl Marx could not foresee, structures of domination and exploitation are often made invisible in an economy that is intangible. It is in this respect that it is often assumed the working class has disappeared, but, as André Gorz has written, “jobs have tended to become intellectualized, that is, to require mental rather than manual operations without stimulating or satisfying intellectual capacities in any way. Hence the impossibility for workers to identify with their work and to feel that they belong to the working class.”60

To, on the one hand, speak of the working class and, on the other, be in the position of an artist, is a somewhat difficult and strange balance. In working as an artist, one is granted another way of thinking through the concept of work; one simply lives it in order to avoid it. One is perhaps tempted to call this being an “art dreamer” and not an “art worker,” as Lee Lozano declared herself through her participation in the Art Workers’ Coalition in 1969. Gorz writes: “It is impossible to envisage the predominance of autonomous activities over heteronomous work in a society in which the logic of commodity production,
profitability and capitalist accumulation remains dominant.”66 And much in the same way, so too does Lozano claim that she would not participate in anything but a total revolution simultaneously personal and public.65 Everything is, indeed, connected. So, in 2014 when the black civil rights movement in the US intervened into public spaces, such as malls and highways, in order to disrupt the flow of capital, were the activists not, as a matter of fact, pointing to the inevitable ways in which consumption and capital crap is related to racism? Raven Rakia examines this connection in her 2013 essay “Black Riot”:

Many on the left called the predominantly black 2011 London uprisings a “consumer riot,” arguing that they were not a moment of resistance but a reflection of greed run amok. Breaking and taking property happens in pairs. Since the elite detest both, they are equally effective. … The historical context is, of course, conveniently ignored. Since colonization and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, white wealth has been and continues to be built off the backs of black labor, off the exploitation of African resources and bodies. But wait for the courts to grant reparations, and remain waiting. Looting is the opposite of apolitical; it is a direct redistribution of wealth.63

To be against work, then, is to be against these types of domination; it is to refuse the world as it is and to not be content with the current situation.

When I don’t “work,” I “collect, accumulate, gather, preserve, examine, catalogue, read, look, study, research, change, organise, file, cross-reference, number, assemble, categorise, classify, and conserve the ephemeral.”64 It looks like work, but it isn’t. The result is that the distinction between work and non-work is nearly impossible. Riffing on a Reinhardt quote, I am tempted to say that work is work and everything else is everything else. Of course, this might come across as an extreme simplification, but it remains a fact that most artists I meet also have qualms about categorising their own lives and work into simple categories such as “work” and “non-work.”

Often these categories blend into one another to such an extent that they are both work and non-work at the same time. To be an artist is to be against work: “art is not work because it is a refusal to take part in the production and reproduction of that which exists.”65 As Bang Larsen goes on to write: “If art is defined in terms of work (or economy, or politics), it loses its specificity. This is not nostalgic re-affirmation of art’s autonomy, but rather, an observation that, if artistic production is de-differentiated from other activities, it logically becomes non-art.”66

In 1994, the artist Laurie Parsons withdrew completely from the art world. To me, she seems to be an artist who thought of art outside of the value system we have today, which often (but not only) values work that has an immediate monetary value. In Parsons’s first show in Europe, someone apparently bought her whole installation upon stumbling in through the door of the gallery. His purchase, followed by other collectors’, in the end led Parsons to request that dealers no longer offer anything of hers for sale.67 In a work she proposed for a sculpture park in Nordhorn, Germany, she visited the site and came up with a number of different ideas, some of which were “completely fantastical, with no hope of being realized.”68 In her own words:

I had the thought that the moon should be brought to settle over Nordhorn. … I do have issues with the format of proposals and art. What do you want? Make it. Pay for it. Anyway, this thought was not as tongue in cheek as it may sound. I meant it with warm feelings. Bring the moon to hang over Nordhorn each night that you may, that it is visible. I meant a sincere level of poetry here.69

In another idea of hers, she proposed that visitors to the park be told that she had camped there for an entire year.70 As she says, in the end, would it matter if she didn’t?

The world, as Roland Barthes wrote, “subjects every enterprise to an alternative; that of success and failure, of victory or defeat.”71 Like him, I protest by another logic:

I am simultaneously and contradictorily happy and wretched; “to succeed” or “to fail” have for me only contingent, provisional meanings (which doesn’t keep my sufferings and my desires from being violent); what inspires me, secretly and stubbornly, is not tactic: I accept and I affirm, beyond truth and falsehood, beyond success and failure; I have withdrawn from all finality, I live according to chance. Flouted in my enterprise (as it happens), I emerge from it neither victor nor vanquished: I am tragic.72

Irremediably lost, without a destiny and without identity, I joyfully love my abandon. Abandon (respectively from capital, state, and God) is in fact what I actively pursue.73

Art is not work.
MFA2

Niilas Helander

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41. Ibid. Italics in the original.
42. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Buck-Morss, “What Is Political Art?,” 20. “In the military meaning, the avant-garde (or vanguard) of the army goes out in the front of the troops to meet the ‘enemy’ in an unexpected moment, and with the advantage of the shock of surprise, delivers the first blow.”
46. Ibid.
48. Ibid., 100–101.
49. David Graeber, “The Sadness of Post-Workerism,” in Revolutions in Reverse: Essays on Politics, Violence, Art and Imagination (London: Minor Compositions, 2011), 98. “Affective labor is understood as the production, communication, and exchange that is tied to direct or virtual human contact, and whose essence is the creation and manipulation of affect, according to Hardt and Negri in Empire.”
57. Mac OS X dictionary, s.v. “axis.”
60. Ibid., 12.
65. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
72. Ibid.

Further references
Ingvild Hovland Kaldal

Untitled, 2015. Sculpture. Metal. 270 x 120 cm. Ingvild Hovland Kaldal
In Your Own Time Open Your Eyes

How deep in your sleep have you been?
How often don’t you long to go there again
Sleep to escape the world
Sleep to speak another tongue
Sleep to keep the dreams awake
Sleep to be someone else
Sleep to fall forty thousand fathoms
Sleep to get an ice-cold glass of water
Sleep to dare to ask someone about something
Sleep to be like the cat and mess around
on the other side of the mirror
Sleep to die more deeply
than anyone else has died
and to finally dare to live^1

In the other ward, called PIVA, there is an old woman,
an actress that I like.2 I call it the VIP ward. All the rooms have doors with windows. I am there for observation. I look in through the old woman’s door; she’s asleep in the bed in the foetal position. She looks so wild even though she is lying entirely still. I paint my skeleton on my skin with black nail varnish. That’s wild even though she is lying entirely still. I paint my skeleton on my skin with black nail varnish. That’s more or less what I recall. I guess I’ve been there for a few hours. In reality two weeks have gone by.

This text is about another type of sleep, about dreaming while wide awake. In the summer of 2013 I was hospitalised at the St. Lars Psychiatric Clinic in Lund, after a diagnosis of postpartum psychosis.3 During my hospitalisation there I made hundreds and hundreds of drawings, and since this period is but a dim haze in my memory, these drawings are my gateway back. The intensity that I experienced during this working process led me back to the medium with which I began my career as an artist. The experience jolted me and reawoke the unrestrained power of being obsessed with creating.

Analysing this episode is an attempt to reflect on how this experience has subsequently influenced my artistic process. In order to do so, I will present my memories from this critical time and also draw on examples from literature and from other works of art that have inspired me.

In the psychotic condition I found myself in, I experienced all manner of impressions hurtling towards me without control. In an attempt to understand what I had undergone, I immersed myself in works by artists whose mental disorders materialised in their output. I thereby want to address the question: Is there a connection between vulnerability and creativity?

I’ve also tried to find a connection between thirty-two-thousand-year-old cave art and my own drawings. When watching Len Lye’s film *Tusaloa* (1929), which I describe later in the text, the abstract pictures give me a strong feeling of anxiety that reminds me of the stages of the psychosis. Can pictures, in the same way that they affect us when we see them as viewers, stimulate us and help deliver us from a state of anxiety?

I found few articles or works of literature related to the subjective experience I had undergone during the psychosis. All artists and creators, I believe, yearn every now and then to return to those periods of being enraptured by a joyous flood of ideas and free-flowing impulsivity. The purpose of analysing this experience is to develop rituals that can establish discipline and take me to a state of mind where I can create. What is important in my process now, and what has changed?

“The first symptom observed during the afternoon was a certain consciousness of energy and intellectual power.”

“This passed off, and about an hour after the final dose I felt faint and unsteady; the pulse was low, and I found it more pleasant to lie down. I was still able to read, and I noticed that a pale violet shadow floated over the page around the point at which my eyes were fixed. I had already noticed that objects not in the direct line of vision, such as my hands holding the book, showed a tendency to look obtrusive, heightened in color, almost monstrous, while on closing my eyes, afterimages were vivid and prolonged. The appearance of visions with closed eyes was very gradual. At first there was merely a vague play of light and shade which suggested pictures, but never made them. Then the pictures became more definite, but too confused and crowded to be described, beyond saying that they were of the same character as the images of the kaleidoscope, symmetrical groupings of spiked objects. Then, in the course of the evening, they became distinct, but still indescribable—mostly a vast field of golden jewels, studded with green and red stones, ever changing. This moment was, perhaps, the most delightful of the experience, for at the same time the air around me seemed to be flushed with vague perfume—producing with the visions a delicious effect—and all discomfort had vanished, except a light faintness and tremor of the hands, which later on, made it almost impossible to guide a pen as I made notes of the experiment; it was, however with an effort, always possible to write with a pencil.”^4

This excerpt is from a book I received from a friend of mine several years ago. The book is an annual compendium from 1898 of various scientific reports that study native tribes in the United States and Latin America. In the article “Mescal: A New Artificial Paradise,” the art historian and critic Ellis Havelock experimented with mescaline, which he did in order to explore the aesthetical and visual experiences of
After having taken a few doses himself, he chose to carry out the experiment on an artist because he deemed the person in question to be more sensitive and more receptive to the type of visual mental images that mescaline triggers.

The artist in this experiment detailed his journey of intoxication, from being seized by a sudden fear of death to his vision of a pack of cigarettes shining like a purple amethyst. When coming down from this high, he was overcome by a feeling that he compares to how you look at the world differently when you come out from a theatre performance—only that it was more intense. The outside streets, buildings, and light seem suddenly unfamiliar, and the contrast to the fictive world where you have spent the past few hours makes the outside world seem unreal. It was as though he had gained objective insight into his personality.

Havelock describes how mescaline differs from other substances such as alcohol and hashish and how he experienced that his brain remained calm and collected like a demonically possessed viewer. He considered his power of judgment to have been more or less as normal and that his mental capacities were not lessened, but rather it was his most intellectual senses that were heightened.

Rituals are a major component of all religions, and not least rituals related to life and death, that is, to the beginning and end of a person’s life here on Earth. Rituals are an important part of handling processes in life that can be described as transitions, conclusions, or new beginnings. One particular phenomenon that inspires me is how we in the future will create new rituals for the vestiges that we leave behind on the Internet and that do not disappear when we ourselves pass away. Facebook has a timeline that begins with the user’s date of birth and a symbol of a little baby. However, this timeline does not have an endpoint the way that real life does. This may change when most users have passed on and the social network has become a community of remains and estates.

The profile picture of a friend of mine who passed away in 2011 still pops up as a suggestion of friends I can invite when creating an event.
on Facebook. I receive reminders of his birthday and even reminders that it’s been a while since we last were in touch.

The last thing he sent me via personal message on Facebook was a film clip. The clip shows an octopus lying on a plate, apparently dead. A hand enters the frame and pours a bottled liquid of some sort over the octopus. The octopus starts flailing around with almost extraterrestrial movements. The hand in the movie recoils in terror. The clip lasts only a few seconds before it repeats itself, and the torture continues endlessly in a loop.

The fright triggered by the octopus’s continued existence makes me think of an episode of the BBC documentary series *The Blue Planet*. The creatures in this episode, titled “The Deep,” live at the bottom of the ocean and seem frightening to us because they are so very different from all other life forms we know of. Indeed, when the creators worked on the series, they discovered species that had hitherto been unknown to humankind.

At the beginning of “The Deep,” a placard tells viewers that in the murky depths of the ocean there lurk creatures who look like they come from another planet, just waiting to be discovered. The narrator invites us to “come on a journey down into the abyss.” Several of the creatures living in the deep are transparent or have blinking organs capable of emitting luminescent light. They are psychedelic and remind me of a series of photographs I took with a high shutter speed when a friend of mine, the one who later died, danced in the dark using his mobile phone as a glow stick; the light lingered in the air as white spots in a line or a row, according to how he moved his hands.

Since so few life forms can survive in the depths of the ocean, it’s difficult to capture living organisms from there, and those that the camera did manage to capture with the aid of powerful submarine searchlights seem incredibly lonely. You find the same unnerving feeling down there that I imagine is found in outer space: it’s a vacuum of murkiness, of boundless darkness, with no gravity, no vegetation, and no horizon to cling onto. You can’t cast a shadow in complete darkness.

In 2009 I participated in an exhibition at the Natural History Museum in Göteborg. In conjunction with this exhibition we received a guided tour of the archives in the basement of the museum. The archive shelves were such that they could be moved...
around so that only two shelves were accessible at a time. The first thing they showed us was the section on extinct animals. Rigid ape skins hung down in a row from clothes hangers, as though in a cloakroom. You couldn’t help but think of how the death of these very specimens had played a part in the extinction of their species. Even though this section was small in comparison with the others, it served as a reminder that all other species might also become extinct one day. The animal skins represented their own doom, and I was seized by a pang of guilt because those of us who were down there, and perhaps in particular the woman with the white gloves, were part of a historical legacy in which nature was a force that was to be controlled.

A collection of natural history consists of material gathered from the entire world. Only a fraction of the collection is allotted space in the museums, where dead animals are stuffed and staged in order to give the visitor a better understanding of the vast biodiversity found on our planet. In the same way that the photograph can be seen as a representation of reality, collections of natural history try to represent life only through a life that is dead.

The First Pictures of Her are in Black and White
As a contrast to this I want to talk about the ultrasound pictures that were taken of my daughter when she was still in the womb. Two lines of text along the upper edge of the pictures state the date (January 8, 2013), my name, and my ID number. It also states that she is fifteen centimetres long.

One of the pictures shows nothing but the underside of a tiny foot kicking out towards the camera. The rest of her body is hidden there in the dark, as though ensconced in an infinity of space. Another picture shows her crouched up as though doing a flip. I remember looking at the pictures and thinking that her bones looked like white reflectors. I extend my hand and create an “L” between my thumb and index finger. I somehow remember being told that this distance equals around fifteen centimetres.

The first week after the delivery, the doctor discovers that her thigh bones are too pliant, so she must wear a brace for six weeks. The brace, called von Rosenkrantz, makes her look like a little priest, or she must wear a brace for six weeks. The brace, called von Rosenkrantz. One day, while I hold her close to my chest, it happens that she slips out of the brace; her back is soft and bent heavily forwards. She lies close to me, and I understand that she cannot feel free in her restrained condition: calm, perhaps, and safe—in the way gravity feels safe—but not free. This makes me think of how the process from the time she floated freely around in the water until the final weeks when she lay permanently in the foetal position, all scrunched up, was perhaps a preparation for the force of gravity waiting outside.

Just as the first photographs ever taken were in black and white, the first pictures of her are in black and white.

The image: fixation of the idea. The abstract—it is a way of remaining in motion. The image is a means of getting anchored, the return to solid ground. Without images abstraction would not prove its point. You couldn’t tell whether it were really an idea or an ignis fatuus. The image is the proof of successful arrival, its landing, its well-earned rest. One advances only by means of abstraction, but one finds rest only in the image.

Some of the first traces of human life are the remains of campfires, and the first pictures were probably made by someone who rubbed a bit of charcoal against a rock; these were pictures that later washed away.

Werner Herzog’s documentary film Cave of Forgotten Dreams (2010) is about the cave paintings discovered in the Chauvet Cave in Southern France in 1996. The paintings, dated to around thirty thousand to thirty-two thousand years ago, are among the earliest pictures created by humans. The documentary shows how the film team entered the cave along with the researchers who worked on analysing the paintings over a five-year period.

Herzog describes what we see as “a flash of time frozen.” Inside the cave, the crew installed a ramp that allowed them to walk around without leaving any footprints. The walls are illuminated with artificial light, and the beautiful paintings gradually emerge.

The first paintings we see are a cluster of red markings on the wall inside the cave. The markings have been made by a single person using his or her palm. The paintings in the grotto aren’t found near the opening, where they could have been created in the light of the sun. Rather, they have been created in the darkness of the cave, where the source of light must have been a mere flame. One can imagine how the people saw their shadows being pitched against the wall in the flickering of these flames. This is the first representation of humankind: an empty wall and a person’s shadow. Herzog then shows a clip of Fred Astaire from the film Swing Time (1936) in which he dances with his own shadow. “These images are memories of long forgotten dreams,” Herzog narrates. “Is this their heartbeat or ours? Will we ever be able to understand the vision of the artists across such an abyss of time?”
Farther inside the cave we find large, gorgeous drawings depicting animals such as horses and cave lions. Several of these animals have been drawn in the same way we would when trying to sketch someone who is constantly changing position. You start by drawing a line, quickly, so as to draw the jawbone, but the line must be redrawn when the person lowers his or her head and looks downward. The myriad lines overlap and create a feeling of movement. This is most clearly seen in the drawing of a rhinoceros, whose horn is repeated as a crescent like in an animated sequence. The painting of an apelike creature features hands that are drawn like circles, as though the hand movements create an outline in the air.

These prehistoric animal paintings remind me of my own drawings from my time at the clinic. One of the drawings is a portrait of a horse’s head. Most of the non-abstract drawings from this period depict animals, especially birds, but also mythical creatures and hybrids of various animals with camel bodies. The drawing of the horse features several lines that repeat the contour of the horse’s head, inwards, as though the head is either shrinking or expanding in size. But when I watched Herzog’s documentary over again while writing this text, the most striking likeness was how the artist imbued the animals’ eyes with a certain glint, as though full of sentimentality and inner life.

The floor of the Chauvet Cave is covered with the remains of bones, mostly from cave bears that lived there after the paintings had been created. Researchers have ascertained that no humans ever lived in the cave and that it was only used as a place for ceremonies and paintings. A fundamental difference between us and them is that they believed nature had a soul.

Two archaeologists work on extracting the various layers of the drawings, those that lie beneath the scratch marks from a bear’s claw. They have made a reconstruction, and on their computer they have juxtaposed two pictures that show a detail from one of the cave walls. The first picture represents a bear standing on its hind legs and scratching the wall, while the other one depicts a human standing and extending a stick against the wall. From the drawings’ placement the researchers have concluded that the person must have used a stick to reach that height.

One of the archaeologists interviewed in the documentary explains that the first time he was inside the cave, he was there five days in a row. Every night he dreamed about lions, both real lions and representations of lions. He describes the experience as
an emotional shock, though he added that he wasn’t afraid when he saw the lions in the dream.

After having seen this documentary, I return to the drawings of the Swedish artist Lena Cronqvist from the time she was hospitalised with postpartum psychosis. The drawings were made hastily with a restless hand. At times, Cronqvist’s drawings bear an uncanny resemblance to the work of another Swedish artist, Carl Fredrik Hill, who suffered from schizophrenia. For example, both artists included lions in the art they made while ill. The lion is a symbol of strength, but it can also represent a danger, a situation that is wild and unmanageable. The latter point might then mean that the lion as a symbol represents emotions that are difficult to control, such as fear or dread.

Anxiety and dread can be seen as something we inherited biologically from the time when we as humans fought for our physical survival. Anxiety is an emotion neurologically hardwired in humans. If you are forced to fight for your survival on a daily basis, anxiety is directly aimed at entirely concrete threats and obstacles in your existence. In the opulence of modern life, however, such biological fear may instead be directed at obstacles and threats that are less easy to identify. Such diffuse, unmanageable anxiety thereby becomes a consequence of contemporary society.

Postpartum

The word “postpartum” comes from the Latin post (“after”) and partum (“the act of giving childbirth”). Postpartum psychosis can be triggered by a variety of causes, for example a traumatic experience from a difficult birth.

On several occasions I have thought of my own body and of whether the body has memories of what it has been through, including from the time before it was born. Might our muscles contain latent memories that come to the fore after a sudden, spontaneous movement? Every movement is new but builds on repetition and memories from prior experiences. My body is also superficial. I have caught my body “remembering” a movement that never occurred or using artificial gestures. Following electroconvulsive therapy, it seemed to me that my body relived the electricity. I began to shake in uncontrollable spasms, though in reality I had lain entirely still during treatment, having been anaesthetised and given muscle relaxants. Were these spasms merely a constructed reaction, patterned on what I had seen of electroshock treatment in films? Or was it the body reliving the epileptic seizure induced by the electroshock treatment? Was this about the memory of the seizure remaining in my muscles, and them reacting physically while I was awake?

At this point I want to elaborate on something I mentioned earlier, namely creativity under the influence of intoxicating substances. In his book Miserable Miracle, the artist and writer Henri Michaux writes of the drawings he made under the influence of mescaline:

As for the drawings, begun immediately after the third experiment, they were done with a vibratory motion that continues in you for days and days and, though automatic and blind, reproduces exactly the vision to which you have been subjected, passes through them again.

Michaux chose mescaline as a means to achieve stages of subconscious creativity. He used drawing as a technique to transcribe information in a more direct way and as a replacement for language and text. Wanting to go beyond compulsive and habitual modes of thought, he aimed to expose his inner nature and use it as material for reflection. The fourth time he tried mescaline, he accidentally received a dose that was six times greater than what was recommended. He recounts this episode in Miserable Miracle in the chapter “Experience of Madness,” describing how he ends up in a state of “horror and atrocity.” He reached the most profound depths of his soul through what he believed was the best available means for exploring madness, namely mescaline. By means of these sessions of mescaline highs, Michaux managed to change...
the speed of his brain in regard to mental visualisation and perception. This can perhaps be described as a state between dream and reality, where the goal was to abandon “reality” in order to find true reality.

“Man is a slow being, who is possibly only a result of fantastic speeds”¹⁴

Michaux writes of how his perception of time changed, of how it becomes more rapid and how thoughts and ideas come to you like enormous volumes of water flowing forth from an open sluice in a dam. But when time speeds up, it also in a way moves slower—by that I mean that this feeling of exhilarating velocity is also treacherous, since you lose control of how much time has in fact elapsed.

Michaux’s drawings in black ink have been described as a rhythm, or a movement reminiscent of a study of musical notation, with swirls and scrape-like slashes, an incision in time, halfway between ideography and magical symbols, more tangible than legible. His drawings are an attempt to capture the indescribable or unutterable that lies in an experience too powerful to be described in words. Or perhaps they are an attempt to go beyond what can be described, to find the form of the indescribable, where all meaning vanishes, an eternal quest for the other?²¹

As in this example and in the pictures from the cave paintings in Herzog’s documentary, the impression of the hand is something that recurs in my drawings from my stay at St. Lars Clinic.

When you draw with charcoal, the fat from your hands and body help the charcoal attach itself to the paper. Charcoal makes a direct trace from your hand onto an empty surface. When your hand is entirely black from the charcoal, it fills the pores of your skin and all the lines in the palm of your hand. The drawing moves over onto my body.

In drawing it is the line, the trace of the line against the empty surface, that is important, whether it is your hand that follows the line or the line that follows your hand. When I was studying at the Rogaland School of Art in Norway, we were given a task that I often return to when I think of drawing in relation to movement. The task was to throw a paper plane and immediately draw its flight through the air. This task was meant to demonstrate the possibilities of line, where the impression from a hand, and even the absence of the line, tells a story.

Drawing has always been a way for me to express spontaneity and intuitiveness. I have never been interested in drawing as a representation of reality, and the few times I did do someone’s portrait, it was to prove that I can in fact “draw.” It has been a long process to move away from the craft dimension of drawing, a dimension that has led me to despise most everything I have drawn over the past decade. When I was a teenager, I drew sketches for graffiti painters, who at the time did not understand that the most beautiful graffito is a single line you draw while passing along a pristine, unspoiled wall, that drawing is about an impression, or an impression of a movement, and how it relates to the body and the body’s distance and movement. Getting to know your own drawing style can be compared with the time it takes to recognise people from afar the way they walk, long before you see their faces.

Just as the artist in Havelock’s experiment describes a feeling of unreality about the world, art can entail that you perceive the world around you as alien or different. Drawing helps me look at the world around me in lines, spaces, and contrasts.

I am very conscious about upholding the associations triggered by a line or a smudge. During the psychosis, drawing became a way for me to return and to express the abstract as something concrete. People usually communicate in order to get a response, and communication gave me a certain amount of control of my situation.

Discotheque: A Nightclub Where Dancing Takes Place

An artist whom I admire and who has influenced me greatly is Sofia Hultén. Disappearance is a recurring theme in Hultén’s work: not mental disappearance, but rather how you can physically disappear into your surroundings. I recognise myself in the way Hultén goes to great lengths in her experiments.

Hultén’s video work *Immovable Object/ Unstoppable Force* from 2009 shows how the artist made several fanciful attempts to make large rocks move. The film contains rows of text from the telekinesis instructions that she has followed and that explain how you can move large objects with your mind:

**VISUAL TECHNIQUES**
**MOVING A LARGE OBJECT**
**CHARGE YOUR PHYSICAL BODY WITH ENERGY**
**PLACE A STONE IN FRONT OF YOU**
**FOCUS YOUR EYES ON THE STONE IN FRONT OF YOU**
**CLOSE YOUR EYES AND VISUALIZE THAT STONE IN FRONT OF YOU**
**VISUALIZE THAT YOUR ENERGY IS BLENDING WITH THE STONE**
**FOCUS YOUR MIND ON MOVING THE STONE TO THE LEFT USING THE POWER OF THOUGHT**
**FOCUS YOUR MIND ON MOVING THE STONE TO THE RIGHT USING THE POWER OF THOUGHT**
**FOCUS YOUR MIND ON MOVING THE STONE BACK TO THE CENTER USING THE POWER OF THOUGHT**
**IN YOUR OWN TIME OPEN YOUR EYES**¹⁶

The still pictures from Hultén’s staged film are nearly identical to the composition of one my own photographs, which I shall now describe.
The photograph from 2011 shows a man standing in front of a large sculpture of stone. The stone has been polished into a perfect sphere and then reduced to around two-thirds of its size like the opening of a snail's shell. The photograph shows the moment the encounter between the man and the sculpture takes place.

The man stands and looks down at the sculpture, bending one of his arms so that his hand holds an ear. The only feature of the man's face that can be glimpsed is his sport sunglasses. The man is wearing black clothes and ordinary black, all-purpose shoes, sort of a mix of walking shoes and trainers. Since he is dressed entirely in black, his body becomes like a silhouette, which accentuates his posture and bearing. The leg that is farthest away from the camera is slightly bent, as though he is relaxing, but in a tense way. The way the arm bends out from his body creates a triangular shape in the negative space between his elbow and stomach, similar to the shape seen in the stone. It is as though the sculptural form returns the gaze of the man standing and looking at it. Is it this that creates the energy that exists between them? The man is connected to the stone and becomes more like a sculpture than the sculpture itself, and vice versa.

Someone proposed a title for the sculpture by tagging the stone with the word “disco,” as though suggesting a dance is about to take place. This photograph, also titled Disco, served as the basis of my Master's exhibition, So Busy Being Free, at KHM Gallery in May 2015. All the works in the exhibition relate to the photograph in one way or another. It is an abstract thought that is hard for me to explain.

So Busy Being Free
The sculptures titled So Busy Being Free from 2015 consist of three white, plastic chairs supporting a line of bent metal. I wanted to create a work of art based on the body merging with an object.

The plastic chair used in So Busy Being Free has purportedly been manufactured in such a large quantity that there is a chair for every single person on Earth, a calculation based on the stated production statistics for this chair. As a discipline, statistics uses mathematics and information on trends and tendencies partly in order to describe our current
situation and partly to help predict future events. Statistics can be manipulated by including certain things and discarding others, a bit like how a sculpture consists of various components that together become meaningful because of what the artist has chosen to do and what he or she has chosen to discard. You could also say that the plastic chair is without context—by which I mean that in a photograph you cannot use the chair to define where in the world the picture has been taken.

The inspiration for the sculptures So Busy Being Free came from a number of observations and findings. For example, the following excerpt from the Situationists describes a possible interpretation of the state of alienation that I believe can be found in the concept of leisure:

Leisure society is an appearance that veils a particular type of production/consumption of social space-time. If the time of productive work in the strict sense is reduced, the reserve army of industrial life works in consumption. Everyone is successively worker and raw material in the industry of vacations, of leisure, of spectacles. Present work is the alpha and omega of present life. The organization of consumption plus the organization of leisure must exactly counterbalance the organization of work. “Free time” is a most ironic quantity in the context of the flow of a prefabricated time. Alienated work can only produce alienated leisure, for the idle (increasingly, in fact, merely semi-idle) elite as well as for the masses who are obtaining access to momentary leisure. No lead shielding can insulate either a fragment of time or the entire time of a fragment of society from the radiation of alienated labor—if for no other reason than the fact that it is that labor which shapes the totality of products and of social life in its own image.17

In summer 2014 I found myself on a beach, and in front of me two elderly women and a man sat in a row, each in a plastic chair. Their bodies were heavy from the sun and the heat. One of the women was unwholesomely tan. She was short but with quite some girth, and her body covered the chair like an octopus engulfing the splintered remains of a sunken ship. Everywhere in the chair’s negative space her body bulged outwards as though someone had tried to stuff it into a party’s worth of balloons. Her face was turned up as though to say, “Here I am, I’m all yours, embrace me!”

Ah!

Since they sat there facing the sea, it seemed as though they were waiting for something. The beach was entirely flat, mirroring the eerie calm of the sea. It made me think of an episode in Michel Houellebecq’s novel Platform (2001), in which an explosion on a beach in Thailand blows all the tourists to pieces. Burnt plastic and body parts with charred

Havaianas sandals are strewn everywhere. Perhaps they had sat down here at the end of the world, without any fear in their eyes, in the odour of their own sunbaked skin, in order for the sun to warm them so much that they ultimately detonated, like a rotten whale that has been swept ashore, lying on the beach like a ticking bomb, before its hide gives way and its entirety explodes with a tremendous bang.18

When you start to think about it, most of the things people take to the beach are made of plastic, such as beach shoes, sunglasses, water bottles, bathing rings, and dolphin-shaped floating mattresses with a small handle on their backs. Plastic is resistant to the corrosive effects of saltwater.

Another episode that inspired me to work with plastics and heat-based transformation was when I saw a park worker burning away weeds along the cobblestones in the street where I live. The following day all the vegetation was gone, and it struck me that it was an incredibly effective way to clear the area. I followed the burnt traces, collecting less-combustible items that hadn’t entirely gone up in smoke. Among such scorched items I found a white and rather thick disposable fork made of plastic. The heat had deformed the fork’s handle and tines, which had twisted into vaguely undulating shapes. It was a haphazard process that had led to the fork lying there, transformed by the heat. The fork had gone from being a mass-produced object to a unique item that could no longer fulfil its original function.

“Action is a means of Dreaming”

In the following I will describe two films: an animated film I made in 2013 and a film by Len Lye from 1929. Both films are in black and white and have a similar visual language.

Action is a means of

Reflection is a means of

Staying awake.19

From 2009 to 2011, I worked on a project that dealt with the closing of the Zoology Museum in Lund. I gathered objects that were not to be preserved for the future when the museum was packed up and shipped away to the archives, its final place of storage. One of the boxes that was going to be discarded contained photographic plates from various microscopes. I placed each of the pictures on a light box and photographed it several times, from left to right as when reading a text. Afterwards I arranged the pictures sequentially to create a six-minute animation.

The pictures reminded me of an abstract, recurring dream I have had as far back as I can remember. I have often thought that the memory of this dream is my very first memory, that the memory was created before there were any words or images that could accompany the impression that the dream conjured up. I have tried several times, though in vain,
to describe this dream to others, but when I found these pictures at the Zoology Museum, I recognised the same organic language as in my abstract dream.

The dream is in black and white and oscillates between two different stages. The first stage provides a feeling of pleasure as round, gentle shapes glide slowly into one another in a landscape. You go with the flow of it all, and you can’t resist continuing inwards. I once tried to describe it as the urge to knock two stones against each other underwater, where the sound physically transforms itself and is both seductive and grating.

The second stage, which the pleasant stage always turns into, is disagreeable, confusing, and full of speed. The shapes expand like thick handwriting moving about in overly vertical lines. The transition is like a symbiosis that changes into a parasite.

As soon as I try to comprehend what it is the dream triggers in me, as soon as I try to grasp it and describe it in words, it’s gone, lost, vanished. It’s as though consciousness has returned and the subconsciously has slipped away.

"After you have settled yourself in a place as favorable as possible to the concentration of your mind upon itself, have writing materials brought to you. Put yourself in as passive, or receptive, a state of mind as you can. Forget about your genius, your talents, and the talents of everyone else. Keep reminding yourself that literature is one of the saddest roads that leads to everything. Write quickly, without any preconceived subject, fast enough so that you will not remember what you’re writing and be tempted to reread what you have written. The first sentence will come spontaneously, so compelling is the truth that with every passing second there is a sentence unknown to our consciousness which is only crying out to be heard. It is somewhat of a problem to form an opinion about the next sentence; it doubtless partakes both of our conscious activity and of the other, if one agrees that the fact of having written the first entails a minimum of perception. This should be of no importance to you, however; to a large extent, this is what is most interesting and intriguing about the Surrealist game."[20]

The first time I saw the artist Len Lye’s 1929 animation film *Tusalava* was at the *Animism* exhibition at Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin in 2012. Lye was inspired by the surrealist idea of using automatic drawing to reach the subconscious. He was also keenly interested in the art of the indigenous peoples of Australia, New Zealand, and Samoa.

The film is in black and white and consists of forty-four thousand drawings shot on 35 mm film. It begins with the screen being divided into three vertical rectangles. The drawings move upward, and a black column with white dots glides across the screen, as a chain of spots wriggle like a larva, with traces of the film always in the background. The drawings crawl slowly, they merge together and give birth to new meandering, stain-like shapes. After a while, the organic drawings assume the shapes of more complex figures that bring to mind tribal images before continuing in a hypnotic spiral and ending in a circle that vanishes into the light.

The drawings from *Tusalava* still affect me in a physical sense, as though they are speaking to me through telepathy. The film’s imagery reminds me of how the shapes in my dream absorb and attack one another. I am drawn in, and the physical reaction that the animation provokes in me makes it nigh impossible for me to watch the entire film. It communicates with me on a level that is beyond language, recalling the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan’s theory of the real.

When you know that *Tusalava* consists of no less than forty-four thousand drawings, it is impossible not to reflect on the process of how it was made. It is an animation process that requires countless repetitions of the same drawing, a sort of repetition that becomes almost spiritual in its meditative force. This enormously time-consuming effort is perhaps best described as an obsession—an obsession to merge the abstract with the concrete, a constant itch that comes from inside.

This obsession reminds me of a friend of mine who had become infatuated with the idea of tearing down the wallpaper in the old house his girlfriend had inherited. For hours on end he could stand there scraping down and pulling and picking away the layers of thin paper. In certain areas the wallpaper remained firmly attached, but once in a while he managed to dislodge large flakes that seemed to detach by themselves. The process was satisfying but tricky, and each hit that came off only made him more determined to continue on to the next one. There were several layers of wallpaper on top of one another; the previous owners of the house hadn’t bothered to remove the old wallpaper before papering over it with a new layer. Perhaps it was easier for them to do a makeover if they didn’t have to deal with their previous wallpaper choices. Perhaps the redecoration had to be done quickly, in order to be a surprise or to cover up a problem that perhaps could be taken care of with just the right change.

My friend related the process of tearing down the wallpaper to another process whereby he scraped off the layers of his own body. The itch he felt was physical, corporeal. Over the course of several years, small red “roses” had flared up on his skin everywhere on his body, transforming into scabs of dead skin when they had finished blossoming. He itched constantly, and the lavatory floor had piles of white skin, the size of aquarium fish feed, like scraps from a croissant. The itching only became worse, however, strengthening the roots and nourishing the flowers.

This is about scraping down layer upon layer, layers that overlap one another, that change and form a new picture on the wall for every piece that
is plucked away, in a desperate attempt to find stories about what happened in these rooms before. It's like when you see a photograph where a piece has been torn away so that something can be forgotten, but where it is that very piece that gives the photograph a focus or narrative: everything else in the picture remains visible and is read from what can be glimpsed of the torn-away piece.

My friend’s disorder is genetic. It lies latent and breaks out as a physical reaction to stress or bodily infection, but there is a chance that it may skip a generation or two. There is no cure, but those afflicted can use medicine and various creams. Saltwater is also good; saltwater and sun.

you must stop
squeezing your eyes
turning up your nose
and baring your teeth

let the light from the sun
meet your eyes
hard

The sun is everyone’s greatest love. One day you will fall in love with it, just like everyone else before you has. The sun gives us light so that we may see, makes plants grow so that we may cultivate food that we can eat, and provides warmth so that our bodies can stand being here. After a while this infatuation will develop into love. For large stretches of your life you will take it for granted, in particular on days when you can’t see it, when it’s cloudy, when it rains, and they say it’s dark outside. When you haven’t seen it in a while, you will notice that you’ve missed it. You will long for it without knowing what it is you long for, you will feel betrayed, but it will also make you feel that you are unique and special.

On warm days, when it’s at its highest point, it burns, and at least once in your life you will get sunstroke. It’s like a fever, you’re cold-sweating, but your skin is on fire. You feel burnt, and dizzy. Perhaps you will interpret it as an overdose of sun. You will perhaps be advised to go lie down in bed, and you close the window, because even though it’s hot, you want to shut it out, the light, the white, white light. You lie there and wait for the night, for sleep.

Like the person I wrote about above, the protagonist in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) finds herself in an old, large house. The short story, written in first person, tells of a woman who has recently had a child and who suffers from postpartum depression, which during the narrative gradually evolves into a psychosis.

The woman’s doctor has prescribed that she remain in bed and not exert herself or be stimulated in any way. She is not to write, read, or engage herself intellectually. In the room where she lies, the wall is covered in yellow wallpaper, and her passive state allows her to empathise with the wallpaper’s patterns and shapes. She is finally consumed by the wallpaper and becomes obsessed by the pattern and the lines, which begin to communicate with her. She attempts desperately to determine what it is the wallpaper is trying to tell her. She begins to see figures crawling into and behind the wallpaper, and also women who sometimes come out from the wallpaper and crawl out the window and around the house.

Yvonne Rainer made her debut film Hand Movie (1966) when she was bedridden following a major operation that made it impossible for her to dance. The film is a six-minute presentation of Rainer’s choreography of a dance carried out by her hand. The film explores the hand’s quotidian movements, seen in a close-up shot against a neutral background. We see how it stretches itself out, how the fingers bend, how the pinkie finger tries to move sideways away from the others, and how the thumb hides inside the palm. The piece, which was Rainer’s first foray into dance-related film, was a way for the artist to express herself while the rest of her body was incapable of dancing. She bends her fingers,
twists her hand around and shows her palm, she closes her hand and opens it. The choreography is beautiful, a manifestation of control as she explores different variations of movements and gestures. Rainer’s minimalist choreography reduces dance to its essence, with a focus on simplicity, repetition, and (in line with her own tenets) demystification.

The first symptoms of my own illness came from an oversensitivity to sound. The omen, by contrast, came from my hand. The day beforehand—the day before the dream began in the daytime and the inner world took over the outer world—I was lying in bed, and I lifted my arm up and held my hand in front of myself as though to check whether I was still awake. When I moved my hand in front of my face at a slight distance, it lingered in the air as though in slow motion. All the movements of my hand lingered in the air as though they were film stills, as though the air was so thick that the movement became lodged in every vortex of pressure it pressed away.

It is always your hands you look down on when you want to determine whether a danger has passed that your eyes can confirm: I look, I hold my hands out, and I see my body, and therefore I am here. You extend your fingers to see how much they tremble, as if to show yourself how scared you were: “Just look at my hands! Look at how they’re shaking!” You hold them in front of you and calmly exhale, as if to say, “It’s over now, I’ve made it.”

Likewise, you lay a hand on someone you were on the verge of losing, as if to say, “You’re here, I can feel you. You didn’t disappear after all. As long as I hold my hand on you, you’re going to be here.” When a child is born, it’s the hands you look at marvel at the miracle that has been created, and it’s our fingers we count when we want to make sure we didn’t forget anything.

In Jonas Gardell’s novel Torka aldrig tårar utan handskar (Don’t Ever Wipe Tears without Gloves), one of the main characters describes a childhood memory. He is standing inside his parents’ summer house after the family has eaten dinner, and he’s looking out through a windowpane on the veranda door. His father has just washed and polished the windows, so the outside is so clear and transparent that the thing that separates him from the world outside has become invisible. He lays his hand, dirty from the fish grease from dinner, on the empty surface. When he sees his handprint on the pane, he gets the feeling, for the first time ever, that he exists.

Blood Like Shadows in Water

I wrote the following text for my exhibition Blod som skuggor i vatten (Blood like shadows in water) at Galleri 54 in Göteborg in 2014:

A psychosis is the innermost rebellion. It makes things clearer: around the diving bell that people are ensconced in like a foetus in a membrane, alien, predatory fish move about.24

A confused bird flies straight into a window that cannot be opened. The handle has been dismantled, and the blinds cannot be pulled up. Everything went so slowly in the beginning. The hand that I lifted in front of my face lingered in the air like a long exposure. There was no time to sleep or eat. My thoughts seemed to be sticking to the outside of my body, a body that remembers the pain from giving birth. In the dream it was only I who understood, who saw what was going on. There were so many codes and signals but no messages to decipher.

My room is the innermost one in the hospital corridor. The blind lady always manages to grasp my hand when I try to walk past. She is extremely paranoid. I draw two portraits of her. She keeps one, which she can show to the nurses to prove she really exists.

In the ward there are decorative canvases made from floral cloth. In the bottom-right corners of these canvases, someone had used a pencil to scribble down titles in shaky handwriting.

I was convinced that I was the one who had written the titles. It can perhaps be compared with how I am convinced that the pictures are mine, even though I cannot remember making all of them.

The title of the exhibition was taken from one of the titles a former patient had given to the flower pictures in the ward. In the exhibition I displayed three works created during my hospitalisation. The exhibition consisted of a selection of charcoal drawings sized A4, A3, and A2, which were presented lying on a table under an enormous glass slide.

In the exhibition I also displayed a series of towels I used to erase charcoal while working on the drawings. When I folded these towels later on, I saw charcoal formations in their folds that to me resembled birds that had flown into a window. Some of the towels were inscribed with logos or company names, such as Skånetvätt or Landstinget.

On the back wall hung a frame with an old patient overcoat that I had found in a closet at the psychiatric clinic. The overcoat is light purple with patterns of blue lines superimposed, like some sort of psychedelic camouflage that was meant to make it easier to separate the patients from the employees.

While working on the exhibition, I felt that I was relating to my own works in an unnaturally objective way, even though they had originated from an immensely personal experience. To be sure, one of the reasons was that there were few drawings I could remember making. But I also believe that it was because I had come to accept, much more than before, that there was something vital in the drawings’ unfinished style. The exhibition became like a conclusion of a painful episode in my life, allowing me to move forward.
By chance I recently came across a text by the author Krister Gustavsson in which he describes a psychosis in an unedited, unexpurgated way, unlike how psychoses are usually written about in medical encyclopaedias and journals. In the text I recognised for the first time a similar pattern of thought, something that felt comforting and reassuring. His text, "Slute avdelning" (Psychiatric ward), is a direct transcription from notes and texts he wrote while receiving psychiatric treatment. The text was published in the Swedish cultural journal Subaltern in 2012 without any editing or censorship. In the introduction to the text Gustavsson describes how he didn’t have any recollection of these texts before he found them in his notebooks some while later. It is difficult to follow the text, since ideas and reflections that are written down seem at times to change direction midstream. The following poem is an excerpt from Gustavsson’s text:

Bad poem (the entire poem with markings, but fully legible)

There is a schema
That says how you feel
There are perhaps several schemas
But in each and every one of them
Is your previous
Discomfort, you may ask
Yeah sure, discomfort, for here
there is no
No passion

How do you listen to terms
from the field of construction
that you make visible from the structure
Where is the word euphoria
Where is the word hypochondria
And what are the dark elves
whose
beating wings
are clearly felt in the corridor²⁵

At the last moment, when there is nothing left in us—
when self is lost, when identity is lost—a fusion takes place, a fusion with something alien to us that nonetheless is ours, the only thing that is truly ours.²⁶

The title of the article by Ellis Havelock I mentioned earlier, “Mescal: A New Artificial Paradise,” alludes to Charles Baudelaire’s Les Paradis artificiels (Artificial Paradises) from 1860, a book-length essay about the French poet’s experimentation with opium and hashish. Ellis perhaps chose this title because Baudelaire’s title and text bore the closest resemblance to his own experiences with mescaline.

“The New Artificial Paradise” is certainly not a title I would say accurately reflects the experience I myself had of a postpartum psychosis. During the time after the psychosis, I began to search for something that could explain what I had endured. I found few articles or works of literature related to the subjective experience of a psychosis I had undergone. Rather than reading articles about my own diagnosis, I began to read countless studies of intoxication on the Internet. In older scientific experiments on intoxication, I found another mode of talking about this other reality, a mode that struck a chord with me, describing as it did the feeling of observing myself with a demonic gaze and of bursting with all the impressions around me. When someone else had described something I couldn’t put into words myself, reading helped me find the words to remember what I myself had experienced. Perhaps this was also a way to avoid feeling alone, being able to look at my own reflection in someone else’s experience, as though to create a memory I could live with.

In order to find your creativity, you must also know your own vulnerability, or at least allow it to exist. The visual experiences I had undergone were something I wanted to embrace and appropriate in my art. The greatest effect this has had on me is that I now work more intuitively rather than on the basis of a preconceived idea. I reflect afterwards and allow myself to complete those works that perhaps can be seen as failures. Instead of waiting for inspiration to come to me, I try to work on and experiment with the material. In short, I am no longer as afraid to fail.

In the introduction I asked whether there is a connection between vulnerability and creativity. Various studies have arrived at this clear conclusion, and there are many artists who suffer from mental illness. When that which usually buttresses our perception of reality disappears, you also lose that membrane that protects you from painful impressions. I believe there is in fact a connection between vulnerability and creativity, one that is absolutely necessary. But this is also what makes the process so painful at times.

It has been suggested that a fundamental precondition for a psychotic disorder is “the loss of the filter that our reality encounters prior to reaching our consciousness. Patients with a psychosis are thus open to a greater number of impressions and associations, but also find it difficult to interpret reality.”²⁷

All the texts I read on the Internet about postpartum psychosis were at the outset clinically scientific; they were written from the vantage point of a healthy “we” in order to explain the other person, the sick person. The texts described the pathogenesis of the given illness in a rational, objective, and categorising way that did not fit my own subjective experience. What I found in such articles were scientific explanations of something that could not possibly be explained by someone who hadn’t been there.

Some of these descriptions were also based on a terminology that contradicted what I myself had experienced. An example is the description of how psychotic patients lose their ability to think rationally.
In my own experience, I was rather filled up with all manner of thoughts, certainly including rational ones, but not “rational” as commonly accepted. I had in one way lost my grip on reality, but at the same the feeling of reality was stronger than ever. 

The dream, the memories of my deceased friend, the frightening and the unknown, the impression of a hand, the hand trying to leave an impression, the woman disappearing into the wallpaper, the feeling of obsession my internal itching gives me. All these are components that are crucial in my art.

In the same way that my art is inspired by associations and observations, this text has also been written on the basis of the associations that have turned up in the writing process. It was by no means given that I would write about my psychosis here. Perhaps it is a sign that I’m becoming more personal in my art as well.


2 In this section at the clinic, there are thirteen beds in the psychosis ward as well as three beds in the psychiatric intensive care ward (psykiatrisk intensivvårdsvädelning, or PIVA). PIVA takes care of patients who require a secluded environment and close follow-up from the staff.

3 Postpartum psychosis (also known as puerperal psychosis) is a type of psychosis that can affect mothers after giving birth. The psychosis is very serious and requires intensive psychiatric care.


5 Mescaline is a hallucinogen that is derived from the peyote cactus. Peyote was first used by the indigenous peoples of northern Mexico as part of their traditional religious rituals.


8 Cave of Forgotten Dreams, documentary film, directed by Werner Herzog (Canada/US/France: Creative Differences, History Films, Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication, 2010).


11 ECT (electroconvulsive therapy) is a psychiatric treatment whereby epileptic activity in the brain is induced with the use of electric stimulation. The current provokes an epileptic seizure, which supposedly changes the balance in a number of signal substances in the brain. The patient is anaesthetised during treatment and is therefore unaware of the epileptic seizure. A muscle relaxant is administered so that the patient avoids the muscular pain that is otherwise common during crampping in general.

12 Michaux, Miserable Miracle.


15 Michaux, Miserable Miracle, 5.


18 “Exploiting Sperm Whale Carcass Caught on Camera in the Faroe Islands,” YouTube video, 1:09, posted by ODN, November 30, 2013, https://youtu.be/7X0hq0ug9q4: “A camera captured the moment a sperm whale carcass, which washed up in the Faroe Islands, exploded. The clip, which was shown of Faroese Television, has since gone viral, racking up millions of hits on YouTube alone. The dead whale had been lying on the beach for two days, after getting stuck in the waters between two islands, when marine biologist Bjarni Mikkelson was sent to cut it open. As he made incisions in the whale’s side the carcass exploded due to a build up of methane gas from the decomposition creating a loud sound and releasing a pungent smell. It is reported that a local museum will collect the skeleton and put it on display.”


21 The quotation describes a technique that is also known as automatic writing.

22 Pär Darell, Degussa skincare (Stockholm: King Ing, 2007).

23 During the twentieth century, “bed rest” was a common cure that physicians prescribed to treat mental disorders. This treatment, and its terminology, stems from Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell and was mainly prescribed for women, especially those diagnosed with hysteria or who suffered from depression (and particularly postpartum depression).


26 Michaux, Miserable Miracle, 8.


Further references

The mundane egg, 2015. Installation, detail. Flower petals, flower debris, glass, lens, paper, masonite, wood. Loui Kuhlau
Right: *The mundane egg*, 2015. Installation, detail. Flower petals, paper, wax, masonite, wood. Loui Kuhlau
You pretend to be the universe. Every time you meet people, you introduce yourself as the universe.

I ask you:
—Do you know the planet Earth?
You search inside yourself, try to remember what you have been taught, and ask:
—Do you know what your inside look like?

I tell you about a spleen, a liver, and the blood flowing through them. Things I have been taught I have inside, but don’t really know where. You tell me it’s the same for you. That you know of the planet Earth. But don’t know where it is or what it’s for.

I tell you about an illustration I found, a drawing of a human. On top of the page it reads, “de microcosmo externo.” There are lines drawn over the body, like cross-sections. One line is drawn over the chest, the word “vitae”—“life”—is written to the left of the body. Right next to it, a small heart, drawn on the chest. To the right it says, “sphere,” with a small circle surrounded by lines, also drawn on the chest.

—throughout life I have been taught that the heart is on the left side, and after seeing this illustration, I realised I have no idea what’s on the right side.1

*The Unfamiliar*
At first, I felt shame. As if I was not allowed space inside that I knew nothing about. Fear of space that could be filled by anything, a space of which I had no memories, a part of me I could not recall. There was an absence of muscle memory, of cells knowing what to do, no sound, no echo of the heart as could be expected. Looking at it as a newborn would approach an object never encountered before, I had a feeling of seeing something for the first time. Only I could not see this; it was nothing and inside. I used all the senses, but none of them would do. The possibility of reaching anything on the inside is usually hard enough, our nerve endings send information only when it’s critical. Other than the sounds from the stomach and the heart, there is little information leaving the body. Listening to the inside has become habitual and retreated into the automatic. But this was not a matter of forgetting or retreating. It was as if the nerve endings were grasping in thin air. Imagining its colour, shape, size, and consistency, I slowly became aware of the desire to frame the unknown, to project ideas, but there was a sensation countering the urges of control, wanting to linger. As if the imagination took great pleasure in meeting the unfamiliar, resonating with a long-forgotten feeling of wonder.

Anyone who has tried to take a walk with a small child knows that the road is long, not only because children’s legs are one foot tall but because they stop to look at every little thing. Every detail, know as unknown, is of utter importance. They examine details to the greatest extent; you have to follow their following, their drive and lust for detail. A stone is lifted from the ground, to be carried for hours. A branch found in the forest, picked out to be brought home, details of everyday life, lifted by the child for you to see. Things usually passed as other things occupy your mind.

When growing up, the everyday is invented, as a way of coping with the overwhelming struggle to absorb the world. In The Invention of Everyday Life, Rita Felski describes the nature of the everyday:

At first glance, everyday life seems to be everywhere, yet nowhere. Because it has no clear boundaries, it is difficult to identify. Everyday life is synonymous with the habitual, the ordinary, the mundane, yet it is also strangely elusive, that which resists our understanding and escapes our grasp. Like the blurred speck at the edge of one’s vision that disappears when looked at directly, the everyday ceases to be everyday when it is subject to critical scrutiny. “The everyday escapes.”2

It becomes something we can’t fetch, as it always is where our mind is not. Felski goes on to describe the everyday as “the essential, taken-for-granted continuum of mundane activity that frames our forays into more esoteric or exotic worlds. It is the ultimate non-negotiable reality, the unavoidable basis for all other forms of human endeavor.”3 She speaks about

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* The Mundane Egg

Loui Kuhlau

Left: The mundane egg, 2015. Installation, detail. Flower petals, flower debris, glass, lens, paper, masonite, wood. Loui Kuhlau

Right: The mundane egg, 2015. Installation, detail. Flower petals, paper, wax, masonite, wood. Loui Kuhlau
an everyday that is no longer connected to the miraculous, magical, or sacred. An everyday that above all is temporal, that doesn’t refer to the singular or unique but to the repetitive, that which happens every day. At the same time, it’s the position from which one finds wonder. The foundation from which we descend.

The child not only brings you down to the detail of things, but repeats all your actions, gestures, and emotions, tries every word that comes from your mouth. All the things you have forgotten or surrendered to the habitual are re-enacted. The child repeats the repetitive everyday, making it observable. Every time a gesture is mimicked, a slight change takes place; the repetition slowly turns the smile into a grimace. The separation of knowing and perceiving is done through the mind of a child. By extracting what we presume to be known by repetition, distortion, or displacement, the known is made unknown, letting the spectator perceive it rather than know it. As Viktor Shklovsky explains it:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects “unfamiliar,” to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. ... After we see an object several times, we begin to recognize it. The object is in front of us and we know about it, but we do not see it—hence we cannot say anything significant about it. Art removes objects from the automatism of perception.4

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The mundane egg, 2015. Installation, detail. Flower debris, flower debris, glass, lens, paper, masonite, wood. Loui Kuhlau
It’s a ball. In having a conception of what we see, we have forgotten how to take it in. We don’t know much about it: where it has been, who has played with it, what its inside looks like. We project the knowledge from earlier perceptions that we carry with us onto its surface. Forgetting to perceive the object as it is.

In the foreword of Shklovsky’s book *Theory of Prose*, there is a peculiar passage that talks about the everyday:

In a poetic universe, every fragment is a luminous detail. It resonates with the supersensuous. It is in perpetual transport from the everydayness of its material appearance to the sphere of the transcendental where it is really located, and its impact upon consciousness constitutes a moment of vision or the sense of embracing the totality of all that is. There are overarching everywhere. But a prose universe is just one damn thing after another, like an attic or junkyard or side of the road.\(^5\)

This passage describes something nameless that has run parallel to my art making for as long as I can remember. Something that seems to evade every attempt to be framed or captured, lingering in the junkyard of prose, hidden within every thing of every day. “Trace a circle no larger than a dot, the whole birth of Eternal Nature is therein contained”—a quote by one of many who has tried to describe the same thing. As I have little knowledge of what it is or where it is to be found, referring to it as a “thing” feels troubling. Applying a * in its place seems less invasive, which I have therefore chosen to do hereafter. In “El Aleph,” Jorge Luis Borges tells the story of someone who has found a *, which he chooses to give the name “El Aleph”:

On the back part of the step, toward the right, I saw a small iridescent sphere of almost unbearable brilliance. At first I thought it was revolving; then I realised that this movement was an illusion created by the dizzying world it bounded. The Aleph’s diameter was probably little more than an inch, but all space was there, actual and undiminished.\(^6\)

El Aleph becomes the * from where the narrator descends into wonder. A position from where the spectator is granted a view of everything, a possibility to embrace all that is. It bears a close resemblance to the fragments in the foreword to *Theory of Prose*. As the narrator tries to describe what can be seen in El Aleph, he begins to apologise for language, in which he will try to retell his experience: “How, then, can I translate into words the limitless Aleph?”\(^7\) He continues by telling the story through others:

Mystics, faced with the same problem, fall back on symbols: to signify the godhead, one Persian speaks of a bird that somehow is all birds; Alanus de Insulis, of a sphere whose center is everywhere and circumference is nowhere; Ezekiel, of a four-faced angel who at one and the same time moves east and west, north and south.\(^6\)

Just as Alanus de Insulis, the narrator describes the * as a sphere, “where all places are seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending.”\(^7\) Borges continues the account for the metaphor in the text “Pascal’s Sphere”:

In the thirteenth century the image reappeared in the symbolic *Roman de la Rose*, which attributed it to Plato, and in the *Speculum Triplex* encyclopedia. In the sixteenth century the last chapter of the last book of *Pantagruel* referred to ‘that intellectual sphere, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference nowhere.’\(^10\)

Borges then continues on to Giordano Bruno, who, in *De la causa, principio et uno*, searched for words that could explain Copernican space to mankind: “We can state with certainty that the universe is all center, or that the center of the universe is everywhere and the circumference nowhere.”\(^11\) The history of this notion repeats itself time after time. In the *Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy*, Helena P. Blavatsky refers to the sphere or spheroid as the “mundane egg,” which in itself contains the promise and potency of all the universe. She describes it as:

*[The] form of everything manifested, from atom to globe, from man to angel. ... the sphere must be thought of as seen from its centre. The field of vision or of thought is like a sphere whose radii proceed from one’s self in every direction, and extend out into space. ... It is the symbolical circle of Pascal and the Kabalists, “whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere.”\(^12\)*

You ask me what sphere means and I try to explain.
—It has a surface. It’s a border between what’s on the outside and what’s on the inside. It’s a definition of space.
—Is it like you and me? you ask.
The definition I have given, I realise, didn’t say anything about the shape. It is merely a definition of where one thing ends and another begins.
—How can one tell where one thing ends and another begins? you ask.\(^13\)
—First they are given a colour, then a shape, and finally a name. With this comes a border. They get an inside and an outside, and every time I say their name you create an image of their presence.\(^14\)
The Oceanic Feeling

The term “oceanic feeling” is credited to one particular author, as many other expressions are, but as it is, with a feeling such as this one, the author is not to be found. There are only stories layering other stories.

all languages have black and white.
if there are three names for colour, the third is red.
if there are four, then it is green or yellow.
if five, then whichever didn’t make four, yellow or green
if six, it is blue
if seven, it is brown
if eight or more, then purple, pink, orange and grey are added in any order.

In language you divide, categorise, and combine. As words enter your language, they create parameters in a spectrum in which you previously didn’t make any distinctions. As you come into being without a language, the first period of life is lived in a continuous spectrum. A world where everything is one. Your senses collect information as if nothing is separate. At this stage, the oceanic feeling is all you know; everything is something you associate with.

At first, most of us were gatherers, then we started to collect, and eventually we became hoarders. As gatherers we learnt only what was needed. That which wasn’t essential for our survival wasn’t kept for long, but as we began naming things, we started to collect. The collection grew into interest, which gave us meaning and encouraged us to continue. Eventually our interest transcended our most pressing needs of survival. The collection became collections, and the interest became a constant naming of what we found. With the interest of naming rapidly increasing, we began to name things that didn’t exist. The first non-existing thing we gave a name was “nothing,” continuing with a name for when we name a thing: “naming.” We kept on inventing names for all the things we couldn’t grasp, as if naming would make them more real and therefore easier to understand.

An idea of how to make them part of our world was formed. They were given letters, which together would form their names. Letters we could make present in the world, through writing. This writing could be done anywhere, on anything. Stone, clay, wood, wax, and the skin of others, but none of them would prove as efficient as paper. Even the things that were already present could be inscribed by their names. We made


Ord bortom tidens kontrol som får oss att färdas ljusår. 2015. Installation, detail. Felt hat, colour debris, wood. Loui Kuhlau
The mundane egg, 2015. Installation, detail. Felt hat, flower petals, paper, masonite, wood. Loui Kuhlau
The mundane egg, 2015. Detail. Egg, lamp, paper. Loui Kuhlau
the naming physical. It was no longer a collection in
our minds, but something we could touch. New ways
of storing were invented. From the point when we
began writing all the names we knew on paper, the
collection expanded exponentially and soon demand­
ed us to settle down. We became hoarders, stacking
the names in piles. Not knowing what to do with
them, we started to combine, putting one name after
another. Acquiring more paper, the stacks grew high­
er. To keep them from falling over, we bound each
paper to another. We called them “books,” deriving
from an early name for tree, “bōc.”

In our endeavour to collect all names,
many attempts were made at creating a complete
collection. Looking back at the names constructed for
these books, one finds a poetic set of titles: Speculum
Image of the World.” Others less pompous, but grand­
oise in their own way: Fons memorabilium universi,
“The Source of Noteworthy Facts of the Universe”;
De natura rerum, “On the Nature of Things”; Hortus
deliciarum, “Garden of Delights”; Theatrum Vitae
Humanae, “The Theatre of Human Life.” All titles
trying to frame an idea of a collection worthy of
calling itself complete, or at the very least a collec­
tion of the most essential of everything. Most of these
books became not one, but many. We chose to call
them “volumes,” as the content was not the most sig­
nificant, but rather the quantity they held. One of
the largest collections I have ever encountered is titled by
an even larger name:

Great Complete Encyclopaedia of All Sciences
and Arts which So Far Have Been Invented and
Improved by Human Mind and Wit: Including
the Geographical and Political Description of the
Whole World According to All Monarchies, Em­
pires, Kingdoms, Principalities, Republics, Free
Sovereignties, Countries, Towns, Sea Harbors,
Fortresses, Castles, Areas, Authorities, Monas­
teries, Mountains, Passes, Woods, Seas, Lakes ...
and also a Detailed Historical and Genealogical
Description of the World’s Brightest and Most
Famous Family Lines, the Life and Deeds of the
Emperors, Kings, Electors and Princes, Great
Heroes, Ministers of State, War Leaders ... ;
Equally about All Policies of State, War and Law
and Budgetary Business of the Nobility and the
Bourgeois, Merchants, Traders, Arts.

This book later came to be published as
Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon. The name
“encyclopaedia” (deriving from another set of names:
“ἐγκύκλιος,” meaning circular, and “πάντα,” meaning
education or rearing of a child) was created to describe
what these books had set out to do. A complete knowl­
dge with a circumference that holds everything, or
an education that has the form of a circle. In early
encyclopaedias there was no index; some even were
without recognisable divisions between the names,
and most were without any structure or order. One
could argue that these were closer to the world they
were trying to mirror, where one thing dissolves into
another. When the collections resided in our mind,
there was usually no difficulties finding a name, but
as the collections became physical and grew to such
an extent that they were no longer graspable, finding
a name could take weeks. The immense work of cate­
gorising had become a pressing matter. In our search
for categories, we had to go back to the origin. All
things that didn’t exist had been given letters, which
now had spread to the existing things. The letter had
become the smallest common denominator of names.
The letter with which one begins to say a name were
made into categories. Beginning with “A” and ending
with “Z.” This of course changed according to the set
of names one chose to use. We called ours “alphabet,”
a name built on the first two letters of another set:

When the structure had come into place,
many of us became idle, looking for other things to do.
Connections were made and the previous randomness
of one name after another turned into descriptions,
whereby names described other names, filling each
one with meaning. The purpose of these descriptions
soon became clear, as the idea of what each name
meant stirred heavy debates. One could find an equal
number of interpretations to people working with de­
scriptions. A new collection was built. Its name was
“dictionary,” built on the set of names “dictio,” speak­
ing, and “arium,” room. It became the room in which
the general idea of a name was spoken, where we
agreed upon a common ground. As we were busy es­
tablishing what each name meant, there were others
constantly interrupting the work, altering the mean­
ing of each name, using them in every possible man­
er. They were called poets, deriving from the name
“ῥητός,” meaning creator, maker, or doer. The poets
inspired many of us descriptors, making it possible to
expand the descriptions. No longer bound to describ­
ing a specific name, we began mirroring our world
in an immediate way, describing what we perceived.
The names were flying, swimming, rooted to the
earth; they were placed in an order, where they could
act upon each other. We called it “sentence,” a name
deriving from “sentīō,” meaning to feel or perceive. We
became enchanted by this new existence, and reading
allowed us to wander. Absorbed by the stroll, attempts
were made to enter the descriptions. We mirrored
ourselves.

Over time, most of us came to live in this
world, seldom seeing what’s in front of us. The names
had taken its place. Where we once saw wonder or
spectrum, there now was a chair, a stairway, a person,
or a car. Attributes were given to them: blue, white, big,
slow, dead, happy. All names structuring our knowl­
dge, names that we have forgotten the origin of.
A memory loss of the greatest proportion, a confusion
of the tongues. A riddle that we all helped to create.
In an encyclopaedia there is a limitation of space; with this comes the idea that nothing important should be left out and nothing trivial can be included. With the notion of an all-knowing collection that has failed to include all, one begins to wonder which names were left out.

* 

**The Other Word**

There is a word for performance that I prefer, as it has other connotations. It talks about our perception, imagination, and conception. The word is a vague notion of a truth. It describes what happens in the mind of an audience as they are watching. The construction of a mental image. The word is often used in the context of theatre, where its meaning is the same as “a play.” It talks about what we perceive to be real or true, but more importantly it creates a possibility for us to imagine other realities. The word is in my mother tongue: “föreställning.”

The first time I created a föreställning was when I pretended to be the universe. I had a feeling of not being enough, I was dressed in a black costume resembling a tent, and my voice was altered to cover my lack of knowledge. Entering the space where an audience was present, I told them who I was and that they could ask me questions. Soon, my fears were confirmed as they asked about the future, the past, and the meaning of life. Questions to which I had no answers. They treated me like an oracle, as anyone would, presented with the possibility of talking to the universe. I had no answers, and after a few excruciating questions to which I felt too small, as I had taken on the role of everything, I started to reply with questions. If they asked me about the planet Earth, I would ask them if they knew what their inside looked like. Little did I know at this point that I had started to explore the similarities of the “self” with the self of the universe. Questions about vast space were answered by questions about human anatomy. The universe I was trying to portray became an I, and the lack of knowledge we have of the self was projected at the universe. This became a way to address the “everything.”

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**The Walking Sea**

As we once came from the sea, we brought the sea with us. Every time we shape a new self into existence, a sea fills our inside. The other takes a breath, lungs are flooded, and water passes through the inside. We all start as fish, swimming, breathing water. Until one day, when the water is pushed out of our lungs and we take our first breath of air. Incapable of managing the gravitational weight of the new world, we learn to crawl. The crawling leads to walking, and we start to talk. A story that took billions of years to tell is now told and retold in the course of a lifetime.

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1 Loui Kuhlau, *I pretend to be the universe*, performance, 2014.
3 Ibid.
7 Ibid., 62.
8 Ibid., 65.
9 Ibid., 62.
11 Ibid., 9.
13 Kuhlau, *I pretend to be the universe*.
15 This expression was coined in correspondence between Romain Rolland and Sigmund Freud, and later used by Freud in *Die Zukunft einer Illusion* (1927). Rolland allegedly derived the term from the ancient Hindu tradition of Advaita Vedanta.
Cucumbers, 2015. Sculpture. Bronze. 4 x 34 x 47 cm. Ronnie Lykke Lauridsen
Let’s move right out there where words are plentiful and always fall short of the mark! We are busy working on some form of antenatal preparations. I need to have eyes and my green pen has to be made a bit more pliable. Caesarean is unfortunately not an option.

What we have here are reflections on my artistic activity, practically speaking. The main focus is being placed on sculpture—more specifically, on two bronze sculptures that were part of my Master’s degree exhibition—and I have decided that we will be dealing with the following question: Why do they look like they do?

I find myself at the present time inside an old yellow house in Brønshøj. Here, my body is located, the body that currently possesses the same incomplete character as the coffee that I, with a great deal of toil, have managed to wring out of the Rancilio coffee machine. Compressor sounds and metallic strangeholds feel violently intimidating at four thirty on a pre-summer morning. I prefer instant coffee, water in the plastic kettle, vapour, hot water in the cup with a disproportionate lot of freeze-dried coffee in the bottom, and then vapour again. It’s almost morning and neither Satan nor I have got shoes on. I’ve got to remember to smoke and think things out again. What’s quite certain is that there are going to be second thoughts by and by. A bird is making chirping sounds; it’s too early for that, and I’m getting a bit provoked by the bird’s spontaneous active and energetic song. I don’t think that it’s thinking about me and I should probably concentrate less on it.

But why do my sculptures actually look like they do? We’ve got to go back in time and make a quick detour into and around the back of my head and Næstved. I remember that, at that point in time, I had a vague notion about wanting to devote my time and interest to sculpture—and the material would have to be bronze. Thus prepared, I get in touch with a number of different foundries on the island of Zealand. I have no prior knowledge about particularly good places and no recommendations, so it’s sporadic searching around, with a point of departure in Google with the words “bronze,” “casting,” “foundry.” Previously, I had a conversation with my father, who contributed, from time to time, with well-intentioned advice and comments. Father-Flemming is a craftsman and bricklayer and knows every Tom, Dick, and Harry in dark Jutland, and I’m thinking that it might just be that he can hook me up with some sorcerer quack experts who have some skill when it comes to metals and casting. I have previously, with the aid of my father’s know-how, had some success with finding my way towards alternative dynamic personalities who have managed to materialise my ideas. But this time around, his response is: “Casting? I don’t know! Aren’t you learning about that kind of thing at your school? So you can do it yourself.” To which I reply: “Well, that would be one way of going about it, of course, but I believe that my idea might meet an unfortunate outcome in my unskilled hands; I don’t have any knowledge in this area and I’m afraid of screwing things up.” “Hmmm, that’s up to you. Well, yeah, OK. We’ll be talking, then. And say hello to your mother.” In this fashion, by the grace of God, I succeeded at long last in making contact with a foundry in Næstved. I get the casting master on the phone and I present him with the sketch of an idea that has taken up residence in my mind. “Cucumbers, you say? I don’t really know, but we have a retired caster hanging around here who’s making some things, on the hobby level, for a few different artists. He’s called Per.” “That’s someone that I would like to speak with,” I say, feeling uplifted and with my appetite fully whetted. Per is cheerful and not totally dismissive of my idea. Next stop, Næstved. But first we’ve got to go out and purchase the basic goods in the form of cucumbers.

Dansk Supermarked and Coop get ready to make room on their shelves for crooked cucumbers and large apples.

Deformed vegetables will soon be on their way to the shelves of Dansk Supermarked and Coop.

The two major supermarket chains have previously had strict requirements concerning shape and size, which has made it difficult for producers to deliver quirky and very small or large vegetables to the stores.

This has resulted in a waste of foodstuffs because the vegetables have been dumped into the trash instead of into shopping carts.

At Coop, crooked carrots have already been introduced, but now room has been made for crooked cucumbers and less nicely shaped potatoes.
In Form, 2015. Series of paintings. Gesso, spray paint, chalk on canvas. Each painting measures 130 x 180 cm. Ronnie Lykke Lauridsen
—We introduced the crooked carrots last year, so it’s not hard to imagine that this will develop, says press officer Jens Juul Nielsen to Ekstra Bladet.

Over at the competitors in Dansk Supermarked, the crooked cucumber and the oversized head of cabbage are also now able to gain a foothold in the vegetable section.

—It’s clear that we are always on the lookout for new initiatives. So we will not rule out that it might also come into consideration that Dansk Supermarked will start to sell quirky vegetables, says communications officer Martin Møller Aamand to the newspaper, according to FødevareWatch.

Dansk Supermarked has, however, actually been experiencing that some customers simply sort out the deformed vegetables, so there is a question about how much selling power they have.2

Copenhagen Northwest, some time ago. As I remember, it was a relatively early morning, and the mechanical sound that the garbage truck gives off when it empties the association’s garbage in its container makes me conscious that it is what it is. Coffee is a matter of fact and movement is, at this time, a necessary evil. Wow, are we going bananas—or cucumbers!—but we’re not entirely awake yet. Now that the agreement with Per had been secured, it had become time to acquire that which is the core of the project. But where do you find precisely the right/wrong cucumber? Fakta is a bad choice. But, on the other hand, it’s a short and tumble walk from my apartment. REMA 1000: well, they’ve got almost everything, but even they cannot muster up adequate cucumbers. It’s frustrating, but not really: in a certain way, I know darn well where I can find what I’m looking for. At the greengrocer! The guy who’s always talking on his cell phone and rarely, if ever, talking to his customers. So I drag myself down there. And what do you know? He’s yakking on the phone! Here I make up a little game for myself: if the greengrocer is talking on the cell phone, then I won’t buy cucumbers from him, no matter how imperfectly suitable they may be. I demand, as part and parcel of the game, that he look over at me or that he at least pretends to be smiling. I did not think that this was too much to ask and I’m well aware that he’s not part of the Irma chain. The Irma girl is always smiling.

Of course, the greengrocer is talking on the phone. And, in spite of the hard and fast rule I concocted about aborting the mission in such an event, I buy the prepossessing cucumbers. Thus equipped, and in a kind of flush of triumph, I set my course and head home.

The white bag with the stretched handle containing the crooked vegetables is now lying on my kitchen table and I have decided to make an attempt that I ordinarily refrain from getting involved in; I’m impatient by nature and this generally comes to manifest itself in my dealings with materials. I want to see the idea take shape, right now, and in the manifesting process, it’s like I let the hand work on autopilot; it accordingly knows something about where we are going. But the cucumbers also have something to say, that’s what I’ve decided. They are co-composers. They are, in some way, loaded.

A total of six cucumbers are lying at my feet; actually, they’re right in front of my hands and eyes. They’re really cucumber-like and their aroma also says “cucumber.” They seem to be almost hyper-real as they lie there; their green peels are still elastic even if they’ve suffered what appear to be small bruises. I’m thinking that it’s a bit peculiar that what can be described as being something natural and indisputable seems strangely foreign to me, as they lie there. Maybe it’s the amount of space they take up or maybe it’s purely and simply the sheer multitude of green in combination with my stainless steel sink. I don’t know what it is but there’s something about them.

When you deal with the unique object, you are not dealing with the idea of its materiality but with its stance, its posture in the world. But when you deal with the idea of the materiality, its posture is only a small part of the whole. If you can close things off into being “just a coffee pot” and forget about the fact that the coffee pot is made of either metal or glass, you’ve lost three quarters of the essence of the coffee pot. If you haven’t taken into consideration its use, its manufacture, or anything else, if you only have taken into consideration that … yes, its aesthetic beauty—what they call beauty—its physical form, then that is only a very minor part of it, and art has a tendency to close off the major part of everything and leave you only with the minor parts of it.3

I pick up the cucumbers, one by one, and place them in the form of a horseshoe, with an eye towards getting to know them better. I have a notion that the sculpture has to be flat and open; it has to be dynamic but also a form encompassing its own short-circuiting as well as a form of thought generator.

The late Willy Ørskov, who was a professor at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen and an artist, wrote that there has been a breach within the field of sculpture. In the past, or more specifically before the 1960s, sculpture was characterised as being akin to painting: it was a sub-species, a non-independent art form, in the sense that sculpture formed part of a reference system with painting. It was not sculpture as sculpture, with its own language. Their materials were not the same, of course, but what was common to painting and sculpture was the tendency to want to tell, to stage a drama that reflects the world, a condensed psychology. There is focus on the content, which culminates in a self-referential cultivation of SCULPTURE. Heavy,
In Form, 2015. Series of paintings. Gesso, spray paint, chalk on canvas. Each painting measures 130 x 180 cm. Ronnie Lykke Lauridsen
turgid, pale versions of the mythical gods and perfection, placed at the top of the marzipan ring cake and examined under devout conditions in almost hallowed halls and magnificent gardens. In the 1960s, this tradition was ruptured and sculpture became extricated and liberated from painting and all of its reference system. Now sculpture has to stand on its own legs; in fact, “legs” is a poor choice of metaphor here insomuch as what we have here is precisely the undermining of this reference system, an amputation, but even more than this, the reference breaks off, or, to put this more correctly, the opportunity arises at this very moment: sculpture is no longer compressed life and the image of something else. It is!

Sculpture steps out from the optical-illusionary pictorial space and into the physiological space, sensory space, body’s space. Instead of, as was previously the case, portraying the human body or referring to it as sculpture in an image-spatial construction, the sculpture now becomes the body’s adversary and opponent. Expelled from the optical-mythical pictorial space, sculpture ceases to be a focal point for the eye and a referring sign on which the brain needs to take a stance. Instead of being an obtrusive impounder of place inside your own physical space, it becomes, by turns, a blocker and opener of space, an alternating proximity and remoteness in the space that surrounds you, an alternating counter-voltage and an escaping in space—“Not your body’s mirror, but your dance partner or sparring partner.”

The sculpture is! But what are my sculptures? They continue to lie there as unresolved shadows, right where I placed them, in all their cucumber might, in a constrained horseshoe. For the time being, they are intellectual baggage; they are, in a way, radioactive. Apropos “sparring partner,” I mentioned earlier on that I had the intention of making the sculptures in collaboration with the cucumbers, that is to say, on the cucumbers’ premises, actually. I am certain that this calls for some kind of clarification. It has to do with making room, space, like a Finnish rally driver who is collaborating with his co-driver: “sharp right” and “easy left.” I am imagining that the driver of the car is partly abandoming himself in a state of concentration, confidence, and a kind of foolhardy recklessness. But the steering wheel is in his care; therein lies the power.

I come to think of something else: when I was living with my parents, there was also another person living in the house, in addition to my brother, of course. She calls herself my sister. And my so-called sister had a cat. It was called Fuzzy. Or maybe it was Stampe? No, it was surely that annoying bunny rabbit that was called Stampe, but I won’t put my head on the chopping block and swear that this is how it was. Let’s call the cat “Fuzzy” for now, as long as that’s OK with you. Fuzzy had a hard life but it got food and such so I don’t think there was a case of out-and-out cruelty to animals but perhaps a mild form of it. My sister had, at that time, a burning desire to have a little sister. She didn’t get the sister but instead she had Fuzzy. Understandably enough, the cat was rarely at home because when it was home, my sister had the habit of placing it on my swivel chair and spinning the chair around until the animal got dizzy and somehow more easy to get on with, and when it was ready to “talk” with, she dressed it in dolls’ clothing and suddenly the cat is a baby in the arms of an irresponsible little girl. And like the rally driver, she also had the power to form and especially to deform.

Jimmie Durham, a person who I know by name and whose artistic oeuvre resonates inside me. Maybe we’re soulmates. My first meeting with Jimmie—I write “meeting,” but we haven’t ever really met flesh + flesh, as such, but it felt a little like that. About six years ago, somebody stuck a book in my hands; it was kind of out of the blue and it was on Danish soil. “Check out this guy,” says the voice that hands the book over to me. I accept the book and glance right away at the cover and then at the back cover, the same procedure as I would follow when visiting Mr. Video, which was the local video rental place at the time. “Is there anybody in the movie who’s famous?” “Well, Forest Whitaker is sort of well known,” I would say to my brother. “I don’t know him,” he would answer. “It’s a bad movie.” Getting back to the book in my hands, I open it up and the binding yields to my touch. I cannot remember the book’s title, but I do remember, on the other hand, much about the content. I would really like to exchange the word “content” with the words “material, exotic-accessibility.” Maybe this is something like what I experience when I watch Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is, a British TV program about antiques and wily wheeler-dealers, and one of the people appearing on the show tells a joke in English that can, at the very same moment, be read on the Danish subtitles—two flies with one slightly transposed swat. Jimmie! That’s what I call him, quite simply; I’m on a first-name basis with him. That’s my impression. And now I would like to try describing a work by Mr./Master JD. Partly because it moved me and still moves me; it has also to do with fascination. I remember that I thought, when I saw it, that is to say, when I saw it described in book form: that’s the way you can actually say something without really saying anything, no words except the title of the work, which sounds like I’m remembering incorrectly: Stone as Stone. Here, the material is being articulated. A man is wearing a long coat and an apparently heavy stone. The man is Jimmie; that occurs to me at some point. Close by, there’s an empty display case, like somebody would use to show various effects, such as books, bones, or African masks. But this display case is empty; the empty space is defined by the...
In Form, 2015. Series of paintings. Gesso, spray paint, chalk on canvas. Each painting measures 130 x 180 cm. Ronnie Lykke Lauridsen
The sculptures have been rendered emancipated from an implicit context. The stone was stone when it was in Jimmie’s hands, but as it lies there, it’s as if the stone has become even more—or just—stone. The stone is, first of all, exotic because it now forms part of a context that says, “Look at me, I’m inside a glass frame. I’m something extraordinary but at the same time I am more stone than any stone has ever been.” The stone enters into a new context, removed from its natural environment; it could be in the vicinity of a forest where a family is sitting on a bench and eating their packed lunches. One of the picnic guests spills some cola and it runs down the leg and eventually falls onto a stone and some grass. Here it’s like the stone has been reduced to nature infused with cola, but—yes and no—undeniably stone. I am fascinated by Jimmie’s capacity to articulate through material. I feel that it concerns me. There’s a kind of spontaneous open dialogue, albeit written in milk. In Jimmie’s own words: “It’s always a little bit more complicated.”

Getting back to my kitchen and the green horse-shoe-shaped mass. Now begins the actual operation: equipped with paring knife, zeal, and an aura of idiocy, I now place the various cucumbers in a circle and the pruning can commence. I have decided that the sculptures are going to have circular forms. To me this form seems, in one way, to be closed, but also open. Open because the weight is more or less evenly distributed and because no actual start or end exists. Moreover, there’s no material in the centre. Consequently it appears to me that the centrifugal force has dislodged the material from the centre and distributed it uniformly and economically, and this in spite of the fact that the ring is closed. One might say that the sculpture’s hierarchical construction is flat. The word “flat” causes me to turn my thoughts to the word “democratic.” Already at this point in time I am aware that the sculptures are going to be hung on the wall. Mounted, or rather hanging on a hook, as though a jacket, or some other form of non-static object: what I’m striving for, in part, is mobility. I believe that this kind of placement shores up the flat composition and removes the sculptures from what, for me, is a more traditional context, where the sculpture, by virtue of its placement, will typically be on some kind of centrepiece or massive plateau. My sense is that there’s an interesting duality in the act of hanging a sixteen-kilogram bronze figure on the wall: in a way, it’s as if the drama, the sculpture in the classical sense, is being punctured while simultaneously being enhanced: the sculpture is emancipated from an implicit context. But the fact that the sculptures have been rendered in bronze gives rise to the effect, no matter what, that they will be read within a bronze sculpture tradition, which includes, among other things, canons and church bells as well as heavy and imposing portraits of people. Vegetables are perishable, but heroes and heroines are not. They insist and they take their place in the story. My wish is that the sculptures will come to function on their own terms: that they are and appear in themselves and on their own premises. I’m not really all that interested in having them stand in opposition to tradition, but I would like them to be autonomous. But nothing is independent; even nothing is not independent. Maybe I’m a romantic? Quite certainly conceived, for isn’t it also true that around 10 percent of the thoughts and considerations that are infused into a work remain visible while the other 90 percent remain intellectual baggage, visible only to the artist himself? I know that I’m moving around on thin ice here; we could also say 15/85. OK, this is a gross generalisation, which presumably would be true if it were not for the use of titles, which quite precisely have the capacity to be able to open up the work, like some greasy little geologist’s hammer in a teenager’s hand. But sometimes it appears to me that the title tends to abduct the work, to turn it into something else, which is not in line with the work’s DNA. Maybe it’s a little like when you go for a walk at Fisketorvet (a relatively large shopping centre in Copenhagen) and you see a woman/girl with an indiscrreet amount of Botox in her face. Sometimes it can almost be a matter of people who have become transformed into some other species, as if the DNA strand had gotten snipped and replaced by plastic. But titles can have their rightful justification: nothing stands alone. Maybe I am a romantic. Certainly, I have to wonder: Is my being driven by a notion that I can put something into the world that has not been seen before an idiotic conceit? Maybe it is. But this is a powerful driving force within me. Actually, I refrain from looking at too much art because of the danger of infecting my whole activity and especially my energy for working. I need to have the impression that the ideas come from me even though the ideas are deposited unconsciously and can stem from unexpected and often spontaneous invisible places. Ergo, voluntarily ignorant and introspective; my belly button must be axis mundi, a hermit, a small crustacean in a penthouse, filled with mirrors, but behind the mirrors there are kindred spirits, perhaps. I am my own grandfather! That’s what Jørgen Buckhøj claimed in 1972, and I’m still imagining this, even if I’m writing this in 2015. My art, my progeny/bastards! Donkey-amen, or basta!

Næstved: indeed, I have promised you a trip to Næstved. We’ve got to go and pay a visit to Per, whom I still haven’t met but have only spoken with on the telephone. I’m bringing along a backpack with the model that I have made ready in advance + four extra cucumbers that I have envisioned would be prepared on
the spot, out of consideration for their limited shelf life, now while they are still in the vegetable stage and have not yet been preserved and materialised in bronze. Per turns out to be a pleasant and apparently competent man. And he spontaneously has an understanding of the project’s nature.

Three weeks go by and during this period we are in contact by telephone: here, the process is tailored and readapted and adjusted. After the casting and the subsequent processing and surface treatment have been carried out, I am invited to Per’s private residence and here my now manifested ideas are placed into my hands.

Thank you, Per!

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An Aspect of the Clown Speaker

I am the one who loves blue flowers.

Blue Butterflies come to my hand and dance.

The sky is my nem shirt
And rocks are messages from that spider woman.

My idea is to go into your closets
And speak. (And meddle with everything while I’m there.)
Speak those messages
And see what we’ll do.

Sometimes I can say a sentence
And you are very still in your bed;
Like when you have felt something crawling on you
Under the covers, and you are not quite sure
You felt it.

The blue ocean puts sentences of broken shells
On the beach, written in some deep and spiral tongue.

On Matagorda Beach the trees are also twisted
By the wind’s insistent urging.

There I once found a part of a skull like a seashell.
Some Indian silent for a thousand years.

But the wind never speaks to me.
It only questions.

So I run into the woods and in desperation
trample blue flowers.
I say, “What is going on here!”
Everyone says they don’t know what I am talking about,
But I know you are hiding something.
Because didn’t I see you in that place?

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1 *Agurketid* (literally, “cucumber days”) is a term for a general lethargy in the news flow. Sometimes translated into English as “silly season,” this is a period during the summer months when public institutions such as the Folketing (parliament) are not in session and when the Folketing’s members are off on vacation, thus making it difficult for the news media to find any items that are genuinely newsworthy. Instead, the media transmits pseudo-news. *Agurketid* is taken from the German *Sauregurkenzeit* (“the sour pickles’ time”). In Germany, it has been used in trade language since the year 1780 to designate the “quiet time” in the summer. Around 1850, the usage of *Sauregurkenzeit* spread to the newspapers in Berlin, while the earliest occurrence of the Danish term appears to be in 1897.


5 Jimmie Durham (b. 1940): artist, essayist, poet, and maybe even my soulmate.


Untitled, 2015. Oil on panel. 122 x 104 cm. Kalle Lindmark
Tryck, 2015. Oil on panel. 140 x 101 cm. Kalle Lindmark
"The brightest clarity of the image was not enough for us: for it seemed to reveal as much as it concealed; and while it seemed, with its symbolic revelation, to demand that we tear down the veil, that we reveal the mysteries behind it, that brightly lit clarity kept the eye in thrall and resisted further penetration."
—Friedrich Nietzsche

I met a gaze in a fresco. More than two millennia separate the moment the eyes were painted from the moment I saw them. In front of an intensely red backdrop, in Villa dei Misteri in Pompeii, one can watch a young woman take part in a religious rite. Different ritual stages, bodies yellow as though glowing from within, dread, submission, bliss, choreography, ecstasy. Their stiff, slightly unnatural postures echo in my body. Along the walls, one watches the events unfold as a spectator, from the outside—with one exception: when the initiate is introduced, before she takes the step, she directs her gaze outwards, as though inviting a direct connection, allowing one to step into her. The eye contact makes it possible to feverishly experience the ritual with this young woman. The eye contact is a reminder that seeing and being seen are two sides of the same coin. This is highly charged. I see her, and she sees me.

Most people are familiar with the tension and intensity of looking somebody in the eyes, and experience it almost daily. There are people close to me who avoid eye contact to the point that they have made a habit of focusing their gazes on the bridge of the nose, between the eyes, of the people they face, to give the impression that they are making eye contact without actually doing so. I’m sure that a lot of people have also experienced the intense sensation of being watched from outside one’s field of vision, and discovered, after looking around, that the hunch was right. Or experienced the sensation of being watched without anybody actually being there. Reports of people who have felt watched in nature, by nature, are not uncommon, either. Paul Klee describes how he, during a walk through the woods, experienced being watched by the trees, rather than him watching them. In my childhood home, it used to seem to me that the dark silhouette on the small poster on the fridge was following me with its veiled eyes, and I would make sure to cover it up with one of the photographs, drawings, or magnets that cluttered the fridge door.

This tension in seeing and being seen can take various forms and reverberates through many layers and aspects of our being. It has attracted a lot of interest—not least from image-makers. This is plain to see in Diego Velázquez’s painting Portrait of Pope Innocent X (1650), in which this tension is given horrific guise in the piercing gaze of the pope, who is bizarrely slouched and upright at the same time in his rigid throne. In orthodox iconography, the primary direction of vision is reversed. One doesn’t stand in front of the icons to view those depicted in them; one stands there to be viewed by them. To emphasise this fact, shadows were not painted in icons. In the foreground of Pieter Aertsen’s Butcher’s Shop with the Flight into Egypt (1551), surrounded by abundant meats, charcuteries, and lard, the dead eye of the severed cow’s head mercilessly pins me with its gaze, and I have to strain to look past it at the background, where the scenario of the painting is played out. Or in some of Ivan Aguéli’s later landscapes, an absence is so forcefully present that the whole surface of the image is charged to the point that the picture itself seems to be looking back at you.

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan extensively explores the loaded relation of seeing and being seen in his theories of the split between the eye and the gaze. I will very briefly go over a few of his concepts, to serve as stepping stones. A familiar idea in psychoanalysis is that we are governed by a hidden unconscious. The control we seem to possess over our lives through consciousness is an illusion. In psychoanalysis, a current state can only be understood by going back in time, to understand why the unconscious is manifesting in this way. Lacan claims that as infants, we don’t experience ourselves as separate entities. We are fragmented and lack any real knowledge of where our bodies end and the outside world begins. We experience sensations through different body parts, but we can’t tell our own body parts from our mother’s breasts, for instance. Early in its development, when the child sees itself in the mirror, in what Lacan calls the “mirror stage,” the child identifies with its reflection in the mirror and perceives itself as a whole, separate from the rest of the world. In the mirror, the child sees a body being controlled by and obeying the conscious, which causes what Lacan refers to as a méconnaissance, a misunderstanding. The child is
under the illusion that it is a single controlled whole, despite being fundamentally split, with the unconscious conducting the way. This misunderstanding is the beginning of a lifelong struggle, in which the child seeks to maintain this illusory sense of itself as a controlled whole.

Now we’re getting to what I find so interesting about Lacan’s ideas: unlike Sigmund Freud, Lacan claims that the individual and its sexuality are shaped by language and by social and symbolic structures. In Lacan’s theories, the mirror stands for this, so when the child mistakes itself for a single whole when it sees itself in the mirror, this also reflects the way in which the child’s identity is imposed from the outside. As he develops his theories about the split between the eye and the gaze, Lacan claims that when we see it is with a desiring gaze that seeks a lost unity, as well as to see infantile fantasies fulfilled in the scopic field. This makes it difficult for us to see things for what they are. It results in our vision being split, with the vision of the eye being the rational, conscious seeing, which regards things in the light of logic. But when we see, we are also seen from the outside by the gaze, which constantly disturbs our vision. The gaze is not a matter of being directly watched by somebody, but rather, in Lacan’s words, “imagined by me in the field of the Other.” Thus, the gaze is not something we possess or employ. It sees us from the outside (imagined); it is a relationship. According to Lacan, painting is a way for artists to hide themselves and allow the viewer to be seen, but with the gaze pacified, since the viewer can sublimate erotic desire into contemplation of the image. Of course, this occurs unconsciously, and although the desire is not sated, as it never is according to Lacan, its consequences are interesting. It means that the artist is able to create an armature, or prepare a space for dialogue, with the painting. This and the idea that seeing is a sexual act, along with Lacan’s idea that it is language that shapes us and our sexuality, combine to make his ideas interesting to me. I will return to language, and to its relation to images, and to get there, I want to pick up where the painter left the prerequisites for dialogue—in front of the painting.

A road slices through the landscape, the ground gouged by wagon traffic and countless shoes and feet. The heel sticks to the vacuum of the mud being pressed between the toes. Like the face of a spoon against the skin, it is only after long and dedicated influence that it leaves its painful traces. A pair of deep wheel tracks with a hint of alizarin crimson adorn the umber road that leads me on into the picture before turning off to the left and disappearing behind the little hill on the left side of the painting. The right side of the road slopes down towards it as well, and towards where I’m standing, while also giving an odd impression that it is collapsing at the lower right of the painting. The right side of the road slopes down towards it as well, and towards where I’m standing, while also giving an odd impression that it is collapsing at the lower right of the painting. The sandy ground made up of specks of pale ochre, earthy green, and dusty pink is split by the road, which is wet and muddy from the activity at its surface. The moisture comes from beneath. Strangely enough, the road seems to be both elevated, almost suspended in midair, in relation to the ground to the right of it, while the horizon line suggests the opposite, set deep in relation
to the left side, which looks like a wave with teeth about to break over the road. Like the drawing in which one can see a duck or a rabbit, the position of the road oscillates. The landscape is clearly divided in two, just above the vertical centre, and although the horizon line separating the two parts is almost horizontal, the foreground of the picture billows like a waterbed slept in by somebody haunted by nightmares. The toughest and most resilient little plants and bushes of earthy green mixed with white cling to the sand despite the wind. The surface is lumpy and granulated, as though something was applying pressure to the visible layer of paint from behind, from underneath the image. That same layer is all that exists between me and that which is located along the wheel tracks, behind that corner. In the lower part of the canvas, paint has been applied using a brush, a brush handle, and a palette knife. It’s smeared and hazy and mixes with carefully depicted soil and vegetation to create a very precise blur that swirls across the foreground. Gilles Deleuze borrows André Bazin’s description of Jacques Tati’s soundscapes when he writes about different kinds of blur: “the blur is obtained, not by indistinctness, but on the contrary by the operation that ‘consists in

*Untitled*, 2015. Oil on panel. 91 x 71 cm. Kalle Lindmark
Surfacing installation, 2014. Oil on canvas. 65 x 55 cm. Kalle Lindmark
destroying clarity by clarity.”

In a similar fashion to the way Tati, instead of using indistinguishable murmurs, uses clearly recorded conversations in his films, which become indistinct by virtue of their superficial nature, the blur that billows over the ground in Carl Fredrik Hill’s *Hjulspår, Montigny* (1876) is clear. Appropriately, the road that splits the foreground in two is shaped like a dagger, and at the same time, like a snake slithering across the landscape. On each side of the road, a bit further along, three different sites are distinguishable: little, distinctive brushstrokes of orange, cobalt blue, reddish brown, and Naples yellow, which are distinctly different from the rest of the painting. They stand out and attract attention. What happened here? There is an intensely human presence in these specks of paint. The wheel tracks are mechanical and the road has been trodden on to the extent that individual footprints can no longer be distinguished—but those orange brushstrokes are obvious traces of a human presence. They testify to the events that took place here, to decisions that were made.

The top part of the painting is dominated by a dreary grey sky, like a rag stained with grease and hard work, in which one glimpses tentative cracks of blue sky just above and to the left of the centre. Below them, a little to the right, these small gaps in the clouds are contrasted with distinct dark greys twisted into the white sky with the brush, staining it with small oscillations to the right. In the middle of the picture, on the far side of the hill, we glimpse two solitary bushes or young trees. To the left of them is a grove of trees, which transitions into a forest at the painting’s left edge. The right side is also outlined by a distant forest. Perhaps it is the “forest that swayed deep below the milk of the waves and the thirsty wind, in the forest where the herb of secrets raised its black crown of pollen among the roots that were crawling down to the water carriers’ reservoir and the lizards’ wells.”

In the far distance, the outline of a town and a church steeple are hinted at. The town is in the area of the picture that the road I’m on is headed for before it abruptly breaks off to the left. Perhaps there are obstacles in the landscape that make a direct route to the town impassable. Perhaps this road doesn’t go there at all, maybe it leads to some other place. The road, after all, is not a static thing, but is constantly being made. The people who have travelled along this road might have been heading for the town, and then made an orange-marked decision to turn away from their intended direction and go left, *sinistra*, to some other destination.

I’m standing in this mud of oil paint with full awareness of, and thus clearly influenced by, the fact that two years after painting this scene, Hill was afflicted with what is presently referred to as paranoid schizophrenia. A transitional moment that drastically changed his life as well as his artistic production. Much has been said and written about Hill, his illness, and how it affected his work, and I won’t pursue that. The thing that strikes me more than anything else when I view *Hjulspår, Montigny* is the incredible presence and tension that exists in the painting. However, it also makes me very aware of my lack of ability to verbalise the various delicate frequencies of the painting. All I can offer are coarse and clumsy descriptions of a fraction of what is there (the only time I feel anything happen is when I allow Gunnar Ekelöf’s poetry to seep through). Most obviously, I notice my difficulty in doing justice to the humorous and warm aspects of the painting. Despite how clearly they reveal themselves to my eyes. I suspect that if somebody were to read my recollections after having viewed the painting, they would consider my description very onedimensional. I can see the many subtle levels, which are sometimes in direct contrast with one another, but I remain unable to capture them in words. It’s like in the dream where you keep brushing against the thing you’re trying to grasp over and over, but never quite manage to reach it. These very frequencies, which logically contradict one another, seem only to feed off of each other and grow exponentially. The fact that humour and tragedy are closely connected is old news, and in an effective painting I find these aspects will be crammed in next to a number of others. This is the very thing that creates the tension: that the painting constantly contradicts itself. Virginia Woolf wrote in her diary: “It must include nonsense, fact, sordidity: *but made transparent*.”

The tension and presence in Hill’s works is something Torsten Andersson, like many others, has also experienced, and when he writes about Hill, he chooses to focus on Hill’s pictures and his visual intelligence rather than on his illness. As Paul Cézanne, who was a contemporary of Hill, described landscape painting: “man absent from but entirely within the landscape”—something most present in *Hjulspår, Montigny*. By this, I don’t mean that I think Hill used the landscape as some kind of backdrop on which to project some inner state of being. On my reading of the work, it seems he painted the landscape the way he saw it—with precision. I read *Hjulspår, Montigny* as the mixture of Hill and the landscape. And it is because Hill painted the landscape the way he saw it that there is so much more than the landscape to see in it; of him, of his time, and of the viewer, in his or her own time. This is the context through which I understand Andersson when he writes about “visual intelligence.” Because painting is a craft. It is a craft that is learned by seeing and doing, by seeing and imitating, rather than through theory. Even when somebody who has experience of the same craft tells you something about execution and material, you can’t understand it until you’ve tried it yourself. The craft itself is about making choices, and since one’s understanding of the craft hasn’t been primarily acquired through spoken or written language, it can often be difficult to verbally present one’s works or explain one’s choices with sufficient precision, just as it can be difficult to describe one’s experience of a picture in a satisfactory fashion.
Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2015. Oil on panel, oil on canvas. Dimensions variable. Kalle Lindmark
(a fact I am constantly reminded of when I attempt to verbalise my encounters with Hjulspår, Montigny). Luc Tuymans claims that “the small gap between the explanation of a picture and a picture itself provides the only possible perspective on painting.” In other words, there is something that goes beyond spoken and written language in both the experience of and the creation of a picture. This means the challenges that visual artists often face when attempting to use language to pin down a painting are not necessarily the result of the painting having come to be through a series of unconscious decisions. The decisions made during the process may be informed by experiences that haven’t been acquired through language, but this does not make them any less conscious. This kind of knowledge is sometimes referred to as “tacit knowledge.” So, when Andersson writes about visual intelligence, I understand it to be a form of tacit knowledge.

The painting Hjulspår, Montigny, its brushstrokes every bit as vibrant today as on the day they were painted, a carrier of knowledge and experience that operates in the periphery of spoken and written language, extends towards me as a viewer. And because, despite its fixed form, it is in becoming just as much as I am before it, there is room for the picture to take place. I want to use the phrase “take place” because whenever I stand in front of an effective picture, I experience it as though seeing is replaced,
reformulated into something else. When I am shown something precise, I register the image through my sense of sight, but I experience it in my body. As Deleuze describes this: “it is in the body, even the body of an apple. Color is in the body, sensation is in the body, and not in the air. Sensation is what is painted. What is painted on the canvas is the body, not insofar as it is represented as an object, but insofar as it is experienced as sustaining this sensation.” A visual artist can’t solely rely on the represented elements within the picture. Deleuze goes even further when he discusses this in the context of Francis Bacon’s paintings:

The experience of a picture is not rational, and one can’t separate what is painted from how it is painted, just as one can’t speculate a painting into being. I often experience that the less the artist points at in a picture, the more the picture reveals to the viewer. Something present that is not explicitly stated becomes charged in a particular way. Refraining from formulating something is sometimes a way of drawing attention to it. Just as the word suggests, the invisible resides in the visible: in-visible. This absence can enable one to go deeper, or, as Tuymans puts it: “When something is not depicted it makes it more meaningful, more sexually loaded not in terms of the physicality but in the physicality of the painting itself.”

The fact that the experience of a painting is not rational or calculated can make it surprising. But getting something out of a painting often requires some effort. In an interview, Nina Roos touched on the problem of approaching “a work that offers no formulation programme.” She claims that people often approach paintings in order to encounter something they already know, and that they can react negatively if this recognition doesn’t occur:

Suddenly, the beholder has to refer to her “own” modes of seeing. Painting puts this seeing to trial. Painting always operates with certain limitations, and deals with reality in oblique, indirect ways. ... Painting cannot be unequivocal. ... Painting operates through minute, almost imperceptible, “analogous” shifts.

The open landscape in Montigny enfolds me, and I am made aware of the presence of choices. Just like the artist, and innumerable others, I also face choices here, among these orange specks of paint. Here, on the blade of the dagger, on the back of the snake, I’m in a place where I can think together with the artist, and mirror myself in the painting. Among the remains of his concerns, I notice that the wheel tracks in the mud lead in both directions. The road, which seemed so immutable, is suddenly nothing more than a number of separate journeys, which could change direction at any time according to these wishes of those making them. Not just reversing direction along the trodden road, but in any direction at all. At some point in time, the road went to the town; now it swerves away from it. Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote fittingly in regard to Cézanne’s painting:

We live in the midst of man-made objects, among tools, in houses, streets, cities, and most of the time we see them only through the human actions which put them to use. We become used to thinking that all of this exists necessarily and unshakably. Cézanne’s painting suspends these habits of thought and reveals the base of inhuman nature upon which man has installed himself. This is why Cézanne’s people are strange, as if viewed by a creature of another species.

I remain sitting in front of the painting, with the question staring back at me: What lies beyond that hill, beyond the paint, underneath the blue streaks of sky?

And in Closing, Some Words about Painting (In the Studio)

“Our organs are not instruments; on the contrary, our instruments are added-on organs.” —Maurice Merleau-Ponty

Painting and its history are closely knit, and painting is read through its history. This fact presents opportunities as well as resistance, just like the material itself does. However, there are also a number of common preconceptions about painting. To me, painting is (“just”) a medium; a tool for communication. This might sound obvious, but it is worth repeating. It’s a tool for communication, through which I am able to experience and mediate things using my body. Simultaneously direct and fragmented, non-linear and very precise. This means that I don’t feel any need to revolt against earlier expressions in painting, or reinvent the medium. Neither do I feel any need to act as a defender of any particular tradition, in some other respect. To me, it’s about being precise. Whether or not something is pretty, good, ugly, and so on is just an arbitrary effect (which might just as well signify its opposite, depending on how it is used). If one brings value judgments such as these into one’s work, I believe one runs the risk of simply trading one cliché for another, and in the long run, contributing to a domain where one can confirm what one already knows over and over. And while I have spoken fondly and passionately of painting, I find the kind of paintings that attempt to satisfy this seemingly unquenchable thirst dreadfully dull. I don’t mean to say that it is necessary to do something new, or
take the medium anywhere in particular. But painters’ desperate attempts to illustrate the explanatory structures erected around their painting, through their painting, in some isolated cycle of meaning, are of no interest to me. Paintings in which, to revisit Tuyman’s model, the gap between the explanation and the image itself shrinks to the point that the experience has to be shoehorned in.

The components of a painting, such as light, space, colour, and contrast, are not elements that I focus on in isolation from anything else when I paint. A certain state might require some specific lighting or spatiality, but this is never an element in focus independently of the others; they are all just parts that have to function together in a certain way to be made precise. I have no interest in drawing attention to the process. I experience the process of working on a painting as complex at times, and occasionally interesting, but it has no value in itself to be regarded separately from the painting and cerebrally woven into the experience of the piece after the fact. For me, working is about creating conditions that are conducive to reaching that state where things happen. I know today. This last year at the academy is really something—I can’t take this further, but for a painting to be effective, something—even just a detail—has to happen to make it go beyond what I know, beyond the reach of my ability.

Time is an interesting aspect of painting, which I would like to just touch on briefly here. Many people have commented on the fact that time behaves strangely in painting. After finishing a painting, I discovered that the light in it had an effect similar to one I had seen in a decaying fresco I came across in Sri Lanka a few years ago. At the time, I was spellbound by it, but I hadn’t given it much thought since then, until I recognised the effect in my own painting. In the same interview mentioned above, Roos described how her paintings sometimes even seem to be about the future. Another aspect of time in relation to painting is the large amount of time required to get anywhere (at least this is the case for me). I need to have time set aside for painting to be able to enter the special state that I seek. Going to the studio, day after day, without any interruptions. I can’t simply have a day to spare and expect anything to come out of it. But it takes time in a broader sense, too. As I stated earlier, an understanding of an aspect of a craft can’t be acquired by any other means than practising the craft. And it’s taken me a lot of time to arrive at the things I know today. This last year at the academy is really the first time I’ve felt that I’m actually close to reaching what I am trying to do.

To conclude, I want to emphasise that you don’t need to know anything about me, my background, my interests, or any of the references I’ve mentioned here to view my paintings. My paintings are supposed to be able to stand alone. It might seem naive, but the things that go into the creation of a painting, the combination of experience, theory, tacit knowledge, and so on, need to be present in the painting in another form. When I’m finished, it’s up to the viewer to take over, whoever he or she may be, and whatever he or she may know.

2 Many of the details are mysterious, and the exact nature of the ritual depicted in the fresco is not known. Most indications suggest that it is a rite of initiation into a secret cult of Dionysus, performed in the presence of Dionysus, Ariadne, satyrs, and sileni. A union of human and mythical reality.
6 Carl Fredrik Hill, Hjulspar, Montigny, 1876, oil on canvas, 65.5 x 77.2 cm. In the collection of Malmö Art Museum.
8 As Gunnar Ekelöf wrote in a poem dedicated to Hill. Gunnar Ekelöf, quoted in Johan Cullberg et al., Carl Fredrik Hill (Laholm: Trydells Tryckeri, 1999), 203.
Andersson further claims to have been so affected by Hill’s work, on such a deep level and for such a long time, that he isn’t influenced by Hill, he is Hill. Torsten Andersson, “Arbetsanteckningar,” in Torsten Andersson (Värnamo: Fält och Hässler, 2002), 114.


“Where in the realm of the understanding can we place these occult operations, together with the potions and idols they concoct? What can we call them? Consider, as Sartre did in Nausea, the smile of a long-dead monarch which keeps producing and reproducing itself on the surface of a canvas. It is too little to say that it is there as an image or essence; it is there as itself, as that which was always most alive about it, the moment I look at the painting. The ‘world’s instant’ that Cézanne wanted to paint, an instant long since passed away, is still hurled towards us by his paintings.” Merleau-Ponty, “Eye and Mind,” 130.

See Nietzsche: “What do we understand to be the boundaries of our neighbour: I mean that with which he as it were engraves and impresses himself into and upon us? We understand nothing of him except the change in us of which he is the cause.” Friedrich Nietzsche, Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 118.


Deleuze, Francis Bacon, 32.

Ibid., 34–35.

Tuymans, Luc Tuymans, 28.


Ibid., 32–33.


Further references


The corner candy store contains flavours that will never become part of your selection. Juices that won’t get to caress your absorbing tongue. Letting it passionately blend its saliva with new liquors, before they’d gently slip and glide down your slide. Where sensors would soak up the new relations, setting up additive connections in your private rhizome.

The refined experience would have been filed and contained within your archive of references. A multiplicity of mouth-moaning memories. Striving for a complex achievement. A level potentially attained just by including the cellophane-wrapped pieces paralleling your assortment of favoured flavours. Being only scoops away from the tastes that would decipher the imaginary. Avoiding the piles of these delights represses an expanded experience.

Surrendered to natural selection. Pleasures taken seriously.

An array of lust
projected onto cosmic dust.
Interstellar time,
billions of light years waiting in line.
Infinite possession.
A timeline in tangles.
Merge perception.
Suffer from mangles.

Seek to be seduced by visuals complex enough to suspend disbelief. Carefully collect materials with wanted connotations. Selectively add imagery that carries its weight in allegorical accompaniment. Pierce through to the content beneath that which reaches the retina, and unleash the potential stored in untitled1 constellations. Be the moderator of how the objects get to relate internally. Urge them to perform at the outermost of their capacities. Lay the groundwork with your weapon of choice,2 and make the most layered move.

You’ve come here to play. Notice how sturdy the control lies in your hands. Use the device to rapidly shift between perspectives, to maintain a constant overview. You don’t slay it easy. Make lithe manoeuvres as you watch from above while keeping your ten toes in the sand.3 Interconnect core and periphery in a pyramidal hierarchy. Not in the straight way. Carefully preserve dynamics. You’re in between colliding continental plates. Position yourself wisely. Or you might not stay.

Orient yourself throughout the variable dimensions between strong integrity, concentrated intensity, and fundamental density. Track these factors and watch how neatly they merge together. Construct the foundation with the aim to continue their expansion. The growth seeks to mine time, on its search for fertilised ground. Where the merge can gain its lusciness from newly acquired equivalents. While exploring the narrowest of wells. All the way out towards hidden matter. To where the interstellar still serves to reveal time, as billions of light years shine in a waiting line. Gaze, nurture on a broadened knowledge, and suck up information with grace.

Stand en pointe4 on current ground. Allow yourself to feel how this timeless classic stubbornly positions you in the present, by intensely reminding every fibre in your body of the physical strain. The striving for precision adjusts the historical context to a contemporary perspective. Lower it down to your touch with common ground. Where the current crust is revealing dew-fresh curves. Extend from this origin5 and push your capacity towards an equilibrial pose. It’s a balancing act. An intermezzo between the now and the floods of the future.

“Truth no doubt continues to assert itself. However, no matter how it asserts itself, it still remains hidden. Such is its nature. Similar to death and eroticism it does in fact conceal itself: it conceals itself at the very moment it reveals itself. A more obscure contradiction cannot be imagined, nor one better contrived to guarantee a resonation disorder.”6

Sustain a close dialogue with relevance. Set up a game of ping-pong between you and your body of resources. Keep a sharp eye on its changing structure. Best viewed from an inverted perspective. Hover over its hemisphere. Thoroughly like Hubble. Copy flair. Celebrate finesse. Address distances independent of time. Note your observations on stacks of blueprints. A soft scroll through the pages reveals the sympathy laid down in the weight of each remark. Have to value the sincerity. Now, place out the mesh. This is how you contextualise the contemporary. Time is a fictional
structure to which only a certain pattern of references attach. Looped in ever self-effacing cut offs, and ever self-renewing double knots.

Raise your head for the colour red.7 The first wavelength darkness will shed.

Keep one constant. 
unlink internal scale. 
Paint the red thread in 
cadmium yellow pale. 
Escape the conventional. 
Enter the sensational. 
Demand from the viewer a slow phase. 
Embrace the whole space. 

Indulge in the freedom found in the relics that survived themselves. Defenescless subjected to free interpretations. Have no respect for religious, mythological, or scientific borders. Be a brutal consumer of astrological as well as pop cultural resources. Mine them for their most valued players. Kill for the trophies, and run the remnants through the same meat grinder. Feel the pleasure + pressure of tearing texture. Open wounds heal in new constellations. The different components remain the same. But the original context is removed and replaced by altered relations. An uncanny blend.

“Beauty is desired in order that it may be befouled; not for its own sake, but for the joy brought by the certainty of profaning it.”8

Have a taste of the temporary. And remember that 99.9999999999999 percent of every bite consists of emptiness. Vacuum space. Take the advantage to fill it up with parallel presents. Imagine the atmosphere conceived in the blow of a soap bubble. Encrust it with all the dreams you’ve eaten in the past.9 Each mouthful is a piece of the total feast. It’s just that some of the ingredients get lost in passing moments. However, the recipe was just pure fiction. But any fiction produces a reality.

“When the virtual image is recognized, the memory of the present is accompanied by a perception of the memory.”10

Use materials coherent with the way they convey their content. Include nothing without precise contributions. Then select the best medium suited for the performance. Like cream. Analysed to fit specific requirements. Vessels holding invisible structures, needed for the realisation of the intention. Beyond eyesight. For the love of systemised communication routes channelised through handmade delights. Each handled with concern and the encouragement to become an independent piece. At the same time as the third eye is linked to its origin.

It is futile to implement visuals directed towards only one singular intention. The inherent value will change depending on the different connotations gained from a diversity of meetings. From every reaction, it grows in range, as each perception keeps adding layers in exchange. As different as index fingers in variation. Mirror that quality and convert the function into the practical aspect of the presentation. Serve individual experiences through a menu based on continuous change. Let the flow take the viewer’s time, and not the other way around. Lead along among distorted, invading, moving, and unavailable content, asking to be viewed from different angles. Directed in and out of duration. Dealing a deathblow to the concept of infinite knowledge.11 You are told stories in order to remain persistent.

Be the interrogator of every influence you obtain. Reflect on all the tendencies that seek admission throughout your everyday life. Regardless of your awareness of the inputs that gain access to your consciousness, you will become a mirror of everything you obtain. A distributor of information, no matter whether intended or not. Spreading out a large scale of unconscious knowledge. Creating voids of undisclosed content.

The Constant Cognitive Collapse

You’re not given more than what the sequence gains in return. Only those who invest in time will learn.

The lights are passing on, dis/appearing in a wave of rays, in and out of an opaque, mirrored face. Offering a discomforting satisfaction from the withheld information. Asking you to pierce through your own reflection. Imagine what’s kept in the gradient and beyond. Watch the succession. Dream the mainstream.

“Painting escapes idealistic stagnation. Even though it takes liberties with regard to exactitude and to the real world, it wants above all to destroy idealism.”12

Simultaneously pierce through the painting itself, as it unveils all its layers. From raw canvas to the final state. A process of ongoing dissections. Examined for its ability to balance a controlled tension between form, technique, colour, and time. Hence the experiment with time itself, and the curiosity for what ways it can be used as a tool to level dynamic relations across an energetic composition. A dialogue with a dimension in constant change. Catch it while peaking. Coat the work with its most intense potential. Connect the visual elements in a constellation, bouncing off each other’s voltage in a rhythm most essential. Draw your own nebula.

Organise the motive in a primary, secondary, and tertiary composition. Flatten barriers, never layers. There are infinite depths behind the first impression. Unconditional parallels. Penetrate their agenda through an overlay of content, technical implementation, mutual structure, metaphorical framework, and the physical present. Read internal scale. Exceed the canvas. As its actuality never expires.
"The truth is that it is futile to introduce an enigma at once so essential, and yet posed in the most violent form, independently of a well-known context, a context that, however, remains in essence veiled by reason of the very structure of human beings. It remains veiled to the extent that human mind hides from itself."

Out of a whole, only parts are made accessible. Soft lights travel with irregular intensity, revealing the scenario that unfolds behind laminated glass. Your own reflection is added to your contemplation. The figurative composition is as tense as a bow. The pigments emphasise this intense state. No oil is running. The lights rotate. The irregularity in the revelation of the painting causes consciousness of not getting to know everything. An awareness of withheld information. Feel the hunger. The lights reveal a present totality where only bits and pieces are served. It contains flavours that never become part of your selection.

Scarse Poetics

There’s a natural glitch to everything. Reality is not placed in a position where a total understanding can be achieved at once. Laminated glass stands in a fan formation. The projection cannot be seen all at once. On top of a forced imagination, all perception undergoes an ocular autocorrection. An instant repair of the blind spot. A physical restraint to the extent that everything you perceive is a constructed precision. Indeed a neat equivalence to the actual condition. Acknowledge how the original code is converted from real time to text file. Becoming a victim of internal distortion. Before converted back to current truth. Hence how information has been moved and removed during the tearing of time. Make a selection and add frames to a narrow section. Fill in the gaps between dense memory and the story that gets passed on. The intensity is decreased to a slow phase. Take your time to observe all the details, this last time.

Death is the final caretaker, when cognitive management fails to preserve its content. The cortex suffers from an apocalyptic strike back. Contextual fallout. A predicted inability to restore decaying coordinates. Most of which have been forgotten in a conscious mode. Witness the escalating violence of freed fragility. Implose. Loads as massive as the collapse of their cores.

"Nothing used to thrill me like
Your candy flipping night flights
But now I’m all out of charity
I’m all out of change"
“We cannot exist, we cannot live humanly except through the meanderings of time: the totality of time alone makes up and completes human life. Consciousness at its origin is fragile—because of the violence of the passions; it comes to light a little later on because of their attenuation. We cannot scorn violence, nor can we laugh at its remission.”

No Monopoly in Smooth Spaces
Still radiating from six feet under. But whereas supernovas are kept present in their reminiscing over a lost life, the trespassing of human experience fades with the decomposing body. All bonds gradually tear apart, often with great help from the thorns of time. Yet consisting of the mass of energy it took to be killed, because despite their trespassing, their radiation is as strong as supernovas. Though the text file is further encrypted. Such are the private settings.

Observe how a delicate weave of video bands surround the moving body. Paradoxically caging in its mobility with a restraining leather component. One initiated for its overriding trait. The body piece veils its inherent content. In the same way that the face’s identity is veiled by the identical, laminated glass. Detect the red thread. This time you can’t pierce through. Reality comes in codes we cannot decipher, in mediums we cannot read, and in reflections we don’t know how to return. This is the basis for the fictional
recipe. The glazing is required, regardless of the right ingredients. Every perception forces a reaction. Even when solely containing the void the video band left behind. Being an impervious codex between you and your source of information. Mirror this until your own culmination.

Whereas in the dim of night, surrounded by unachievable light. Deep down beneath hollow ground, is the circuit vulnerable if found.

Beneath layers of soil lie memories of the past scattered like star signs across the sky. An archaeological coexistence stored in distant light sources. A collection of recordings set to rec. mode throughout a lifespan.

A real-time archive, acted out under controlled conditions. Time didn’t bother too much about all the loose strings dragging along. But now they form a three-dimensional mandala, a whole, now that they are jointed all together. A fulfilled pattern, organised so neatly, from the most detailed point of view to the largest overview. The accomplishment is too superior for time to handle. The final touch is fatal. Truth sets you free, now that it is finished with you. The final boss is defeated. The game is completed.

Decompose at the final disco
Dance all the way into limbo
Glow in vain
For no one ever to obtain
Dear denier
Exit this apocalypse to enter another
Pierre Huyghe, Untilled, dOCUMENTA 13, Kassel, 2012. Huyghe’s is a work exposed in and composed by previously uncombined elements.

Fatboy Slim, “Weapon of Choice,” Halfway between the Gutter and the Stars, Astralwerks, 2001. In a scene from the music video directed by Spike Jonze, Christopher Walken dances through a corridor of infinity mirrors. The line “Check out my new weapon, weapon of choice” is a reference to the science-fiction novel Dune by Frank Herbert.


Solaris, feature film, directed by Andrei Tarkovsky (Soviet Union: Creative Unit of Writers & Cinema Workers, Mosfilm, Unit Four, 1972).

Bataille, Tears of Eros, 146.

Ibid., 53.


Bataille, Tears of Eros, 164–65.

“The truth will set you free. But not until it is finished with you.” David Foster Wallace, Infinite Jest (Boston: Little, Brown, 1996), 389.

Further references

I Am So Bored, But You Are Alright, 2015. Installation view. 4-channel HD video installation with sound through four speakers. 4 x HD video looped.
Sandra Mujinga
My Uncle Featuring Ben Affleck, George Clooney and Robin Wright, 2015. Nylon thread and matte print, detail. 300 x 110 cm. Sandra Mujinga
With this text I will try to update my Google Docs as often as possible. While I do that, I will also be very appreciative of an earlier self that once scribbled on notebooks while actually listening and responding to another voice on the other line.

Make people believe—Some thoughts on stalking my uncle on Facebook
The pathetic phonetic immersion, but never the patience to start the same sentence all over again, I just compensate with another one. +242 call accompanied by a Silke ringtone, or is that my alarm? Thinking that the last mobile device that had a signature ringtone must have been Nokia, still contemplating whether it’s appropriate to answer or not, knowing it will result in me talking too loud in the shop, not hearing myself. I receive a Snapchat from my brother, and while there are still some seconds left before the message disappears, I drop everything I am carrying to take a screenshot of him crying after having seen the Star Wars: Episode VII—The Force Awakens trailer.

My right arm is hurting, now you know, and I realise that I am not used to having the phone pressed against my ear, only used to seeing the reflection of my face on it. Now, oh! How every letter is melting on the tongue, no, this is what I hoped would happen. Instead, discordant sound, sweat, and embarrassment pouring out. No, dogs don’t sweat through their tongues. Wantee? Drinking tea could go hand in hand with sedating your sweat glands. Wantee? Maybe apps like uTalk are not enough to reconcile my Lingala, and I will still have to have frequent conversations with my family to remember the language. Wantee? Later I write to my uncle on Facebook; he seems somehow confused since it was only a couple of hours ago he spoke to me on the phone. What he does not get is that I find it really awkward calling and receiving calls. I am used to texting and expressing my emotions through Facebook stickers. In a performance, my voice hosts the effects that expand in a space like a strong odour, but I just seem to battle with sincerity answering the phone. How can my voice bear the weight?

The delays, in a performance, my voice hosts the effects that expand in a space like a strong odour. The monitors are there to help me to be a better listener, but I already have my voice in mind. I know my voice, and through it I can be anything. It manoeuvres through different static bodies, goes through different phases, and possibly scatters like breadcrumbs if someone receives a phone call. The act of ostentation: sometimes it’s not enough to say that an object is that object, and one has to use the index finger. I am now calling you out, not by pointing at you but by adding an “at” sign before your name, and creating an entangled system of relations to a person you possibly met at an art opening last week. The moving image capturing Laure Prouvost’s grandparents’ “fictional” living room gives room for this entangled system of different time zones. I am left wondering if I am amenable to a story being shared with me without creating parallel layers of seconds of moving images from social media that are embedded in my daily rituals and trending Internet memes that are circulating. Waving index finger left, right. At the moment I just sound angry. Why did my uncle not just text me? Wantee?

“So much of Chorus was constructed by spying on my own online habits. It felt fitting to invite Akihiko, who I had been spying on online for a long time before my approach, to contribute the visual treatment of the piece.” —Holly Herndon

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“Everything’s Embarrassing

“If networked technologies in general, and social media in particular, generate ideal listening subjects of twenty-first century—for individuals, politicians, consumers, parents and corporations—they also reveal the human limits of attention.”
—Kate Crawford

With this text I will try to update my Google Docs as often as possible. While I do that, I will also be very appreciative of an earlier self that once scribbled on notebooks while actually listening and responding to another voice on the other line.

Make people believe—Some thoughts on stalking my uncle on Facebook
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still has not commented on it. Maybe it’s too much, being that he still has the image of himself and Robin Wright as a profile picture, having his digital representation activated through opening another link with documentation of an IRL representation of the same image. While the exhibition was running, the gallery guests did not believe that he had actually met the celebrities. They thought of course it was Photoshopped.

The work is not waiting for you; it is turning its back to the exit door. As a shallow being you are in a hurry to see the front. All you care about is the looks. It’s possible Robin Wright was in DR Congo for charity work, possibly as research for her House of Cards character Claire Underwood (already a spoiler). Either way, she is still there in and through the image, and perhaps still in an animated world. Layers and storage, and thinking through and with the objects, thinking by way of doing, and mapping thought processes and sharing, hoping that the feedback might have some relevance in a time when everybody wants to be liked.

Jacques Attali’s intention is not only to theorise about music but also to theorise through music. Chapter three of his book Noise: The Political Economy of Music, entitled “Representing,” starts with: “Make people believe. The entire history of tonal music, like that of classical political economy, amounts to an attempt to make people believe in a consensual representation of the world.” While I worked on My Uncle Featuring Ben Affleck, George Clooney and Robin Wright (2015), I was listening to the experimental music producer Ben Frost, whose recent projects include the soundtrack to Richard Mosse’s film installation The Enclave (2013). The track “Nolan,” from Frost’s most recent album A U R O R A (2014), was on repeat on my iPod, and listening to it was a way of keeping myself in a specific state, and when things became difficult, I would have to turn it off before it became too dramatic. But it was also a way of mapping out time, with the song being my timer instead of me being synchronised to regular time. I also don’t have a TV for the same reason. While the track operated as a sticker to express my excitement and, in some sense, fear, over the Master’s show, I was still ambiguous about it being a soundtrack to my state of being, to how I was dealing with the way the materials in my work had different levels of sensitivity. Pausing the song and then starting to track felt like relief from dry hands after applying hand lotion, but also like hands covered in glycerin, first sticky, then slippery.

Music makes us believe, but it is we who give meaning. Music then becomes a meaningless language, as it does not even operate as a signifier, because the signified is constructed by us. Music has to be in itself. I don’t really have to delete “Nolan” because I was so stressed during that period. I should start drinking tea. The methods I use to distort the sound samples and moving-image samples mingle with each other. When I have worked with people in my performances, I have always found it interesting that when they experience their own voices pitched up or down, they react with humour. While on the other hand, when they see their faces warped, it becomes an
immediate disturbance. One way of taking this analysis further has been giving them items such as an iPad and letting them capture and distort themselves. It results in the subjects in front of me effectively performing in their natural environment. That is, they perform for the screen just as they perform every day. Fast-forwarding. Now I am laughing, I think I am seduced. The transition to Laure Prouvost’s installation at Unlimited at Art Basel 2014 went easy, and I position myself so that I don’t see the guests entering. I don’t mind sitting throughout the whole thing. Fast-forwarding this, and this time not explaining why I use poor images. Buffering thoughts, and Prouvost’s hands are constantly skipping the timeline; the voice is in the foreground. I am the shallow one.

I Can Delete It, It Is Not Happening Now
Field research and disembodiment(s). The models in my performance I Can Delete It, It Is Not Happening Now (2015)7 are surprised that I use only five minutes to record them in front of a deep-pink-coloured fabric (that I have explained will function as a blue screen). “Are you sure?” “Should I try the facial expression again?” Now in a digital landscape, paradoxically carrying with me a notebook. My handwriting is getting worse, and I complete my thoughts with an image captured on my phone. Descriptions are all that matter, and an image of the Shiba Inu8 is not dependent on comic sans. Later I show them how I have used an app to create the facial expressions that I actually wanted, and merged the result with their face. But why were they actually there?

Hey, now that you are here, I can stop analysing the LOL. Please don’t have any subtitles on Netflix if you actually understand the language, and I hope your Mac is not overheated. There is never enough space, but replacing your hard drive could be a good idea, and let silence occupy space, too. The facial expressions are good enough, but the real heroes are the ones who remain in the dark.
Two tourists are standing outside a supermarket, and one of them shouts: “Man, it’s hot as hell!” and a man passing by hears this. The man passing by picks up the pace and runs as fast as he can to meet his friend and he says: “Those tourists are crazy...” —No, instead of picking up the pace, he stops up and asks them: “What? Have you been to...” —No, he picks up the pace and runs in a fearful and dramatic manner to his friend waiting for him across the street and says, “You won’t believe this, I passed a couple of people over there have been to...” —No, he says: “You won’t believe this, those people over there have been to...” —No, he says: “The craziest thing just happened, I think on the way here I heard a man say that he had been to...” (My attempt at sharing a joke I was told more than ten years ago.)

Performing Heartbreaks
In my teenage years in Nairobi, the highlight of the day was hanging out with my youngest uncle and his friends. When my closest friends were away at boarding schools, I would join my uncle and his friends and we would sit outside in groups. My uncle always had new jokes to share, and I would concentrate and try as hard as I could to remember the jokes so that I could share them with my friends when they came home from boarding school. When we weren’t listening to his jokes, we would swap VHS tapes with neon-green title stickers and watch movies like A Thin Line between Love and Hate (1996) starring Martin Lawrence, Baby Boy (2001) starring Tyrese Gibson, also known as simply “Tyrese,” and Snoop Dogg, and my favourite: Two Can Play that Game (2001) starring Vivica A. Fox. Jokes are materials that are fluid, constantly sensitive to the power relations in a given space, echoing performances and laughter. And now one experiences it through streaming and sometimes bad Internet connections, always laughing after the pre-recorded audience. Going back to the use of vocals: the voice was not synchronised with the movement of the body. Laughing in the wrong places; Vivica A. Fox does not tickle everybody, but remembering that since the subtitles weren’t present, the jokes became immediate. Always a delay. When I had someone like my uncle in the room who would immediately laugh at his own jokes, he became the timer. Now. Still don’t get it.

In a recent interview, Björk mentioned being embarrassed about “Black Lake,” a song from her latest album Vulnicura (2015). This came after a previous answer in which she stressed the difficulty of talking about lyrics that host the heartbreak she has gone through, because the lyrics became so teenage and so simple. I was not hardened to how songs about heartbreak became a vernacular and a template for songwriting when I was a teenager, and I am still not. In Nairobi, I was writing and recording songs and singing along with them before I even knew what any of it meant. Spending time hanging out with people older than me resulted in them saying things like, “Chilling out in the sun and drinking blueberry Fanta is the coolest thing in the world!” and me thinking exactly that; and if I didn’t, I would convince myself to think the same within a couple of days.

Heartbreak became a performance, and one would write notes to the admired one and hope for the best. A boyfriend meant standing ten metres apart and waving demonstratively so that your friends could see it. And when I was dumped for the first time, I simply stated sentences I remembered from watching Ricki Lake’s talk show and sung a Destiny’s Child song. Until it no longer was like that and it felt like the outermost layer of my skin suddenly fell down like a cloth and I could sense every dust particle landing on me.

PVC Plastic and Being Authentic while Wearing Synthetic Second-hand Clothes
“Use surfaces that can become solid or dissolve into gossamer meshes, surfaces that can fold like curtains, shrink or expand. Let things turn on themselves and move; let lines broaden into surfaces.”
—Kurt Schwitters

In the film Under the Skin (2013), in which the main protagonist (The Female) is portrayed by Scarlett Johansson, one is introduced to a character using her/his/its appearance solely as a tool for food consumption. The skin that s/he/it carries becomes a favourable trait; through continuous feedback, s/he/it understands the appearance is likable and attracts prey. S/he/it mainly uses the mirror to put on lipstick, and her/his/its smile is so precise, it’s like s/he/it has studied emojis. Facial expressions are constantly exercised, but for this “female” character, it becomes like comedians Ilna Glazer and Abbi Jacobson doing their micro-impressions. There is no time, people lose their attention and interest before you know it, and we have to strip our communications down to their essence.

Now I have to go down the stairs every thirty minutes. Preferably run down the stairs, and up again, in order to not get caught up in my own thoughts. I sit still very often, and the burning muscles trigger past events and evoke specific images from a certain timespan: the years 2005–08, when I took physical education in senior high school. Today I am more preoccupied with documenting what I eat than physical education in senior high school. Today I am

Going back to The Female in Under the Skin: she has sex for the first time, and later on she
I Am So Bored, But You Are Alright, 2015. 4-channel HD video installation with sound through four speakers, detail. 4 x HD video looped.

Sandra Mujinga
starts studying what’s between her legs. She does not have any preconceived image of it, and her study is solitary. Can it be a vagina, if she has never seen another vagina before? Solipsistic? Spoiler alert! It is not until the end of the film, after having been harassed, raped, and then torched that The Female rediscovers that she is the other, realising that the man continues to burn her particularly because of her appearance.

The surface of The Female reveals itself. Underneath the skin, humans have the same colour, and if race and gender can be argued to be purely ideological, then this is not the case for The Female. What had been the features that gave her/his/it immediate protection and advantages burn off like plastic. When they are no longer present, she/he/it is recognisable as other, alien, to the human eye. I think I actually have to invest in a new pair of Nike workout tights. Synthetic fabrics, in conversation, in relation, in transition to our skin and bone movements while not adapting to the environment. PVC plastic, mercilessly hosting our sweat, shallow presumptions of its ability to protect us from germs. I am guilty of who I am wearing.

When I saw Destroy, She Said (1969) by Marguerite Duras, I thought the sound had always been present. The event. Of course this was greatly affected by the fact that I had read the book, and as with any good film, there are constantly tiny discoveries, like the discovery of the absence of a composed musical score, that the sound is uncomfortable, that it is present, reveals itself, or even the fact that one actually is hearing it. Like sitting in a restaurant and suddenly noticing the sound of a specific person eating, and the aural space gets side-chained and the ambient sound of the space filters out. Low pass only. You were always there. Before, one could hear
the breathing in a phone conversation; now, one can see that the message is read, reading between messages, and the mute presence, still waiting for other discoveries to reveal themselves.

I facilitate and create a space for these digital objects to interact and, being interested in their present recycled way of being, I want to be a good host. Materials, and material descriptions, also create narratives and poetry, name these sound files like giving nicknames to relatives. As a good host, I am more interested in what they do, by not insisting that they should feel at home. It is difficult to be a good listener, and there are probably too many good listeners out there who I can’t compete with. But these objects are doing things, and they are interacting with each other. It becomes a way of working with bodies without narratives. In Under the Skin, The Female learns about the narrative of the body together with the viewers.

It can be heartbreaking to discover different kinds of love. It can be heartbreaking to encounter different ways to love. It can be heartbreaking not to be loved the way you specifically imagine that you are loved. We all love in our own ways and through our own means. If one chooses to believe that one is still surrounded by love, even though it is something other than expected, maybe there will be room not to believe but just to know. One cannot always project and at the same time hope to be mimicked. Let’s start off with finding karaoke videos with relaxing backgrounds, and while singing, if parallel layers containing different interpretations occur, let’s not panic but continue to participate with our own phonetic interpretations.

We could also change desktop backgrounds more often; they probably affect us more than we would like to think.

Dark Angel

“But contrary to Benjamin’s interpretation, the Modern who, like the angel, is flying backward is actually not seeing the destruction; He is generating it in his flight since it occurs behind His back! It is only recently, by a sudden conversion, a metanoia of sorts, that He has suddenly realized how much catastrophe His development has left behind Him.”

—Bruno Latour

From one material to the other, not leading, but subscribing, following, stalking. Comfort in sorting out the desktop, organising the folders, feeling better about being a hoarder, continuing to collect digital objects. Creating efficient systems that can host the tabs. Always too many tabs, and I’m never sure whether I have finished reading an article or not. Taking breaks by answering e-mails, retweeting, and regramming. By regramming, sharing a trailer, glimpses of what my future projects might look like. Like it? Will you Ge.tt on the next exhibition? Eating chickpea soup, dipping bread in hummus, double denim. Is that a quote? Selections of selections, presenting it on another timeline, on parallel timelines.

Not mourning the loss of aura, sorry not sorry. Walter Benjamin writes:

The mass is a matrix from which all traditional behavior toward works of art issues today in a new form. Quantity has been transmuted into quality. The greatly increased mass of participants has produced a change in the mode of participation. The fact that the new mode of participation first appeared in a disreputable form must not confuse the spectator.

Historical objects, constantly being distorted, shared, and distributed, still not sorry, but at least I know who Paul McCartney is. Mean tweets circulating, and celebrities insisting that they are not solely avatars. “Real” people behind the tweets, but the distance to empathy is getting longer and longer. Do commentators demonstratively try to remove themselves from their contribution to the conversations through lack of empathy? Holding on to the videogame controllers, surely all the participating gamers have the same point of departure? Parallel to expressing ourselves through stickers, when we are online we tend to already assume that the other gamers can handle the level of violence circulating. If the aura has been long lost in “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin has already challenged the artist in regards to reclaiming the aura. Where is it, and how are we placing it in art that mediates our knowledge? In having at least ten different sites displaying art exhibitions, are we absent-minded in hosting quantity over quality?

Performance lectures and public speaking can be seen as direct ways of sharing knowledge, with both centred on displaying interest and sharing particular knowledge. As an artist, I am constantly participating, scanning through objects, and, however long the journey might be, the objects will become digital in the end. Transforming the knowledge through art as a medium that will be distributed online. If the Internet is the stage for displaying know-hows and we are all on it, and we can just Google this and that, does that not mean the premises are the same for all of us? For Jacques Rancière, the notion of the passive spectator is ambiguous, and the relation between the “educator” and the “student” cannot be simplified to active and passive roles. If there is already stored knowledge, it has to feed into what we contribute with, just like the ads in my Gmail sidebar. Ads comfort us with the message that our interests are real and important, but it has always been a complicated thing keeping it real.

It’s a Complicated Thing, Being Real

Mike Hadreas, known to most people as Perfume Genius, talks about facing ugly sides of oneself in order to write songs. The lyrics of Perfume Genius’s third album, Too Bright (2014), are catchy, and at times it even feels like reading someone’s personal notes. As a listener you draw parallels between Hadreas’s
songwriting and his previous activity in the online community Second Life. In Second Life there was not a need for his “ugly” avatar to “belong” anywhere, and the ugly aspects of his character could be regularly practiced, such as purchasing unnecessary things, going to strip clubs, and gambling with real money. Today, Second Life seems ancient in Internet-time. At the same time, it’s a predecessor to the comfortable feeling of being a detectable and indistinguishable active online object, continuously diminishing authorship, even through directly exposing one’s feelings on sites such as Tumblr, LiveJournal, etc. Maybe we can remove our authorship even when it comes to the core of our feelings, because when our feelings are reposted they gain a sustained but ephemeral life. You liking someone else’s post means there is a shared pain. Too Bright is probably Hadreas’s most accessible album, possibly because it feels very intimate and we witness him slowly accepting the worst parts of himself. The songwriting is not only about where he is at the moment, but where he wants to be in the future. Even if you can be anything, or “nothing,” online you still have to reimagine your future. Even trolls do.

There’s no gentle way  
There’s no safe place  
For the heart to hang  
When the body’s no good

“I was interested in exploring the textures of daily necessities and the embodiment/physicality of the computer and Internet. One of the most striking contemporary images is that of the desktop capture, which is seen commonly on YouTube as part of software tutorials. I like the shots of desktops that are poorly organized and ‘lived-in.’”

—Akihiko Taniguchi

The works I applied with to Malmö Art Academy dealt mostly with the performative body. Later on, my works became not what they were “in that moment,” but mainly what I wanted them to become in the future through documentation. This became complicated when I started working with models and singers, having people other than myself in front of the camera.

While it was clear how I wanted to place and distort my own body in a digital landscape, it was more complicated using the same effects on another body. They became objects, clips in a timeline. One way of solving it practically would be to record myself first, and become a template that could serve as a starting point. Like in a social setting, when you let go of the silence by telling a joke and hope that a series of social interactions will come after you make fun of yourself. In my recent works, I have worked with people who aren’t particularly interested in art and would not normally have imagined themselves in an art setting. Similarly, explaining what I do to my family in Goma, Democratic Republic of Congo, has made me aware of the terminologies I host in my daily life, and that there is nothing wrong with letting go of a language, too.

Wet Cheeks/Comparing Business Cards/American Psycho

I think I can remember this more accurately. I was crying in front of the mirror, and at one point I stopped and considered writing a list with all the typical aesthetic choices that I could improve and that had a potential to emerge from the situation. It was the sort of thing one did as a child: cry, and if the parent did not notice, cry louder. Should my chin be higher up? How much of what is directly uncomfortable, e.g. mascara, can I show to the world? Am I an ugly crier? Does that facilitate empathy? Not enough. I took a picture of myself with a digital camera that I got for my eighteenth birthday, which at the time I perceived as tiny. Where that image is now, I don’t know—out of sight, out of mind, all this hoarding and complaining about storage space. There is always a conflict between how you see yourself and how the world sees you. We already have a preconceived idea of how we look. That’s why we can never see ourselves the way the world sees us.

The year I turned eighteen, 2007, was also the same year Chris Crocker released his iconic video “LEAVE BRITNEY ALONE!” When it was released, and became viral, Crocker was accused of many things, among others of being narcissistic and not actually having empathy for, but rather using, Britney Spears’s situation to promote himself. But how could he have known? Kim Kardashian knows, MAJESTY_FENTY knows, deykno deykno deykno. Very often I find it difficult to be efficient. What I did not know was how awkward I would feel watching a video recording by the paparazzi of Kim Kardashian walking with Kanye West in Paris in an Olivier Rousteing Balmain dress. Earlier I had seen an Instagram post of her wearing the same dress, and it would always stop my scrolling. Seeing the footage of Kim Kardashian painfully walking at a slower pace than her husband, Kanye West, and Oliver Rousting on the other hand walking slowly at her pace with a face seemingly worried that her high heels were a recipe for a fall on the hard pavement. One is reminded that:

1) Through social media, celebrities also contribute to showcasing their “flaws,” but whenever a paparazzo does the same, they are now more than ever vulnerable to attacks from an army of fans.

2) An image of a “girl eating salad” is one thing, but actually seeing “the movie”—now that must be really boring. (No wonder the food scenes in Blue Is the Warmest Colour [2013] were so exaggerated. How often do you see people eat in films, anyway?)

3) The dress, it is all about the dress.
Chris Crocker’s video was released six months after my birthday. It was also the year I discovered that, unlike my friends, I had not mastered a smile that I could use for every photo. Just kidding—I discovered that way earlier.

Hearing the Same Thing/Solipsistic Raincoat

Not random: weird.

Oh, back to the fear of being solipsistic.

Have we come to the point that we have to insist on still being human?

I ask myself if we are putting on roles, and if we keep on forgetting that we are human, and if we may not have the answer to all ecological crises. I don’t know whether what I’m moving towards is animism or techno-animism. There is an acknowledgement of technology of course, as it is inherent in our existence, but I would put it like: I want to be part of the post-human way of thinking and at the same time shrink it to visions I have for the world. I always come back to the fear of being a solipsist, this constant fear that I am not really saying anything about anything other than my analytical intake of my surroundings. That’s why I am so fascinated by retro, nostalgia, the ouroboros (the snake eating its own tail), especially in fashion. There are other ways of relating to objects, of course. We are surrounded by commercials that make us feel attractive as consumers, like somebody wants us, that our interests and urges are normal. We do not experience this alone, but for some reason it comes bouncing back at us.

In a way, solipsism is a form of realism, but a realism without extension, without body, without gaps. A kind of anti-magic, or blindness to magic.

Magic is the impossible relation to what is outside the human. It is something we can experience only by positioning ourselves on the outside. Magic could happen at this very moment, but I wouldn’t experience it as such because I am not outside of it, not outside of anything, always already implicated in the network of feedback. That’s why I don’t associate the Internet with magic. The Internet is a tool, something invented, but interesting because I can’t give it a physical shape, or any shape really, but is something I have access to and something that I can call whatever I like, as long as it is adaptable to my own use. That is not something I would do with the experience of magic, unless I was the one doing the magic. This is to say, a presence in which all material relations are mediated through virtual networks approaches a solipsistic realism that excludes magic.

I try to avoid using one-liners. The masterpiece. The phallus. The time and investment. The paradox of using time to make something that appears effortless. One’s approach to practice does not need to be all about problem solving, and the use of impracticality can be a choice. Does choice always stem from problem solving? Or can it be thought of as a moment of synchronisation. The term in itself is easily connected to history, but also to one’s state of mind, in which solipsism threatens to become an actuality, and one constantly tries and fails to relate to what’s outside.

I associate this with the question of childhood, where your past and your parents are not something that you choose, but in a scary libidinal way become something that you are your whole life. I could have continued to work with loss and mourning, but what if that again contradicts the body as extension? Maybe that is the case—that one does not want to start over? One can’t start over? What are these ways of being that constantly are stuck with us? Thinking through doing; I have to start this doc over.

Boring Boring Boring

One of the main challenges in working with music was constantly hearing that I was doing certain things wrong. I was told I could not use that sample that way—“Sandra, can you imagine someone playing the drums you are presenting? That would be impossible!” I would listen, but then I came to the point when I would say, “Exactly!”

“Throughout the course of its life the animal is confined of its environmental world, immured as it were within a fixed sphere that is incapable of further expansion or contraction.”

—Martin Heidegger

Does one shape one’s own body after a hammer the first time one uses it? Does one mimic the results, or the potential, the tool could facilitate? Along with this I have to mention a pleasant Google gift: a video of a lyrebird on the website Laughing Squid, mimicking the sound of power drills and several other construction tools. What a sculptor! My installation I Am So Bored But You Are Alright (2015) from my graduate show, Rare Darlings, includes a twenty-two-minute video, and in it there are different versions of my own avatar. At one point in the video, there is a close up of an avatar in 3D animation. It is intimate, and s/he/it is dancing, possibly mirroring in the interaction and sharing in the pleasure of the music. The song being played is a cover of Justin Timberlake’s song “Mirror.” At the end of the scene, the avatar suddenly stops and says that s/he/it is kind of bored.

What I find interesting is that I am no longer sure whether I have constructed the avatar based on me, or whether it is me that is constantly performing to be this digital object. The avatar is already teleported to another point in the network, hence being referred to as “s/he/it,” because although the starting point and the resemblance is known, the avatar is active somewhere else. There are shorter, faster ways of solving this; I could be more decisive and avoid entering the rabbit hole. One thing is certain: I am also plastic. My brain is plastic, and when I interact with sound materials, I am mimicking them. These digital objects have a maker, and a history. They also have had a journey that landed
them in my MacBook Pro, which is ill and making a lot of noise, and could go on strike anytime. I was not interested in creating music that could be performed by someone in real life, or, in that scenario, I would prefer an octopus as the ideal drummer.

I have a bag in my studio with all my notebooks from the years I have been at the academy. A lot of time I discover almost the exact same sentences, again and again. My writing is a tool that I use to show that I am not falling into solipsism or just reacting to ads that are automatically adapted to my interests and facilitate descriptions, rather than to frame a daily basis how I interact with materials. Sometimes, yes, the feedback loop can be broken. I choose to watch a movie rather than lose track of time watching Buffy episodes. Writing also becomes a tool that is already broken, being based on my memories and my concentration span. A tool that is always present in my practice but also fully visible in its not being flawless. So, yes, but at the same time, I would not say that these sentences are like recognisable kick drums repeating throughout these notebooks. More like trap-house hi-hats that sometimes sporadically appear. Not random, but weird.

**Already When You Have Viewed the Sound File I Am Working with at the Moment Please Let Me Know If You Eventually Want to Skip**

The hero might remain in the dark and force us to listen, or wear a camouflage uniform that isn’t detectable by drones. But we will still look for the source, preferably one with a button that can be switched off. SoundCloud has this irritating thing where it makes the sound file visible through a diagram of its volume levels; in other words, some tracks may come off as somewhat dramatic. The ears never close, and the sound is never off. It’s either audible or not. Through working with sound—mostly music samples that resemble and have traces of effects from their makers—I have learned that I am always thinking through listening, doing.

**So When Is the Climax? What Is the Essence?**

In my video works that also incorporate sound, I try to solve the above questions by displaying the climax through two flatscreens. This has also a social function, like lounge music, and makes room for the works to be experienced by several bodies. An open choreography, not in and out of the frame, but of the space. It’s more like, “Hey, it’s OK, you don’t have to see it from the beginning to the end.” I am standing close to my works, trying to take an art selfie; come and let’s have a drink instead. I don’t mind sharing the climax with you—it has already happened, and if you missed it, look at the other flatscreen: it’s about to happen again. So then how does one react when one is in a cinema and discovers that one has already seen the movie?

The echo is in the dribbles. The looping and the gestures. From previously using conventional non-linear, non-destructive editing systems such as Final Cut Pro and GarageBand to edit my videos, I have now started working with the tracker software Renoise. I found the transition from working horizontally to vertically interesting. The more I got to know the tool I was working with, the more I became aware of the looping and how important it was for me to be a time manager. I first experienced this when I started to work with different genres, in particular dubstep, placing drums and samples into correct time slots.

During the process, the way of thinking about casting plaster was present, and it was important to also think about the negative space. Place­ments of samples are numerical, so it was always about relating to the timeline and seeing the minutes and seconds go by. Looping excerpts can work with a live audience. One decides that this external looping is shared and can be shared. We are definitely not hearing the same thing, but we are listening, differently of course. You are listening with your feet stomping, and I am very much aware that I have to change the track ASAP before the audience’s Internet attention span comes back into effect.

Now it somehow seems banal to talk about looping, but it’s from the banality of it that something starts developing. Today, living in a time when consumers are also cultural producers, one sees that the divisions are disappearing, and it was while I was learning music genres that I also experienced them as a result of access to endless apps and music software. My works are greatly influenced by the genres that do not fit into any category or have the need for it.

**Mimicking Emojis: Do You Even Care?**

“So then how about a specific thing called ‘image’? It is a complete mystification to think of the digital image as a shiny immortal clone of itself. On the contrary, not even the digital image is outside of history. It bears the bruises of its crashes with politics and violence.”

—Hito Steyerl

So before we go any further, I would like to explain how I tell my jokes. In recent years I have noticed that I am overly empathetic to facial expressions. That is, in the end, a good thing, if you think about the comedian Louis C.K.’s concerns regarding online harassment and the importance of children seeing IRL reactions instead of hiding behind a screen and all. If you, for instance, see someone grinning at you, or even making a confused facial expression, something could be triggered, and perhaps push you to take some steps back. I am very much aware that the words I express are not only carriers of reactions, but that so many factors are at play at the same time in social settings in which power relations are constantly exercised through projections and mirroring. Telling a joke becomes something different too, because telling a joke ends up being about listening.
The Dancers, 2015. Installation. MDF boards, threaded rods, monitor, headphones, flatscreen and fish scale pattern sequin fabric. 2 x HD video looped. Sandra Mujinga
Yes, I am aware that this text will be on the academy’s website, but at the moment that is not as scary as somebody commenting back at me or calling me out. I have a method that I use in social settings, which I have also transferred to work as well (for instance, for an artist talk): I like telling a joke that I have shared before in another place and another time. When reactions are expressed, I focus on listening rather than observing someone’s face, because of the mere phonetics of it. I know in that moment that I am not in the business of reproduction of meaning, but I open doors for the listener’s previous experiences to engage with the expressed content. I, on the other hand, would be rather interested in going on tour with only this one joke, as it eventually would become funny.

Can I Skip This?
How does one work with video, a medium that is in constant transformation? That is, its transformation is so present in my timeline, through how the tool facilitating it is used. Sharing is after all caring: one sees streams of bodies, retweeted by active agents with good intentions, too. Through continuous online activity, one is bound to sooner or later encounter some form of violence. Bodies circulating, depicting violence, by way of online activism. It is not enough to share, one has to constantly skip the timeline. Where do you want it to belong in the future? Reimagining a pattern despite the online activity stored.

One cannot necessarily take on a God’s eye view and assume that one is not partaking in a network. An object interacting with other objects. The TV hosts an Internet connection and is a physical device collecting data, but it is rather interwoven. Before getting a smartphone, I would have been surprised to hear about people keeping their phones close to the bed, because I imagined it would make it so difficult to transition from sleep to another state. Is there a lack of need for distinction? Is it no longer important to actually wake up by getting away from the bed?

In my videos there is often a sense of isolation. The subjects that I record become objects that are placed in unfamiliar scenes. Their desolation interpreted as loneliness does not interact with their environment. Operating as a model agent, I invite people to perform in front of a blue screen. The separation of different working methods has been important to me, but so has letting things meld together.

I can only assume that I do this in social settings. I am talking to you, and also looking for the link that I wanted to share with you a couple of seconds ago. I don’t have to look at you, but I think I am listening. Before, that would be unheard of! I am listening to what you are saying; being poly is not a bad thing. And if this instant bodybuilding cannot make me sweat, the deodorant product assured me that it would not happen for at least twenty-four hours. Whenever there is an update of an Apple product, this greatly affects my work. I think in terms of seconds, and when looking at YouTube videos I try to find comments with digits that can indicate when the juicy stuff happens. Can I skip this? Let’s skip this.

Emotionally Thirteen
In “A Cyborg Manifesto,” Donna Haraway reminds us to actually get up from the bed the day after too much celebration, whether it is fiction or not.31 We are all participating in making the meaning of technoscience this very instant.32 It sometimes becomes too much, the freedom of knowledge, and all we want is to get mobile and updated. We are reminded that if there is such thing as a Generation X or Generation Y, we are still living in transgenerational conditions, and statistics are still necessary when participating in politics through just liking and retweeting, maybe more than ever.

There is a potential in the virtual beings that we are, and we can create parallel rooms of our own instantly and simultaneously. Maybe there has never been so much exposure to so much imagery of violence, but nothing remains the same, and our perception is always fluid. Have I become thirteen again? Do I unwittingly behave like a thirteen-year-old online? How am I participating by liking? How come posting something on Facebook feels like the first day of school every time? Careful selection of items before bedtime, clean shirt is a must. Ironing and the act of irony. I think what is most shocking is realising that one is not synchronised with one’s own body, and that maybe one should call the friend who advised you to install the f.lux app and thank them.

Could it be that we are bad listeners because we are searching for a body, a sound source? The sound is after all never off, and it transcends even opaque walls.

How sensitive or insensitive are we online? How does that affect the online activity and who are the commentators? I want to post something as my Facebook status. The endless possibilities are there when one’s stage is the Internet.

All these body fluids and smells. They remind us of the body taking up more space than wanted. The day one discovers hatred for perfumed deodorant. Something Has to Break.35 Love becomes fluid. Love sick, sick of love, heartbreak, muscle elastic, casted and broken. The answer to the first question is “no.” I don’t think the thirteen-year-old me would survive among thirteen-year-olds today.

It is hard to compete with an Internet persona sometimes, and it can be useful to look at one’s browser history and become aware of the repetitions of pre-recorded performances. A lot has changed since the ’60s, and one should be careful about using these categorical remarks publicly. Still, one of my main concerns has been how I perform for the screen, and being honest with myself on where and how I want to situate my works. Everybody should lighten up a bit. What role does the “but it’s funny” attitude play in all of this? A lot of these offensive comments get a
free pass because it is after all the Internet and people should have a sense of humour.

I still remember when my siblings and I got a TV in our bedroom. Today TVs are not passive objects: they are also listeners, collectors of surveillance data. Does that mean that the louder and longer someone laughs at my joke the better it is? Before social media, and our constant surveillance of each other, a stand-up comedian could tour with the same jokes without the performances being exposed on sites such as YouTube, and seconds of it shared on Vine, Instagram, etc. Since I am not a famous stand-up comedian yet, I can still experiment with that model. When exposed to non-linear narratives, one experiences seconds. When I see either a violent movie or a humorous one, I rarely ask about the seconds before the captured moments, because we all know the context.

No One Is Immune to Projections
Looking at how terms and definitions are thrown here and there, at times one becomes optimistic, in the sense that a certain term is circulating more and is being used freely in public space, without its usage being loaded with fear. On the other hand, as a result of this, one fears that a term has greatly influenced one’s own way of living. Like, for instance: "feminism" is just a trend, or the hashtag will wear out eventually. I think of other strategies: shoulder dancing, being ambiguous, being bored. By being against something and also for something, by being everything but nothing, maybe one challenges capitalist structures because that is also something: being everything and nothing. At the same damn time.

Still there is always the sense of where I want my works to belong, or not belong. I am not immune to representations or the effect imagery has on me. No one is immune to projections and their levels of violence. It’s a complicated thing, being real, and I can’t help but think about Audre Lorde, about how to work with the foundations that enable you to imagine your future. How to keep it real.

And most of all how to Treat. Yo. Self. The erotic provides the force, but we cannot fear its revelation. Consumption and constant exposure to pornographic images. I have stopped noticing Facebook changing its design, and I always swipe left when I see a low-res image on Tinder. We are presented with images that do not attempt to depict a reality; rather, they present a hyperreality. The hyperreality exists as a consequence of our cycle of constantly having to be aroused. As a prosumerist, strength feels like an illusion, fashioned in the context of the male structure of power. If we don’t have time to exercise our eroticism, how do we create a space for our chaotic and messy teenage feelings?

My right arm is hurting, now you know, and I realise that I am not used to having the phone pressed against my ear, only used to seeing the reflection of my face on it.

2 +242 is the country code for Republic of the Congo.
4 The Congress, feature film, directed by Ari Folman (France-Israel: Bridgit Folman, Film Gang Pandora Filmproduktion, 2013). In the movie, Robin Wright, playing herself, disappears into the digital world after selling the rights to her visual representation. She disavows her physical presence and becomes solely an avatar.
6 Like that time when I was installing something from the ceiling and I fell off a ladder and I was listening to M.I.A.’s “Tell Me Why.” I still have a hard time listening to it.
7 Performance presented as part of Soft City, at Blitz, Oslo, 2014. Soft City was a three-day program with screenings and performances, curated and produced by Oslo Kunsthal.
8 This is in reference to the Internet meme Doge, which consists of an image of a Shiba Inu often accompanied by words in comic sans font. See “Doge (meme),” Wikipedia, last modified May 21, 2015, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doge_%28meme%29.
Madelene Oldeman

Untitled, 2014. Ink, watercolour and acrylic paint on paper. Documentation of work in studio. 152 x 200 cm. Madeleine Oldeman
Madeleine Oldeman
Introduction
There is a tradition in Western philosophy of definition through opposites. We encounter it in the ancient Greek concepts of *antithesis* (opposite, counterclaim) and *dichotomia* (divided into two). *Everything must belong to one or the other, and nothing can belong to both at once.* Working as an artist and as an art educator can hardly be considered a case of opposites. However, I experience this very kind of dichotomy in various contexts in my work as an artist and in my role as an art educator—despite the fact that an underlying theme in my artistic work revolves around uniting opposites in new forms. This question interests me: Can I use attributes of, and differences between, the roles of artist and educator to define my work, in either or both of the two roles?

I will begin by describing the dilemma inherent to art mediation in the section “Can You Have an Artistic Experience While Having the Art Explained to You?” Then, I will proceed to formulate my own artistic work in the section “Tacit Knowledge, Matter, and Spirit—Thoughts on My Artistic Work.” In the third section, “How Has My Artistic Work Influenced Me in Art Mediation Contexts?,” I will investigate how I have handled the dilemma mentioned in the first section as an artist, and offer real-life examples of how I have applied my artistic practice to educational contexts. Here, I discover contexts where the distinctions are blurred, so that an art exhibition can be both an educational workshop and a work of art. Does the difference reside in the expectations of the people involved? I continue this train of thought by offering two examples of artists who have created pieces in which the distinction is unclear and which oscillate between different expectations, in the section titled “Cross-pollinated Forms of Expression.”

In the fourth section, “Differences between Working as an Artist and Working as an Educator,” I will examine the ways institutions use artists and educators in their pedagogical programmes and offer further reflections on the differences between the institutions’ expectations and my own expectations based on my experience of working in both roles. As the relationship between the artist/art educator and the institution will be a recurring theme in my reasoning here, I briefly touch upon the current visions art institutions have for their pedagogical programmes in the section “The Defined Audience, the Institution, and Art Mediation.” In closing, I will summarise some thoughts that have arisen during my work on this paper.

When I mention art mediation here, I am mainly referring to it in the context of art institutions. Those projects that were influenced by my pedagogical work and that I ran outside of the institutions are interesting in this regard, as they are independent and can be compared to the pedagogy of the cultural institutions, but I won’t primarily be referring to them. In part, this is because I have more experience within the art institution context, but it is also because I find it interesting to investigate more closely the ways I, as an artist, have worked within the institutions (museums, galleries) and related to their missions. I will mainly be referring to the “Gallery Education” situation, as that has been my main point of entry into art mediation. Professional titles I’ve held in the past include art museum educator, art educator, educator, and curator. In this paper, I will include all of these contexts, as well as the art educational networks that I work in. Together, they express quite well the overall mission of art mediation. This means I will not be defining their differences, either in substantial terms or in terms of status.

My ambition to work as an artist originated during the Hovedskous sculpture programme in Göteborg and matured during the five years I spent at the Malmö Art Academy. This paper is part of my Master of Fine Arts degree, although it is being written several years after my graduation exhibition. My current studio is located in the artists’ collective CirkulationsCentralen (CC) in Malmö, where I was.
also previously involved in outreach projects, for instance, running CC’s gallery. I have made public decorations and collaborated with a psychiatric clinic for children in Malmö, among other things. However, the main focus of my artistic work for the last few years has been working on large drawings and paintings in ink on paper. My subjects relate to time and space, whereby the pictures exist both as material objects and as mental constructs (another dichotomy that occupies my interest). The latest major exhibition I took part in was for the Royal Academy of Fine Arts prizewinners in Stockholm in 2014, where I showed a ten-metre-tall ink-and-watercolour painting on paper.

I’d like to thank Gertrud Sandqvist, who inspired me to investigate my dual role as artist and art educator in this paper, and Johan Birgander, who has supported me in my work by acting as a conversation partner and linguistic advisor.

Can You Have an Artistic Experience While Having the Art Explained to You?
The importance of spoken and written language for mediating art became very clear to me when I agreed to begin working with art mediation. In mediation or education contexts, understandings of and reflections on art are based largely on the spoken word. For instance, this happens in situations where a conversant person conveys her or his knowledge and ideas to an audience that is listening and pondering in silence, or in a dialogue between the expert and the audience, where everybody experiences and reflects together and everybody takes part in formulating and producing knowledge. These are the most commonly encountered forms of art mediation in art galleries and museums. And this is also what most people will think of when you mention art mediation: a guide giving a tour of an exhibition, telling the visitors about the works and the artists. But can you have an artistic experience while having the art explained to you?

This is not a new question. It is one that Anna Lena Lindberg raised in her groundbreaking doctoral thesis, “Konstpedagogikens dilemma: historiska rötter och moderna strategier” (The dilemma of art mediation: Historical origins and modern strategies), from 1988. One problem art encounters, according to Lindberg, is that it is regarded as incompressible, which is problematic from an art mediation standpoint, as it gives the educator an explanatory function. Another problem is freedom of interpretation, which implies every point of view is equally valid. The mere fact that controversy exists over not only the notion of what constitutes good art but also what constitutes art at all adds further complication to the teaching of artistic understanding.

The ways that the role of the art educator and the missions of the art institutions have changed are connected to changes in attitudes to teaching and knowledge over time. Lindberg demonstrates this by describing how the dilemma of art mediation today lies in its wavering between two incompatible attitudes, which she refers to as the “educational approach” and the “charismatic approach.” The former is related to the Enlightenment’s ideas about teaching, in which humans are regarded as recipients of knowledge who, once enlightened, will “rise towards the light.” The transfer of knowledge occurs from above to below, without any consideration for the differences and respective resources of the recipients. In this way, the educational approach objectifies the recipient, in treating him or her as a vessel to be filled with knowledge.

On the other hand, the charismatic approach is based on a concept borrowed from Pierre Bourdieu, who speaks of an artwork’s “charisma.” This concept is connected to an ideology that romantically claims that since the art experience has to do with emotion rather than reason, the piece will speak to viewers irrespective of their education and social standing. Since imagination and intuition are innate, methodical learning contributes nothing in the way of essential qualities. The problem here is that educational activities are not able to promise deeper understanding of art. The charismatic approach only acknowledges the presented stimuli and then leaves viewers alone with their experiences and conclusions. This approach promotes absolute subjectivity, unlike the first one.²

Helene Illeris, professor at the University of Agder in Norway, has also researched the problems of art mediation and has numerous years of practical experience in the field, having worked at Statens Museum for Kunst (the National Gallery of Denmark) in Copenhagen, among other places. In her article “Vad kan man lära av samtidskonsten?” (What can we learn from contemporary art?), she sees relationally oriented contemporary art as offering a solution in what she refers to as “metareflection.” Here, she suggests a dual gaze that allows both interaction with the work of art and reflection on the way one chooses to interact with it. This would make an educator’s explanations superfluous, as there is no need to have somebody stand next to you to tell you what is happening while it happens.³

As an example of metareflection in this sense, of the dual gaze that Helene Illeris advocates, I’d like to use the artwork Choice (2010) by the Brazilian artist Laura Lima, which was shown at Bonnier Konsthall during the autumn of 2014, and which touched me on several levels. This piece wasn’t weighed down by text or explanation; instead, it was shrouded in mystery thanks to its elimination of all description. Lima defines herself in relation to her predecessors in the Brazilian art scene of the ’60s and ’70s, like Hélio Oiticica, Lygia Pape, and Lygia Clark. Just like the work of these pioneers of the neo-concrete movement, her art is a kind of total art, in which the body plays an important role. But while her predecessors used methods that were intended to dissolve the boundary between the art object and the viewer, Lima, according to her own conceptualisation, uses the body as just one material among others, as
a kind of “living sculpture”: “everything, bodies and objects, are on equal terms, without a hierarchy.”

In Choice, darkness is the most tangible material of all. A host who is standing outside the entrance to the piece asks me to leave my bag and mobile phone outside. Only one person at a time is allowed through the heavy drape, and I have to wait awhile for the visitor inside to exit until it’s my turn. When the host gives me the go-ahead, I push the drape aside and step into dense darkness. I have no idea how large the room is, or if there is anything in there. The drape closes silently behind me, and the darkness paralyses me at first.

It’s very interesting to study yourself and your own reaction to Choice. The dual gaze is inevitable as the content of the piece is your own reaction to it, in such a naked way. My eyesight didn’t adapt to the dark even after I had waited for what felt like several minutes.

Blind, I take a few steps into the room, but I realise I might not find my way back to the entrance if I go too far. I back up and begin to follow the walls instead, which are dressed in the same heavy fabric as the entrance. I feel my way along the cloth with my hands. But will I find my way back if I follow the wall? Does it matter if I find my way back? It sounds like there’s somebody breathing in the dark, feels like there’s something alive in there. I have to remind myself that I am in an established public art institution and that I’m hardly in any serious kind of danger. But I still don’t want to encounter another person in here. Different strategies for exploring the room and avoiding discomfort begin to run through my mind, and I am constantly aware of my own actions and inactions. I face my own fears in total darkness.

Tacit Knowledge, Matter, and Spirit—Thoughts on my Artistic Work

In my practice in the studio, I don’t give art mediation and its inherent dilemma any thought at all. For instance, if I were to apply a dual gaze, or metareflection, while painting in ink on paper, it would mean I was trying to produce an analysis at the same time as I was creating the picture or piece. That’s not what I’m after. I tend rather to seek freedom from logical thinking in the moment of creation. Liberatingly, the practical experience and the direct non-verbal interaction are so much faster and easier that an analytical voice would have a hard time keeping up. This voice would probably also lack the words and concepts needed to describe the events that occurred.

"Are there things that the arts—certain arts—can express that science cannot? How can we make room for art in cross-disciplinary work, so that it can help fill in the blanks in areas where rational science can’t go?" Bo Göranzon wrote that in the introduction to philosopher Allan Janik’s book Cordelias tystnad—Om reflektions kunskapsteori (Cordeilia’s silence), from 1991, which is about the epistemology of reflection. Janik speaks of “tacit knowledge,”

a concept that has been overlooked within the field of epistemology. He uses examples from fiction as case studies by which to explore real-life phenomena.

Michael Polanyi was the first to use the concept of tacit knowledge in a scientific context. He claims a large portion of our knowledge of the world cannot be stated fully in words: “We can know more than we can tell.” In his 1966 book, The Tacit Dimension, he gives as examples our ability to recognise a certain face among a number of others, without being able to state exactly what it is that lets us determine that it is that particular face.

In her book Art beyond Representation: The Performative Power of the Image (2004), Barbara Bolt claims there is knowledge that is based on practical experience rather than linguistic experience. She quotes Bourdieu on the relationship between practice and logic:

Practice has a logic which is not that of the logician. This has to be acknowledged in order to avoid asking of it more logic than it can give, thereby condemning oneself either to wring incoherence out of it or to thrust a forced coherence upon it.

Bolt explores how the artist responds physically to encountering the material, and, among other sources, bases her theories concerning the unique logic of practice on Martin Heidegger’s theories of art and the concept of “handlability.” According to Bolt, Heidegger claims human beings don’t primarily understand the world by contemplating it in their thoughts; rather, we are only able to understand the world theoretically after we have experienced it through action.

Heidegger uses a hammer as an example:

The less we just stare at the thing called hammer, the more actively we use it, the more original our relation to it becomes and the more undisguisedly it is encountered as what it is, as a useful thing. The act of hammering itself discovers the specific “handiness” of the hammer. ... No matter how keenly we just look at the “outward appearance” of things constituted in one way or another, we cannot discover handiness. When we just look at things “theoretically,” we lack an understanding of handiness. But association which makes use of things is not blind, it has its own way of seeing which guides our operations and gives them their specific thingly quality.

Bolt develops her theories on the relations between body, object, and material further, and goes so far as to claim that the material can be regarded as the co-creator of the artwork, and that visual arts cause actual material effects. She contends art does not just represent, it effects.

Could it be my extroverted work situation, where I speak of and reflect on art, that causes me, in my own art, to seek to retract into the body and
explore unconscious processes, the liquid, and the non-verbal? It’s as though I’ve sought to shield my own artistic practice from my own educational gaze. “If you can accept refraining from understanding what you do, you will reach much further in what you do.”

Marcel Duchamp said this on French radio in 1960. (These six radio programmes can be regarded as shining examples of interesting French art mediation, in which arts journalist Georges Charbonnier interviews Duchamp in depth on topics such as his relationship to surrealism, Dadaism, history, and language.)

For me, working on art is my own way of relating to life and existence. It is as though I can never find time to process things unless I get to stop time by working in the studio.

One hundred fifty-two times two metres. Three hundred grams per square metre. It’s on the floor. Fingertips running along the grain, its texture rough, it feels strong, a little tough. The paper is a large skin, each corner weighted down. Will the ink stay on the surface, or will it be sucked into it and become its body? The host, the body of Christ. I sometimes feel like eating paper. The window’s open, it’s raining outside, and the paper is swelling from the humidity, spreading itself out over the concrete floor. It makes me think of scar paper is swelling from the humidity, spreading itself out over the concrete floor. It makes me think of scar tissue, the picture as a wound on swelling tree skin. I have filled a large bucket and some smaller plastic tubs with water, and prepared and set out my ink. I have taken out brushes, soft round ones, abused hard ones, feather-light ones, and my finely pointed ink pens. Everything is standing or lying around me, in order. A ritual or a ceremony, perhaps; a sacrifice. But still quite mundane, with the cars whizzing by in the street outside. All this moisture that is going to be passed through the white net, the skin, and the traces it will leave. I’m going to sift the picture out, both carefully and recklessly. I’m going panning for picture, kneeling with the hard, cold concrete against my shins. The ink smells of ink, a little like soil. I haven’t stretched the paper out to tape its edges down, and I’m not going to wet it nicely and evenly all over its surface. I just get started right away with the big round one made of goat and pony hair. Just water that I brush onto the paper skin, painting invisibly, making puddles. The paper contracts in some places and expands in others. It’s moving, alive. I have to adapt my will, because the pools take their own shapes. Hills rise up in the dry areas, and valleys are created in the wet ones. I continue to drip black ink into the valleys. Black fireworks explode, the ink spreads, making rings quickly. I think of a boy who visited the museum, how he exclaimed: “I’ve made an amazing discovery!” I remember how elated he was by this, and the words he blurted out. “There are lots of kinds of black or I mean there are lots of different black colours in black!” His eyes and his fingers messy with paint. It has stopped raining. I drip even more ink into the puddles, and vague, amorphous shapes appear. The darkness moves, and is sucked into the blotchy skin like grey shadows. Grey next to black.

Next to wet white. Shapeless grey blobs run in front of the amorphous bodies, and the peaks sink from their weight. In this way, the differences are evened out, if only somewhat.

In 2008, I began to work with ink on paper. Ink drawings and ink paintings related to nature and the body, often very large pieces that interact with the space and the architecture, which they either fit into or struggle against. In the beginning, I only used black ink. What interested me at first was letting ink drawings and ink paintings inhabit a tension between being a picture on a flat surface and having a tangible physical presence as objects in space. My drawing has always had an element of modelling to it, and in my work on these ink drawings or paintings I tend to find my approach is more closely aligned with sculpture than with painting.

It might be because of my own personal relationship to Christianity and its separation of body and soul that I’m so interested in the distinction between spirit and matter. I want to figure these concepts out. I want to formulate how the distinction works, and dissolve it while doing so. In Stenarna i själen—form och materia från antiken till idag (Stones in the soul: Form and substance from ancient times until today), Sven-Eric Liedman describes how the Chinese concepts of matter and spirit have differed from Western ones historically. In the Chinese tradition, they are not distinctly separate concepts. Chinese artists like Zheng Chongbin, Li Huayi, and Qiu Zhijie awaken my curiosity because of their relations to the picture and to the material. All three of them work in the borderlands between Western and Chinese artistic traditions.

Just like Zheng, I am interested in ink as a material, as matter, rather than merely as a carrier of gestures or forms. Zheng mixes white acrylic paint into his Indian ink paintings, using the white acrylic both as a colour that reflects certain wavelengths of light and as a physical material, or body. This in turn affects how the ink is experienced, so that it also becomes a tangible material in his works. In traditional Chinese ink paintings, the white sections consist of unpainted surfaces, like in watercolour paintings. That is, the absence of a body, or a diluted one.

As a continuation of this material way of relating to ink and paper, I have proceeded to explore drawing and ink painting as an action, as performed by the body. There are different materials that offer differing amounts of resistance; for example, the liquids can be thick and viscous, or thin and runny. I’ve been looking to examine the relation between mental and bodily processes in the creation of images, especially in connection with ink painting and its material aspects. In this regard, I have tried things like drawing based on habitual motions and gestures, whereby the pen or brush makes tracks across the paper to catch the movements. The tracks appear as pictures when we look at the paper, and we might even be able
to feel the movement. Drawing with both my left and my right hand at the same time is another method that can tease pictures out of the actual motions. I will describe this method, which I also used in a workshop entitled “Paralleltteckning” (Parallel Drawing), below.

Polanyi considers perception to be a case of tacit knowledge: “By illuminating the ways in which our bodily processes play a part in our perceptions, we will be shedding light on the bodily basis of all thinking, including the most advanced creative abilities humanity possesses.” He continues to describe how our bodies are the primary instruments of all our external knowledge, whether it be intellectual or practical, and how the use of tools can constitute a sensory extension of our bodies.

A body of work that I think would be interesting to study more closely based on the concept of tacit knowledge is Lygia Clark’s. In the film Memória do Corpo from 1984, which is one of few documentations of Clark (who died only a few years later, in 1988) performing a Structuring of the Self session, the body is extended by the use of objects/tools in a therapeutic context. Clark’s artistic practice developed in a way that led her to abandon the traditional art scene and enter into new and unexplored contexts, such as the development of new therapeutic methods. In this half-hour film, Clark initially describes the objects she uses and the responses she gets from various clients. Then, we get to follow a private session, a kind of psychotherapeutic process. Clark’s undressed male client, Paulo Sérgio Duarte, who is a Brazilian art critic, lies on a bed as Clark places, presses, and rubs her “relational objects” against his body—plastic bags filled with air or water, padded cloth, and rocks in net pouches. She covers his eyes with cloth pouches filled with sand and polystyrene balls and places large seashells over his ears. She drips honey on his lips and shines a torch at them to create the sensation of warmth. It’s interesting to hear Duarte describe his experiences when the session is over. He’s clearly moved by the whole thing, and speaks of internality and externality: “I’m all skin. Surface. It was as if I was all surface ... the place where we meet the world.”

Laura Lima says that she creates works of art outside of herself, and unlike Clark and her Structuring of the Self, Lima doesn’t regard her art as being about creating a subject. She describes it instead as “a risk, a poem a mystery.” I feel that Lima’s art is related to the concept that Janik and Polanyi call tacit knowledge. It seems to me that Lima is experimenting with a non-verbal experience in which subjective experiences are obvious (co) creators of the artworks.

I have drawn without looking, have drawn based on gestures or movements, and have developed a method for drawing with my left and my right hands simultaneously. This exploration of my physical relation to the material and the image is an aspect that is taking on a more significant role for me, not just in my own artistic practice but also in the art mediation context as well. This knowledge is not based on language, but on a practical or physical experience that Barbara Bolt, Michael Polanyi, and Allan Janik each refer to in their own ways.

How Has My Artistic Work Influenced Me in Art Mediation Contexts?

When I began taking on art mediation assignments and was expected to perform the conventional task of giving gallery talks (as an art educator who gives tour of the works in an exhibition), I felt the need to come up with my own approach to it. I came to this purely as an artist, having no previous education relevant to, or previous experience of, art mediation. Later on, I studied the subject at university, and in this context the problems that I had encountered in practical situations were validated. I was occupied by the dilemma that Anna Lena Lindberg expressed (can you have an artistic experience while having the art explained to you?), as well as the fact that there is a tendency in the context of the gallery talk to regard an artwork as the final product of a narrative. If the artistic experience never occurs, if the art fails to “happen,” and leaves the narrative to stand alone, the work being shown (on this occasion) at the institution tends to be the final product of the narrative.

The fact that I worked as an artist and had studied art practically for many years when I gave my first gallery talks affected how they turned out. Initially, I treated them like studio discussions, in the same way that I had experienced them at the art academy and later with my artist colleagues. Treating the situation like a studio discussion automatically places the work of art in a context in which it is related to an artistic process. It invites everybody to take part in its creation. The pieces are no longer finished products that can be explained in terms of a linear narrative. This method works best with children and young adults, who will often be more interested in expressing their own views than adults in a gallery talk context.

What I am referring to when I use the term “studio discussion” is a conversation whereby an artist has the opportunity to have his or her work analysed from several different points of view, to achieve better understanding of where the artistic process is headed. The discussions can be based on different notions such as form, content, technique, presentation, history, emotions, effects, facts, and so on. It’s a way to occupy oneself with one’s art. In the gallery talk context, I use the studio discussion as a method for reflecting on artworks together with an art audience, in which everybody is invited to contribute their own reactions, thoughts, and analyses based on who they are and what their experiences are. This method, so familiar to me, also gave me the physical and mental calm I needed to dare linger in the quiet moments, when everybody’s own internal reflections get the time they need. Of course, this method is open to criticism in the sense that the piece is actually “finished”: the artist
has made all her or his choices, and decided to present the work as it is. It is no longer in the studio.

When I began taking on educational assignments, I was very keen to avoid ending up explaining art, but I am less strict about that today. I also used to be more faithful to the specific pieces and artists, and their own explanations of their practices. Today, I can customise the talk for the group of visitors in front of me and use the artworks and artists’ practices as tools to reach them, or bring up some theory of mine, or a theory from somebody else. Sometimes, it almost feels like I betray the artworks. I feel torn between loyalty to the artworks and their existences within what is loosely referred to as the “art world” and the visitors’ expectations, or, sometimes, disappointment or suspicion.

Bolt claims that the great focus that has been placed on the finished piece at the expense of the artistic practice has produced a gap in our understanding of art as a process, in both research and theoretical work within art studies. She quotes art historian and art critic Bernard Smith, who claims that art studies are based on four keystones—identification, classification, evaluation, and interpretation—and takes this as confirmation that art studies is interested in data, not in actions. The artistic process is treated separately. And, according to Bolt, this means that knowledge specific to the discipline is lost, as well as definitions of fundamental concepts that validate it.18

I have wanted to explore whether or not there is a practical experience-based method for reflection on art in education and mediation contexts. One area in which I have attempted this is the traditional format of “gallery talk followed by work in the studio/workshop,” which is commonly offered to children and young adults at art galleries and art museums. A very simple method for working in this context is to just reverse the order of events: start in the studio, where the kids get to explore and form a physical connection with a material and to their own interactions with pictures and reality, and do the visit to the gallery where the established artworks are shown after.

The difference compared to beginning with the gallery talk and then working in the studio or workshop is quite striking. You notice it right away, just in the way the kids enter the gallery space. Kids that have been allowed to create first are much more confident; they claim to know what the art is about, express opinions about the artist’s intentions, and feel at home to a much greater degree than kids who get the traditional treatment.

Meditating before giving the gallery talk is another method I have tried. My plan was to see if the calm and focus that meditation instills would have an effect on the visitors’ encounter with the artwork and on their experience of the exhibition. Unfortunately, the time constraints in this kind of work made it impossible for me to draw any real conclusions. It’s virtually impossible to make time for meditation. I’ve also attempted short meditation exercises with visiting school classes. In these scenarios, there is a great difference between groups taught by teachers who already use meditation in their teaching and those who don’t. This is something I’d like to investigate closer.

After having worked as an art educator for a couple of years, I noticed a problem that was quite widespread in schools—they couldn’t tell illustration from art. This in turn causes further problems when the schools visit art institutions to see exhibitions, whether they are historical or contemporary. Since setting yourself up as someone who can determine what is illustration and what is art is controversial, in 2009 I decided in my role as an art educator to compose a two-hour workshop in which I took a clear stand on issues and claimed that there were right or wrong answers. The person who decided if something was illustration or art was me, the presenter, like an autocratic ruler. The workshop was designed for adult educators who work with children and young adults.

The participants, after a brief presentation in which I used example images to define art and illustration, were given three assignments: to create an illustration, to create a work of art, and to explain the differences between them. It was all tongue-in-cheek to some extent, but this was the first time I tried not being an open-minded and understanding art educator, and acted more like a strict schoolteacher. My goal was only to get the message across. The participants who succeeded at one or both of the assignments were asked to line up on one side of the room, and the ones that failed were lined up on the other side. I gave clear explanations as to why they had succeeded or not.

These workshops were a lot of fun to do, and they generated a lot of interesting discussions in the groups. Our roles were questioned as a result of my clear enactment of the role of the person in the know. If I hadn’t been an artist myself, it would have been more difficult to make such explicit judgments regarding what is or isn’t art. I was criticised to some extent, but my judgments may have seemed more acceptable because most of the participants knew that I was also an artist. In this case, the workshop was given in the context of my art mediation work, and the question came to me: How clear, and how controversial, can the attitudes I express in my role as an art educator be? As an independent educator, sure, but what about when I’m representing an institution?

Another way for me to work in art education and mediation has been to organise a special kind of workshop that is also an art exhibition, in which the participants join in the creative process. I don’t know which direction the process will take ahead of time; I have to adapt to what happens along the way. Initially, this was a method for achieving an experience through practical work, with the art audience as its target audience, whether it was children, young adults, or adults, or a mixture of the three. These workshops have started to inch closer to actually being art. And this is a case in which the difference
is very difficult to explain. But first of all, it has to do with expecta
tions. There’s one kind of expectation, mostly residing with the institu
tions, in relation to art exhibitions, and another expectation in relation to an
educational project that involves audience participation. There are also different expectations among the art audience and the schools when they are the target audience. My approach as an organiser becomes im-
portant. Am I invited in my capacity as an artist? Am I invited as an artist who is being asked to create an educational context? Or am I an educator at an insti-
tution, in an art mediation role?

To organise a workshop that doubles as an exhibition you need to consider the location and the time: how long the exhibition or workshop is supposed to go on for, on the one hand, and how much time the individual participants will be investing, on the other. Is participation going to be loosely structured, on a drop-in basis, or will there be a set time? The first par-
ticipants will have a different experience than the last ones if the exhibition/workshop lasts for a long time. Will there be an educator on site, or not?

“Parallelteckning” (Parallel Drawing) (2013) was a workshop intended to make the participants focus on drawing as a physical activity and reflect on the connections between mental concepts and the body’s behaviour as they drew. In this context, I was invited in the capacity of an artist developing an educational programme. The workshop was a drop-
in event that ran for two hours, and the participants could come and go as they pleased. I decided to use methods that I have employed in my own artistic practice and test them on other people. The origin of the exercises in “Parallelteckning” was a problem that developed in my drawing hand, my right hand, which made me unable to use it for some time. So, I began to draw with my left hand instead. I noticed that this had an effect on my drawing—not just in a physical sense, but mentally as well. When my right hand recovered, I continued to experiment and began using both my left and my right hands simultaneously to draw, as well as creating pieces by alternating between my hands, or only using my left hand. The workshop was an attempt to challenge both physical and mental habits and conceptions, as well as the participants’ limitations and capabilities. I did this by influencing the physical circumstances and the men-
tal attitudes of the participants as they were drawing. The materials were felt-tip pens, liquid ink, brushes, and paper. Most of the exercises were performed by individual participants. There were also group exer-
cises for two or more participants that investigated openness and attentiveness to others in relation to one’s own desire to get to decide.

The biggest discovery I made in this workshop was the variety of ways in which the participants responded to the exercises that were seen as physical or mental tests or challenges. Some found pleasure in trying out new approaches and letting go of their habitual control, while others couldn’t take it and aborted the exercise. Children up to the age of about five saw no point at all in the workshop, while many of the older participants, from the age of fifty or so, began to construct their own theories. I was told several personal stories about how injuries or illnesses like strokes had forced people to produce new solutions to problems they faced in their everyday existences and in their work. At one workshop, I met a boy who was able to draw two different pictures at once, one with each hand.
Cross-pollinated Forms of Expression
In the preceding section, I described workshops that were also exhibitions as examples of situations where it can be difficult to draw the line between an educational project and a work of art. The distinctions blur and the projects oscillate between different sets of expectations in a kind of cross-pollinated form of expression. An artwork that is interesting in this regard is *Them*, by the Polish artist Artur Zmijewski, which was first shown at documenta 12 in 2007. This emotional video, which you could see as education, social experiment, and documentary film all in one, was part of Zmijewski’s installation at documenta 12, and is a violent example of art created in a workshop context in which the participants were less than absolutely safe.

Zmijewski gathered four groups of adults, all with very strong opinions regarding nationalism, communism, gender identity, and religion. None of these participants were artists. Each group consisted of four to five people. He ran a workshop with these people and filmed the whole process. On large white canvases, they got to spray-paint symbols and images that they considered representative of their opinions as a group. Among other things, they painted a church; the word “Poland” in Hebrew; Szczerbiec (The Jagged Sword), a symbol of Polish nationalism consisting of a sword and a ribbon coloured like the Polish flag; and the word “freedom.” After a while, Zmijewski had the groups trade places, and each group continued on a painting started by one of the other groups. Here, the similarities with an art exercise in school end, and the conflict takes over. The participants altered the expressions, added to them, and spray-painted over certain elements in order to make the other groups’ paintings conform to their own values. After a while, their gestures took an aggressive turn, as the participants became upset and aggrieved at having their messages altered. Their actions turned into a struggle over representation, a war fought using symbols in place of weapons. The pictures were torn down, rebuilt, and destroyed once more. Holes appeared right through the canvases when certain participants felt compelled to obliterate specific parts of the painting. Zmijewski didn’t step in and interrupt the event, instead letting the participants escalate on their own terms.

The video has many interesting dimensions, politics, history, and education among them. Viewing the video is distressing, as the different groups’ behaviour keeps growing more stereotypical, and they begin to take their task of winning the struggle very seriously. They show no desire for dialogue, and their actions get so violent and destructive that it actually seems like the participants could be in danger. The whole thing ends when a fire breaks out in the room, the final statement made by some of the participants.

Another example that I find to be an interesting cross-pollinated form of expression is Lima’s *The Abstraction—an art museum run by children*, which was shown at the Lilith Performance Studio in Malmö in 2014. In the work, Lima let a group of children, aged around ten, select artworks from the collections of Ystad Art Museum and Malmö Art Museum, which were then arranged by the children in the Lilith space. Her only rule was that they had to choose abstract works. The children were then left to run the museum themselves, with eleven-year-old Lo taking on the role of art museum director, with an office of his own. The children charged entrance fees,
ran the café, and gave exhibition talks, in which two of the children showed the artworks together and expressed their opinions about them, at set times every day. The children took these tasks very seriously, and the most striking thing was their desire to emulate adults in their roles. They became a mirror, revealing structures and hierarchies. For instance, the way the boys in the gallery talks I participated in took over the talk more and more, while the girls stayed in the background. Because I work in the world that the children were mirroring, it provided many eye-opening moments.

The reactions to The Abstraction have been interesting. In the press, the piece was mainly treated as an educational project that focused on how children like to act like adults. Martin Hägg addresses the issue from more of an art critical perspective in his article “Barn förklarar det abstrakta” (Children explain the abstract) in the online journal Omkonst. He interprets the piece as a political statement: “The Abstraction is a leftist statement along the lines of ‘art for the people.’ An example of a sympathetic ethos of inclusion that has, since the 1960s, increasingly become the main focus for most of the more respected art institutions.”

I feel that many writers and critics failed to appreciate the value of The Abstraction as a work of art, because Lima’s chosen expressions were so similar to the methods of art mediation.

Differences between Working as an Artist and Working as an Educator
What, then, are the differences between working as an artist and working as an educator? What do the art institutions think of this relation? Ayesha Ghanchi sees artists taking on two roles in the art education and art mediation contexts within art institutions today. She has mainly studied the Tate Modern’s historical use of artists between 1970 and 2010. The two roles she has picked out are the established artist, who exhibits her or his art, and the educational artist, who works as an educator. Here, according to Ghanchi, the institution shows an interest in the artistic process of the established artist, but not in that of the educational artist. The use of the established artist in the educational programmes has changed over the years, as the perception of art mediation has shifted from a teaching attitude towards the visitor to one that focuses on the visitor’s own creation of meaning. Today, Tate Modern experiments with bringing the artist’s studio into the gallery space and into the activities. The artist is considered a scientist who is expected to be able to talk about his or her research and who is asked to reflect on his or her own practice from an educational point of view.

There is a longer tradition of using the artistic process and the artist’s studio in audience development projects at museums, art centres, and galleries in the UK and the US than in Sweden. They have a more developed economic system in which artists-in-residence work at the institutions; artists collaborate with art educators and curators on various open studio programmes; and the audience gets to enter the artist’s studio and take part in the process. Cathy Carpenter, head of department at the Getty Artists Program in Los Angeles, emphasises the importance of being prepared to take risks in this context, to let go of your control, and to not back down from projects with unpredictable outcomes. I find this particularly interesting, as Carpenter is calling for an approach that is part of the artistic process. She also emphasises how valuable it is that the visitors, who are in this case participants, are co-creators of the art on equal terms with the artist.

Here, one might ask if the traditions and hierarchical divisions within art institutions such as museums, art centres, and galleries are getting in the way of the development of new forms of cross-pollination between art mediation and artistic practice. Ayesha Ghanchi (Collaborative Doctoral Award, Goldsmiths, University of London), Susan Sheddan (Tate Britain and Tate Modern), and Cathy Carpenter (Getty Artists Program) all point out how educational programmes like artists-in-residence and open studio programmes tend to end up in the shadow of the main exhibition projects and be regarded as add-ons. Sometimes, this is even visually obvious, when presentations of such projects end up in inaccessible parts of the space, like under stairs, in the cafés, or in other spaces that aren’t intended for exhibitions. And this happens despite the fact that the educational programmes are often what provides the financial means the institutions need for their main exhibition projects.

How would I, as somebody who works both as an artist and as an educator, describe the differences? I’d like to begin with the mental state; in my role as an educator, I am in a different state of mind than I am in my role as an artist. As I have pointed out earlier, I am using for comparison a situation where I as the educator also represent the institution, not just myself and my own opinions. The differences have to do with consideration, responsibility, knowledge, trust, and availability. I am in a mediating state, scanning and validating. As an artist, I can utilise these properties, but I don’t have to. I can actually be ruthless if I want to (and while some education is based on ruthlessness, I won’t get into that here). The mental state I am in as an artist is much more experimental and inquisitive. It can be intoxicating, like a drug, almost like being possessed. Art takes precedence over well-being. The projects that arise from cross-pollination between the educational and artistic practices are interesting, as they challenge these definitions and mental states.

Security is often taken to be a prerequisite of learning in educational contexts. Is it important for the audience to feel safe in an art mediation context? If we take the example of Lima’s immersive installation piece Choice, it has elements that caused me as a visitor to feel insecure, and even somewhat fearful. And it’s not difficult to come up with examples of
artworks by other artists that expose visitors to greater dangers than that. Provocation, fear, shock, and discomfort are deemed acceptable when it comes to art and the experience of it, but in educational contexts, security is considered to be a necessary precondition. Sepake Angiama, head of education at Manifesta 10 (2014) in St. Petersburg, believes that for art mediation, security is a given condition for success. In the extensive and elaborate programme for Manifesta 10, she strived to ensure that the participants would always feel safe, secure, and comfortable throughout every activity in the programme. Her main argument is that anything else renders dialogue impossible. As a visitor or participant, you have to feel safe to dare to open up and enter into communication, Angiama claims. Is it the case that expectations and the sense of security or insecurity are the most important aspects for defining the differences between educational projects and art projects?

The Defined Audience, the Institution, and Art Mediation

In several places, I have drawn attention to the art educator’s relationship to the institution. For example, in the section “How Has My Artistic Work Influenced Me in Art Mediation Contexts?,” I raised the question of how clear or how controversial the opinions I am permitted to voice in my role as an educator can be. The institutions’ expectations of the artist and the educator were touched on in the section “Differences between Working as an Artist and Working as an Educator.” Since the relationship between the artist/art educator and the institution is a recurring theme, I’d like to briefly touch upon how the cultural institutions relate to their audiences today, since this has an impact on my mediation mission as an educator, as well as their handling of the artists and the art. As this is a vast topic, which could be used for a whole other paper, I would like to present just a few of the examples I have come across in my work within art mediation during the last year, taken from my experience as a Swedish/Scandinavian art mediator. I will mention an example of an institution that has a very clear strategy towards its audience, followed by a couple of examples of tools developed for cultural institutions to use in their audience development, and finally an example of a free pedagogy devised by the artists themselves. I’m critical of some examples, such as the tools developed by the Atlas study, while I find the work of Lisa Baxter more useful. In this section I want to briefly show that cultural institutions and art mediation are part of economic and political systems, which also affect artists and the possibilities of art by deciding which projects are allocated funds and given exposure; however, I won’t go deeper into this in the paper. I want to emphasise that these examples aren’t an attempt to present a complete picture of the cultural institutions’ current methods and visions.

Kristin Danielsen, head of the Deichmanske Bibliotek, the main library of Oslo, uses new conceptual terminology in her development work, which aims at making the public co-creators of the library’s role in today’s society. She provocatively compared the library to a brand name and mentioned companies such as Starbucks in her lecture on audience development at Göteborgs konstmuseum in 2014. She recommended that everybody in the audience read the book The Experience Economy, by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore, which describes how the view on economics has changed over time. The most influential source for her work developing the library has been Pine and Gilmore’s conception of the “experience economy” and their interpretation of what consumers, users, customers, visitors, and audiences want today. Danielsen explained that Pine and Gilmore claim these groups want to control the product themselves and that they want the product to change them in some way. They want to play active roles in their own lives. The creators of products need to keep this in mind, according to Danielsen. She runs the library in line with these ideas, and examples of the changes it has inspired include making the archives more accessible to visitors and organising a nightclub at the library. She also describes the shift from consumer to “prosumer,” a concept that describes how an agent produces things for her or his own use, while also making them available to be consumed by others. There are many examples of “prosumers” on the Internet, with people sharing their own music, film, and images with each other in new economic structures.

What does the audience itself say? Having a pleasant time is, statistically speaking, the main thing the audience expects from an art experience when visiting an institution or a gallery. The main reason people choose not to visit a certain cultural event is that they want to avoid unpleasant experiences or being made to feel uncomfortable. This is what Atlas, the big Norwegian study from 2014 of various audience segments in Oslo and Akershus, indicates. It shows that a guarantee visitors will not be made to feel uncomfortable has more impact than lowered entry fees to cultural events, both for attracting new audiences and retaining old ones. This is an obvious source of potential conflict between the visions of the artists and institutions and the expectations of the audience.

Norsk publikumsutvikling, which runs the Atlas project, claims that it wants to offer new insights and develop new methods for engaging non-users of cultural events. The project is a segmentation analysis based on Morris Hargreaves McIntyre’s Culture Segments system. The model identifies eight different audience types based on the specific needs they address by visiting cultural events, as well as what kinds of rewards they expect from art and cultural experiences. The eight segments have names like Expression, Perspective, and Entertainment. If we take a look at the Expression segment, for instance, which represents 14 percent of the cultural market taking part in the Atlas survey, it is described as
follows: “While Expression dislike exclusivity they like belonging and are likely to hold membership of an arts, theatre or music organisation,” and further, “Expression value culture and most agree that subsidising the arts is a good use of government money.”

The segment is then analysed based on demographical and political aspects, and so on. The use of this segmentation analysis provides eight different potential communication strategies for cultural institutions, according to Norsk publikumsutvikling, which also believes that it is relevant to projects aimed at developing relationships with existing audiences. I find tools like these problematic, as they present a generalised version of the public, and when these are then presented to an institution in order to guarantee quality and uphold cultural and democratic values, there is a great risk that other values, which concern innovation and freedom, will be lost. Culture is squeezed into a measurable system that either suffocates or creates a backlash.

There are other tools institutions can use to better understand their audiences and their relationships to them. Heather Maitland, who works as an audience development consultant, was one of the people involved in defining the concept “audience development.” She wants institutions to ask themselves if they create for their audience or with their audience. She also claims that audience development has to start within the artistic, financial, and social visions of the institutions. Lisa Baxter, who founded the Experience Business in 2012, has said: “Art is not the product. Art is the vehicle for the experience.” Baxter has developed a workshop, “Walking in the Shoes of Your Audience,” that is customised for each particular situation in which it is given. She offers the staff of places such as museums and art centres an opportunity to experience their activities from the points of view of several different audience groups, based on their particular attitudes and needs, in something similar to role-play exercises. Several representatives from different cultural institutions in Sweden, Denmark, and Norway who took part in Baxter’s workshop at the Publikutsveckling från A till Ö conference in Göteborg in 2014 thought that her working methods were very useful. They investigated issues such as how visitors are welcomed into the reception area of the museum or art centre and how the location and design of informational signs are perceived in different ways by different groups. Other topics that were discussed include how the curiosity, but also the distrustfulness, of visitors are managed. I think that Baxter’s way of using the knowledge of all staff at an institution and making everyone participate in audience development are factors that make her method attractive.

In 1988, Anna Lena Lindberg wrote that she regards art mediation as an independent part of the larger field of visual arts, in which art is produced and distributed. However, she does point out that an empirical study might produce different results. Today, art mediation theories, especially ones informed by feminist thought, have entered the debate. Here, I’d like to include an example from Radikal pedagogik (Radical pedagogy), who claim that pedagogy that begins with artists has the potential to reach the general public, or audience, in a completely different way than institutional pedagogy. This pedagogy stems from individual artists and is opposed to the institution, which is interesting to note in relation to the examples above. Radikal pedagogik is a collaboration between artists Johanna Gustavsson and Lisa Nyberg in Malmö, and promotes a sense of artists’ responsibility for their own art, including the effects it has. Between 2006 and 2014, they gave workshops, classes, and lectures together on topics such as power, intersectionality, feminist perspectives, utopias, radical pedagogical methods, artistic collaborations, and self-organisation. On their blog, they don’t define the art audience, but they do encourage dialogue in their text “Radikal pedagogy” (Radical pedagogy):

“The Artist who Sticks Around” is the title of the next text, or rap, we want to write. It tells of an artist who doesn’t distance herself, who doesn’t just ask society and politics a bunch of questions, but sticks around to listen to the answers. An artist who doesn’t hide behind the free pass of intention … an artist who takes part in the discussion and allows herself to be influenced. Radical pedagogy makes us aware of the knowledge we create as artists, and who we create it for. It helps us understand how art can stake a claim in the public spaces, and what our responsibilities are. If every artist paid attention to the pedagogical aspects of her artistic practice, as though it were an inevitable dimension that demanded to be addressed, that would make it clearer how the things we do and say matter.

Cultural institutions have to consider surveys like Atlas, as they will be used to define their economic realities stemming from political decisions on all levels, in accordance with stated goals regarding democratic and cultural rights. If the missions of the museums and cultural institutes used to be changed when ideas about knowledge, learning, and teaching changed, it is now worth posing the question of whether these reformulations are not rather caused by economic realities and more audience-oriented efforts. This is one of the most significant challenges we face with regards to the continued existence of cultural institutions and their future education missions. How will this affect the way art develops? Are we headed for an “experience industry” of the kind discussed by Kristin Danielsen? But what does that mean for the right of art to be autonomous? Could art mediation be developed further if it was autonomous, rather than just being part of the larger field of visual art, as Anna Lena Lindberg described it? It’s interesting how Johanna Gustavsson and Lisa Nyberg call on artists...
to take more responsibility in their independent and radical pedagogy. Defining one’s audience and thinking about how to handle the dialogue is important, as is exploring the extent to which the institutions operate democratically. Lisa Baxter’s workshop is a rewarding method for institutions to use in working on their relationships to their audiences. In my work as an art educator, I have sensed that many institutions are lacking in harmony between their artistic visions and their outreach efforts. They are treated as separate components, and outreach is introduced later in the working process and is often neglected, with financial arguments used to explain this. I am convinced there is no need to limit one’s artistic ambitions to be able to run outreach projects. But it requires carefully considered methods, and the institutions have a lot of work ahead of them in formulating their visions. How they handle the issue will also have repercussions for the ways that artists work and the way that art will develop in future. There could be a risk that a certain kind of art is favoured because it is easier to handle in relation to some audience development tools, such as the one presented by Atlas. Based on my personal artistic opinion, I’d also like to emphasise the value of art that isn’t so simple to explain in words, in logical terms, and that might require other methods to be effective, as well as the value of experimentation, whereby neither the institution, nor the artist, nor the audience knows the outcome of a project ahead of time.

**Closing Thoughts**

There are differences between working as an artist and working as an art educator. These lie in the expectations of the institutions, the visitors, and myself, when I work as an artist or educator. One example is how security is often taken to be a prerequisite of learning in educational contexts as well as in art mediation contexts, but not when it comes to art and the experience of it. Another example is how the institution shows an interest in the artistic process of the established artist, but not in that of the educational artist, according to Ayesha Ghanchi.32 (This is described in the section “Differences between Working as an Artist and Working as an Educator.”) Exploring the boundaries of these differences is not just interesting to me personally, in defining my own artistic practice, but also could be a useful way to develop art mediation on a grander scale and to contribute knowledge relevant to institutions’ audience development efforts.

I can clearly see how my work as an artist has impacted my work in art mediation. But it’s harder for me to see any influence going in the other direction. Perhaps it only shows as a growing interest in the body and a non-verbal form of experience. Lygia Clark’s work on the perceiving body produced an entirely new kind of (artistic) practice in a therapy context and constitutes a good example of the former, while Barbara Bolt, Michael Polanyi, and Allan Janik have all explored the latter, albeit using different methods from one another. In art mediation contexts, there is a tradition of using spoken and written language to give logical explanations of art, which has influenced my own art in that it has made me try to avoid this; instead, I prefer to dwell on unconscious processes and the non-verbal. This is evident in my work with drawings and ink paintings based on the movements of the body, gestures, and the method of drawing with my left and right hands simultaneously (paralleltekning [parallel drawing]).

My work as an artist has had an impact on my art mediation work in several ways. In part, it is apparent in my ambition to place the works within an artistic process for visitors so that they won’t experience the artworks as the final products of a narrative. I’ve done this by treating “gallery talks” as studio discussions and using various methods to give visitors access to a corporeal or practical experience of the materials and pictures, which is something I believe promotes the understanding of art. I’ve done these things in order to address the dilemma inherent to art mediation, which Anna Lena Lindberg describes in her doctoral thesis. I’ve also attempted to use artistic methods from my own practice in workshop situations, where bodily and mental concepts related to drawing and ink painting are explored. The “cross-pollinated forms of expression” that oscillate between different expectations and can simultaneously function as exhibitions, educational workshops, and artworks represent an interesting development of both art and art mediation, and require further exploration.

Finally, I would like to mention tacit knowledge once more, as it is a topic I find interesting both in my artistic practice and in my continued work in the field of art mediation. It’s something I would like to study further, especially in relation to cross-pollinated forms of expression. For example, I would like to continue to develop workshops that at the same time are works of art, in which the act of creating and the body are in focus, and through which one can examine a practical, experience-based method for reflection on art.

Ibid., 17.


Allan Janik, Cordelias tystnad—Om reflektionens kunskapsteori (Malmö: Carlsson Bokförlag, 1991), 5.


Ibid., 27.


Ibid., 49.

Ibid., 65.

Ibid., 162.


Polanyi, The Tacit Dimension, 39.

Ibid., 39–40.


Bolt, Art beyond Representation, 5.


Susan Sheddan, “Tate London—Early Years and Families Programme” (lecture, Konstpedagogik i förändring—Från förmedling till konstnärlig vision conference, Malmö, November 24, 2014).


Kristin Danielsen, lecture presented at the Publikutveckling från A till Ö conference (Göteborg, November 14, 2014).


Heather Maitland, lecture presented at the Publikutveckling från A till Ö conference (Göteborg, November 13, 2014).


Lindberg, Konstpedagogikens dilemma, 17.


Further references


Emelie Sandström

It's a strange state to be in: when the veil of reality, as my senses ordinarily perceive it, is pulled aside to reveal new invisible layers. When the distinct line between the outer layer of my skin and the world around me is suddenly erased, and I am dissolved. What appears on the other side can take on different expressions. The feeling of tepid air that makes my whole being feel light and pure, safe purple and milky moss-green clouds enfolding me as I float up at a forty-five-degree angle from the centre of my forehead. Or the horror when the violently black and leaden air wraps itself around me and stops me from moving, makes it hard to breathe. There are radiant portals, magnanimous ovals, malicious ovals, a double helix that reveals to me the essence of the tree, and the same shape convulsively coiling around the muscles in my arms, tearing and pulling at me. It's the dragon from the abyss, roaring and rending, and god beaming and looking down on me from above, rocking me gently in the treetops.

I don't know if water serves as a portal to the deep, from which it makes its way up through, or if it's just a coincidence that I'm usually close to water when I have to surrender. I think it sent its envoys to herd me there. They had already caught up with me by the avenue in the park, just around the corner from my front door. A swarm of agitated bats to the right of my field of vision. Small and black, with vibrating wings, clattering like stressed moths, but heavier, and more metallic. They surprise me from behind, and I curse my uncontrolled reflexes that cause me to hurl my entire body to the left, the jolt in my neck strong enough to cause a pang of pain. Irritating. Within a tenth of a second, they have fluttered past and disappeared again. The next assault is a hundred metres further down the avenue. One of them smacks into me, behind my ear. This time, I manage to limit my motion to my head when I flinch, and I put a lot of effort into appearing unaffected as I turn my gaze back and look straight ahead. The clattering beating of the wings has set a pace for my heart, which pounds out fast, short beats. One foot in front of the other, at a normal walking pace. There's no point in running, they know that I know that they're there. The ground rumbles deeply under my feet.

I want to escape, but I also want to throw myself to the ground, get back up again, and let Rintrah’s wrath carry me wherever it wants to. I tell him that he can use my body as his own. Plant himself in my bone marrow, where I was once told the soul is rooted. I offer it to him. He looks at god in the treetops through my eyes, and god looks right back. Smiles its invisible smile. They have agreed where to take me, and if I take a wrong turn they will get grouchy. They leave me confused on a path, heading the wrong way, and so I hurry back. I allow my legs to carry us to the ocean.

(The Doors of Perception)
It was by the ocean that I once believed myself to have found a true elixir of life. A plant that revealed to me the truth of the world. For a short while, I believed that mugwort would be the last and only thing I would ever need, beside other necessities such as sustenance and air to breathe. The plant that would protect me from everything, and which I would in return surrender myself to, waiting patiently throughout the winter for it to come back into bloom, and then spending the summer months walking by its side, listening with veneration to what it had to say. I understand now

Installation view, MFA exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö, 2015. Emelie Sandström
that this is how god works. God moves through the vegetation, its restful gaze focused on me, but always refusing to be met. Beams that make me melt inside and lift my body to the skies, hoping to get to see more of all this beauty. In the treetop outside my window, early one Saturday morning in May, which glistened with a brighter shade of green than I had ever seen, god beamed a warm smile at me. And then, gone. I want to go back. I draw for comfort, as a sacrifice, I want to capture the way reality really looks.

“If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thr’ narrow chinks of his cavern.”

Before my drawing exhibition Förnimmelsens porta (The Doors of Perception) at Bror Hjorths Hus in Uppsala, I gave a presentation to the staff who would be giving gallery talks on my works. I got myself caught up in a long tirade about a shape on the paper, which I had seen clearly. It was just that I hadn’t seen it with my eyes, but rather experienced it on a level at which I didn’t need the physical receptors of my body to perceive light and colours. Some confusion arose regarding where exactly I had seen these shapes without seeing them, and I was beginning to feel a little defeated, as I had no better explanation to offer than the one I had just tried to give. It became clear to me then how much I had hoped that somebody would validate these shapes that exist in some kind of collective unconscious by recognising them. If there was nobody in this group of fifteen people or so who could see what I have seen through these drawings, how could I expect anybody else to? And in that case, are they even true?

After the presentation, one of the guides walked up to me and discreetly asked me what he should tell visitors who asked about the artist’s relationship to psychedelics, because this was a question that he felt was certain to come up. I understood then that some recognition had occurred after all, on a level at least for one of them. However, the question of whether my works, the shapes and the colours in my drawings, are based on experiences I have had on an LSD trip seems to be a sensitive one.

Some might say that being under the influence of drugs like LSD or magic mushrooms—which have powerful effects on the release of signal substances in the brain and cause vivid visions of things like radiant colours and lights or fractals that pulsate and breathe—adds new layers to reality, but that, no matter how colourful and bright they may be, remain artificial. The material world that we normally inhabit, where most people agree on the colour of a flower’s petals or the roughness of a road’s surface, takes on a different guise. I would claim instead that this state uncovers reality, because it moves our focus away from the backdrops of our everyday existences, which we move through and find so significant.

In the other reality, where the body doesn’t take centre stage, where fingers are small and crooked like salted shrimps, and legs are long and thin like shoelaces, the sky is no longer grey behind curtains taking slow, safe breaths like a pair of enormous lungs. It’s intensely pink, like nothing we know in this world.

Although the question of whether or not I use psychedelic substances in my practice has merit, the answer is not particularly interesting. And if the question is asked, that means their understanding of what I really saw is correct, even though I’m not dependent on those substances to see it. There are many different keys that unlock the doors of perception, but what is hidden behind them seems to be experienced similarly by everybody, with plenty of room for different interpretations. The person who thought my graduation show was about the entity residing in the mushroom—the divine being that he had also been in contact with, albeit under different circumstances, and that he recognised exactly in my sculptures—was absolutely right in a way, although my own approach had been different.

Various kinds of dedication have served me in more or less successful ways to cleanse my mind and study these layers of reality that are so difficult to reach in our everyday existence, and one of the more effective methods has been drawing. On a mat on the floor, which is just the right size for my body as I hunch over a drawing pad, in a posture humans sometimes use to show veneration, I have found a meditative state in which I am able, after spending enough hours putting thousands of short lines on paper, to escape my physical body once more, and make a closer connection with the other side. I translate beams of light and beckoning doorways into colours that I can access in this plane. I try to figure out how to use white and different shades of green on paper to create the illusion that it sparkles just as brightly as it did in the treetop that time. I hypnotise myself with spirals, which make my head ache at first but then seem soft and empty. It scratches, and I get itchy, and the effort of purging it all makes me sweaty and nauseous. On other occasions, it slips out of me easily, and I feel weightless and infinitely flexible; the joints that otherwise serve as my body’s squeaky hinges are turned into warm foam rubber. What reveals itself is still inaccessible and vague, but it’s enough for me to be able to create a translation on the paper. In this way, drawing serves a dual purpose: a method both for putting myself into a kind of trance and for documenting what I see in that state. It is an act of worship, something I have to give in return for the things I’ve been allowed to see, and I gather the results in an archive that I can use to search, compare, make associations, and repeat to make my way closer to an answer. Although the process can be intoxicating, I emerge from it with greater clarity than before, although like with any state of this kind it is important to close down from time to time, to make sure to retain the benefits that a constant flow can negate.
In drawing, I show a passive, mild reverence, and in sculpture, a more active one. It feels brutal to cut into the wood on the lathe, which used to be alive but has now sacrificed its dead body to my practice. I make round, bulbous shapes out of pine, a soft and porous wood, which acquires a rough and splintery surface when I gouge it with the chisel to force it into the shape I want. The tree rings are clear, and I follow the fibres along a wavy line, in and out of the wood, they turn into eyes with multiple irises, bubbling and melting into each other in a line, in an upward direction from below. I try to recreate the motion I saw up above, through my closed eyelids. The shape that lift me up when I am lying in bed, about to fall asleep, but that fades away as soon as I try to pin it down and understand what it really looks like. It pulses with every colour imaginable over a black background. A crystal-shaped heart with a red centre, fixed in position above my reclining body, but also in motion, in an upward direction from below, turning itself inside out throughout eternity. I have sealed it into the dead body of the pine tree, created wide-open eyes that I can stare into. The gaze staring back at me is a superior one, and I'm always the one to give way, but I have sealed it in the splintery surface of the wood, and that provides me with some slight artificial sense of control.

(Greed)

Control is something I will never possess. I once thought I could embody the divine essence of mugwort, that I could become the plant's chosen one and wander the earth spreading its holy message. I drank so much mugwort extract that autumn that my body developed an allergy to it. Now, I can't even get close to it without my nose running and my eyes itching. Disappointing. In my blissful greed, god turned its back on me. Greed, as we all know, is considered a mortal sin, and I am beginning to see where this idea came from. I don't believe there is any such thing as sin, but I understand the shame that follows from greed. Humanity's time on earth is predetermined and can only be spent here, with the odd glimpse of heaven and hell and everything that binds them together. It's only natural to want to stay there once you've had that glimpse of what is hidden on the other side. Where everything sparkles and shimmers, and the air is tepid. Waiting for better times, stuck here on earth, we are left to gather shimmering colourful jewels and glittering gold, and paint beautiful shapes in beautiful colours—anything that reminds us of god's bright light.

I once dreamed of the end of the world. Or, rather, the end of our time in the world. Not death exactly, but a tableau in which everything of flesh and blood that lives there, that is able to wriggle and bleed, ceased to exist, and passed into the divine light. It was a beautiful scene. All that remained in front of me was the ocean, with its shiny surface rippling with tranquil waves. Two suns in the sky, boiling giant spheres of glittering gold. One rose from the underworld, one came down from above, and when they came up alongside another, everything that can wiggle and bleed ceased to be, and fell into infinity. The sense of warmth and love was indescribable. The golden reflection in the surface of the water gleamed.

Pinned to the earth, I am greedily attempting to stare into a sun of shining gold once more. I spend two months casting and polishing by hand a round disc made of bronze. It has the same tranquil and wavy surface as the water in my dream. Highly polished bronze is a beautiful shimmering yellow, almost like in my dream, but also nothing like it. Because this is a sheen that cannot be found in the metal alloys of humans, or in the tinted glass of church windows. But that's as close as we can get, and that's why we build churches with altars inside, adorning them with shiny bronze and gold, and when the light penetrates the windows, which are tinted with the colours we can access here, and mimics the beams from the other side, we can almost feel the presence of god.

After two months of frantic polishing, the sinews in my right arm have become inflamed, and I have lost some hair, because I have basically eaten nothing but goji berries this whole time. I have noticed that fasting has wonderful benefits for maintaining the endurance and concentration that my project requires. The process is fantastic, and during the two months I spend crouching over and vacantly staring into the metal plate, I am in a state of bliss. The growing pain in my arm doesn't bother me. Nor does the bronze dust that I inhale each day, and that makes my lungs ache. The heat within my chest grows warmer as the bronze becomes more shiny. It's almost as though I expect something tremendous to happen as I finally finish polishing the mirror and apply the last coat of wax. As though I were performing some lengthy, protracted sacrificial rite, and expected something in return. But the bronze mirror lies cold and dead before me, and when I look into it all I can see is my own tired face, distorted in its wavy surface. I got too greedy again, and god threw me to the dragon.

There are two things available to me that define the beast from the underworld. Two attributes with which it manifests itself behind my tightly shut eyelids and through my bodily sensations. The claws and the orifice. I also imagine the wings, but I can never quite catch sight of them. It's more like a rising darkness, coming along from below, that rises up and billows out into rolling clouds that drift across the sky. Down by the shore, the ground is a toxic yellow, and swirling. The veil has been lifted, and I see them approach me in a line. The bent claws, purple and lethally sharp, that fall on me in a big, slow swooping motion. I can feel them penetrate the top of the back of my head, and move down, through my neck, my shoulders, my back, and the back of my thighs, as they try to tear
me to the ground. I tense every muscle in my body as hard as I can, resist, and wait for it to make its next move. It doesn’t come immediately; a few seconds pass, long enough for me to think it’s all over and relax a little.

(The Occult Arsenal)
I try to gather an arsenal of weapons inside myself. I imagine that I have claws to scratch back with, and arms like heavy, sharp black spears. I imagine the red dragon burned into my back, its wings extending across my shoulders and the horns twisting up into my neck. He is my protector. It makes sense to use a dragon to fight a dragon. However, I can’t defeat the dragon on the other side with invisible weapons; I need to create reflections of them in my part of the world, moving as I do among material objects. I will use mind power and the strength of my body to knock some sense into five bronze weapons, shaped like the dragon showed me. I mount a row of three evil-looking greenish-black bronze claws at the top of the splayed fingers of the protective rune Algiz, which I built out of lathed pieces of wood joined with wooden plugs, so that I can hold it in front of me like an enormous inverted rake. With these lethal weapons in my possession, the dragon will be fighting itself. I understand why the wizard depends on his wand, and why the priest needs his holy water. I tattoo two of the shapes onto each forearm, so that they will always be with me.

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I know that the claws of the dragon can’t penetrate my skin, but the sudden panic that accompanies losing your grasp on reality is worse than superficial wounds. The fear in turn brings euphoria. Two emotions that are as good as inseparable. I don’t know if I should fight or let go and surrender myself to the dragon. Offer myself to the darkness, not because I am giving up, but because something within me wants to. Its jaws open like an enormous black hole, and it feels like I am about to be devoured. But instead,
I hear the scream. The sharp, numbing shriek that cuts in behind my ears, and I see myself turn to dust and disappear in a deep toxic whiff emitted by the black orifice. But I hold my ground and scream back at it, shriek out loud to muffle the roar that is piercing me. With the ground toxic yellow and swirling beneath my feet, and with its claws dug into my neck, it forces it out of me. “LET GO OF ME AND I WILL PROMISE!”

(Lightbringer)
Surrendering yourself is easier than attempting to take in the fear of a thousand voices that shriek at you in a language you don’t understand. I once promised a flood of forgotten souls from a broiler chicken farm that I would help them. It was a foolish promise, as I couldn’t help them in any way beyond acknowledging their tragic existences and their ultimate fates. The result of this was a bronze sceptre, three and a half metres high, a symbol of power dedicated to those who never held any, and a feeling of shame and betrayal within myself.

At first, I thought they needed a medium. I would transform myself into the witch who swore a pact with millions of restless chicken spirits. They would speak through me. But the voices were just a confused wail of pain and terror, and not something I could put into words. I shouldn’t make promises like that if I can’t keep them. I spend all my mental and physical strength forcing a confirmation that I have at least heard their screams into five pieces of cast bronze, which are welded to each other and raised up towards the treetops. It is given height to manifest a way out, above humanity, away from its violent clutches. Into the light. I charge it with Rintrah’s wrath at the injustices of the world.
Untitled, 2015. Dry pastel on paper. 42 x 29.7 cm. Emelie Sandström
I don't know what I have surrendered myself to, but the claws no longer hurt me. I straighten up, levitate, and my chest feels strong. The strength of the dragon and the darkness surrounding me. I lift my gaze and see through the toxic air, through the black hole that spirals open to become a doorway. And there, behind it, the light.

(Shown to the Dark)
There is something especially vitalising about swearing one's soul to the dark; it is the energy that's required, tearing and hurting you inside, for you to be able see the light. The day after I go to see a show by the black metal band Watain, I feel like I've spent a week at a spa. I hardly need to sleep that night. It's as though I were a big battery, recharged by the blaring drums and the deep growling that penetrated my body and shook the marrow in my bones. Incense is positioned at the centre of the stage, and to each side of it, two large burning tridents are placed in front of the enormous, black, devouring backdrop. The singer shapes his hands like claws, and raises them into the air, swearing fealty to dark forces. I recognise this drama on stage from my own staging of it, which occurs when I install a show, even though it appears completely different. Placing the dead objects that are the remnants of my desperate fumbling among all sorts of promises. Relics from ceremonies where I acted the magician with the connection to that which lies hidden, and tried to answer the voices by carving wood and polishing bronze, giving material form to the shapes I was shown and that I so reverently strive to translate as accurately as possible. If I position them the right way, maybe the doors will reopen. The concert is a sacrificial ritual dedicated to darkness. Validation. I am convinced that the people on stage have also felt the dragon's powerful wings lift them to the skies, and their performance serves as a reminder and a temporary source of energy for me.

(Hin)
Beautiful colours radiate and shimmer through the black hole, which gradually fades to make way for light. The air is just the right temperature. I am no longer strong; I don’t need strength any more, in this state of nothingness. The dragon has let go of me and carefully hung me from an invisible hook some distance above the ground. I am left to hang there for a while. I understand that the dark and the light are not in opposition with one another. They collaborate, and toss me back and forth between them. Hin, the being on the other side, delivers me into the light through the dark, where I can’t stay, since I am stuck on earth. Here, I build walls to protect me, weapons to fight with, pictures to comfort me, and gifts to sacrifice. They are prayers, worship, and armour. Together, they form a bridge between this illusory world and the world on the other side. One of them visible, the other invisible, but both of them equally true.

2 The word “hin” is an archaic Swedish pronoun meaning “that one” or “the other.”
Magnitudes of Mire and Thread

If we walk into a room where we lose our sense of orientation, where everything is falling, then what? We find ourselves standing inside a room where the structures slowly and serenely tumble down around us. As if we had been riveted to a point in time, while everything else continued at a somewhat higher tempo than the ordinary one. The higher tempo: in order to compensate for the frozen individual. And here we take our orientation facing other directions than we normally do. Straightforward does not exist, but up and down, and around and along. What has now been established is a way of seeing. And it is the way that we see rather than what is seen that is important. Herein lies the freedom to transform reality. And the freedom exists precisely because it has to do with the way of seeing.

Where are we flying to? I want to be free. Free from the already formulated. (The movement is towards the reference-free.) The challenge lies in overcoming the distance. The goal is to erase the distance between me and that which I am doing. To be dissolved into. To live in. To exist in. But isn’t this a lot of poppycock? Shouldn’t you just stop? It’s never really going to amount to anything, anyway. Uncertainty is beautiful. Now when you are about to lose it, you can see how beautiful it is. It hangs there, on the fringe of the garment. And gets shaken into insensibility. Uncensored. Thoughts fold up and collapse on top of each other. Melting down like walls in wax. Trickling in across all the edges and cracks in the floor. Filling them out. But they still lie there, amalgamated, folded up in the new formation. Trickling out into edges and corners. Down through outlets and veins, neural pathways. Out through the central nervous system, rhythmically sputtering, springing through every single bone in the spinal column. Like discs that are fried off, out through the joints, with such force that the skin splits ... freezing. The disc froze at a distance of ten centimetres from the body. An invisible column between the two. Columns are sticking up, now, from here and there. Somebody has started to build a dome around the body. Just so that it will be enveloped in darkness? The disc’s form was transferred and became an oval dome around the eyes. Back into the brain.

Drawing is digging. To draw is to probe into new universes. Drawing is an archaeological production: paradoxically enough, what is found and what is produced are the same. Whatever is found is produced at the very same moment that the discovery is made.

Volumes of Silence and Earth

The Parthenon, Vibrations, Le Corbusier, and Hannah Arendt

“The Parthenon is the temple of the virginal (parthenos) goddess Athena. In the Parthenon, architecture and sculpture were unified into the culminating pinnacle of Greek art, which has given us that which, to our culture, is such an important concept: the classical. The Parthenon’s famous Panathenaic frieze is one of the world’s greatest sculptural feats. The sculptures—400 human beings and 200 animals—on this frieze were planned out by Phidias and were executed by the very best Greek sculptors.”
—Lis Thorbjørnsen

Le Corbusier speaks about a resonance chamber existing inside the human being, which vibrates in the meeting with the harmonic. That which is activated in this vibration is “the trace of an indefinable absolute pre-existing at the core of our being.”

And this resonance chamber is our criterion for harmony. The vibration moves its way around the axis according to which the human being is organised, in harmony with nature and the universe. Nature’s phenomena and objects are also organised according to this axis, as are physics and natural science, precisely because they have all been prescribed by an original will. With this, we obtain a possible definition of harmony, which could be: “a moment of accord with the axis that lies within man, and thus with the laws of the universe—a return to the general order.” According to Le Corbusier, this vibration arises in the meeting with the Greek temple the Parthenon.

Le Corbusier makes a careful distinction between architecture and the building. Architecture, in line with music and art, is a purely spiritual creation. The building bears the architecture. If the walls should start to crack, the architecture will be disturbed in the same way as the music would be disturbed if you happened to be sitting on a pincushion while listening. The plastic arts are what we see and measure with our eyes. Therefore, architecture belongs to the plastic arts. According to Le Corbusier, “To formulate the artwork clearly and animate it with unity, to give it a basic attitude or character: a pure creation of the intellect. We recognise this when it comes to painting and music, but we lower architecture down to useful purposes.”

With this distinction between—and separation of—architecture and construction, Le Corbusier asserts that architecture exists in a different sphere than that of the practically functional; he is claiming that the building belongs to the practically functional while architecture is something only attained through a quest that extends beyond the practical. In this way, architecture comes to contain the same potential...
A brief existential moment. Like an explosion that annihilates everything at the same time that it creates a new order in the affected materials. Drawing is a way of excavating space and form.

Freedom is experienced in the synthesis. In the confluent state, where movement, expression, voice (music), and physical (whether voluminous or flat) creation synthesise. Actually, there are no boundaries between these. Mental, physical, and sonic creation and movement all issue from the same source. The separation between them is, to be sure, first and foremost a consequence of language (and tradition). We separate drawing from painting in the distinction between processes and techniques that is bound up with the two, and we separate painting from sculpture in the distinction between the voluminous and the flat. But behind processes and techniques, behind voluminous and flat, there might just be a more all-encompassing source, which wantonly winds its way through all these linguistic and historical categorisations: an artistic essence, which can assume all material forms (all materialisations). In order to attain prudence, do we have to systemise and categorise? In order to attain wisdom, do we have to erase boundaries and act out syntheses?

Experimentation in all (possible) directions. Swimming through the days at the internal waves’ tempo. Last Friday, I set out through grid structures, ice-cube bags like transparent walls in water, rice casts and sonorous harmonies in cathedral-like plaster’s fields—water-walls captivating modelarian formations. Underwater world, underwater day, cathedral under water, water over city, cloud, bursting. A cloudburst overturned the whole city’s rhythm when for generating an artistic experience as a work of art. And it is this that Le Corbusier is speaking about as “a moment of accord with the axis that lies within man, and thus with the laws of the universe—a return to universal law.” Isn’t Le Corbusier thinking closely in line with Hannah Arendt’s thoughts on the relationship between the ethical and the aesthetic faculties in the human brain? (And what about Agnes Martin’s thoughts on abstract emotions?) That which Le Corbusier is describing here, the experience of a meeting with the Parthenon, is presumably linked up with that which Arendt speaks of as “going beyond oneself.” Of course, it can be said that Le Corbusier is speaking more about the artistic/architectonic experience as a condition whereby the human being, for a moment, delves much deeper down into herself or himself and not, as in Arendt, “goes beyond oneself;” but precisely with the result of flowing out into a more general human condition, or maybe—in fact—a universal condition, and thus to a certain extent also beyond oneself. Moreover, I also believe that when Le Corbusier speaks about the ability to bring about the meeting with “the trace of an indefinable absolute pre-existing at the core of our being,” he is referring to architecture’s ethical potential.

I believe that here, Le Corbusier is challenging our conventional thinking about how we draw boundaries between art and architecture. The building is what the vast majority of us supposedly live inside of. Architecture is that which “rises up toward the sky in an order that causes me to feel touched … binding me to this place and my eyes are watching. My eyes see something that articulates a thought, a thought that is illuminated without words, without sounds, solely through the prisms that stand in relation to one another … you have created conditions that have touched me. That’s architecture.”

This means to say, architecture affects us emotionally; it helps us to see; it expresses a thought.

Arendt claims that in the moment you contemplate a work of art, what happens is that you lose yourself. In the moment you lose yourself, you step into “the other’s” way of seeing, and it is here the relationship between the ethical and the aesthetic is built. Namely because the act itself, the very act of stepping into the other’s way of seeing, is that which fashions the basis for ethical thinking. By this means, the aesthetic judgment actually turns into an ethical judgment. Herein lies the reason Arendt positions art as the very core of a society. If we accept Arendt’s theory, we can try to widen the concept of the aesthetic to include not only art but also the constructed environments around us. And here we might inquire about the relationship between these and the formation of the ethical faculty inside the human brain. I would assert that a building is also an ideological entity and that its very structures and its particular distribution of spaciousness represent “the other’s” way of seeing.

The cloud opened up, burst. The cloud bursts ... was burst. Pouring water down on cathedrals and skyscrapers. Flowing out, filling up, streaming through streets, into all the fissures. Here, all the gaps were filled, by the streaming mass, which grabbed hold of trees and cars, hats, umbrellas. Towering columns of skyscrapers started to teeter at their foundations and took up crooked positions—before everything became silent again and froze. Winter set in and the flowing mass congealed into precise formations, with a certain way of knowing, as a manifesto of all the free space there was around the masses, the substances, the materials, the compressed atoms. That which was freely floating around now came to be cast into all the masses, penetrating cracked structures filled with holes, forming horizontal columns through pipes and outlets. Squares through windows and houses. This movement was also flowing out into the woods. Bark had been torn off. Notwithstanding the ferocity,
this had slackened after the meeting with the city—it was good that the willow yielded in its flexible line of demarcation. And remained standing, upright, with its tops sticking up after the movement froze and everything became quiet. It was certainly birch, anyway. From the outstretched condition of the forest, back to the compact state of affairs in the city. Somebody had started to cut up the ice. Into large cubes, slapped up on top of the ice, where the children were kicking them around like bolts, in through the large glass facades that were shattered. But really, the ice simply had to be carved up so that we could see all the imprints that had become embedded in it. We were being allowed to see the city’s negative. All streets, parks, and open plazas—cast right into the frozen water. Imprints of ornamentation. All the empty space squeezed out, eliminated, killed. Well, actually it was simply air transformed into ice.

Moving one’s way through life and the question lingers: Is it possible to find an essential rhythm that is so powerful that all structure collapses, turns to dust? Is this a matter of handing over all will? Of surrendering oneself? (Walking without will.)

A matter of wondering whether there’s some kind of movement that breaks through everything, never accepting boundaries? Movements that break through walls, making dents in them. The invisible. An invisible energy that we appear to be capable of sensing. Fear is activated in certain spaces. Can the blame be put on the architecture? Or should we be looking at energies and history?

After my childhood home had been renovated, this kind of fear also abated, to a significant degree. After lightning had struck right through the gable end, the three small rooms in this part of the house stood unused, musty, uninhabited. Then the walls were taken down and the three small rooms became merged with the large living room. At the same time, a lot of trees in the garden were felled. Everything became more transparent—both inside and outside the house. The mood in the garden was completely changed after someone had gone around and seen to it that it was trimmed in all of its edges. The same with the house. It was almost as though the gloomy energies were being called forth by all that had been so badly maintained, in a state of disrepair. As though the architecture in itself had the capacity to call forth these forces. But there was also something absolutely anxiety provoking about the narrowly partitioned. About space over which you had no overview. The compression of the three small rooms in the gable end. All the small rooms hidden inside the densely entangled rhododendron bushes that were growing wildly, clustered together in thick lines. And the compactly growing bamboo bushes, blocking the sight and blocking the body so impenetrably, like a wall.

There is a constant negotiation between the subject in the world and the masses around it. We might assume that the subject’s internal structures have been formed in part through the external structures that the subject encounters. Or maybe we can talk about an internal architecture, which is formed in the meeting with the external architecture. If we take this statement to be valid, it may be concluded that the architecture has a very powerful position when it comes to the determination of the individual’s freedom and the conditions of possibility for his or her sense perception. Exactly how Le Corbusier has contributed to the quality of freedom and material sense perception in the development of architecture is a topic that I would like to leave open for further discussion. Nevertheless, I do share his overwhelming fascination for Greek temple ruins.

Jane Jacobs’s book The Death and Life of Great American Cities is, generally speaking, a critique of the 1950s urban planning program in the United States and specifically also a critique of Le Corbusier’s role in this development. According to Jacobs, “modernist urban planning rejects the city, because it rejects human beings living in a community characterized by layered complexity and seeming chaos.” She disagrees with the “deductive reasoning” employed by modernist city planners, considering “urban renewal the most violent, and separation of uses (i.e., residential, industrial, commercial) the most prevalent” of these principles, which “destroy communities and innovative economies by creating isolated, unnatural urban spaces.”

Agnes Martin, the Line’s Subtle Sensitivity, and Abstract Emotions

In light of the fact that Le Corbusier refers to the Parthenon as an activator for the axis of the universe’s laws that lie “within man,” we might ask whether something similar can be activated in the meeting with Agnes Martin’s paintings. The universalism that is found in Martin’s paintings may have roots in the classical and may bring forth the same feeling of a temporal and a spacious nothingness that the Parthenon does. As if they were opening a fissure leading into a much wider temporality than the here and now and time’s clasp around my life. Martin’s paintings are like emotions that float out into some kind of abstract nothingness. They are not even perceived as materialisations of feelings but, in fact, as pure feelings in themselves.

Martin felt herself to be more closely affiliated with abstract expressionism than with minimalism. However, she felt connected to the classical tradition to an even greater degree:

“The function of the art work is ... the renewal of memories of moments of perfection.” For Martin, memories evoked by classical art did not involve subjective feelings but abstract emotions, most notably, those of happiness, innocence, and beauty. Sensations experienced when contemplating the natural world can also generate such emotions, she believed. “People are not aware of their abstract emotions, which are a big part of their lives, except when they listen to music or look at art,” she averred.
Recently, I had a dream that changed my outlook on death. I was walking out on a surface of ice that snapped and broke—and at that very moment time became very slow and calm. I fell in, tranquilly, softly, and silently. And I coalesced with everything around me. We became one. It was beautiful.

We two belong together. I have come from you and I will once again become a part of you. I will be transformed into a material that will again form part of your circular structure. My body grows up and for a fleeting moment it turns into a vertical structure that moves its way around on the surface of your spherical structure before it melts down again and becomes a part of you. We break your surface and lay the body down beneath it. Now it’s a part of you and you commence your transformation process of the body’s material. Through skin, nail, hair, muscle, bone by bone, spine, thighbone, fingers, skull. All of this is inside of me but it will one day be transformed into soil.

Through the covering, every single fragile fragment gets frozen in its current position. This means to say that the membrane of fibreglass comes to function, with respect to the wooden construction, as a reinforcing element.

Abstract emotions and the vibration “of the indefinable absolute that existed before everything else deep in our souls”\(^\text{12}\) are, perhaps, two conditions that are not at all separate. And maybe this can also be related to the picturesque sublime, inasmuch as Martin mentions that “sensations experienced when contemplating the natural world can also generate such emotions.”\(^\text{13}\)

Emotions and nature become lines and intensively faint colour fields. Is a rose beautiful? Is the rose’s beauty to be found in the plant itself? Or does it exist as an idea in your mind? Inspiration takes root and grows in a clear mind. (Beauty’s innocence is the road to happiness.)

“I used to meditate until I learned how to stop thinking. Now I’ve stopped thinking, … I don’t think of anything. … I don’t have any ideas myself. I don’t believe in anybody else’s, so that leaves me a clear mind. I’m an empty mind. So when something comes into it, you can see it.”\(^\text{14}\)

At first glance, Martin’s paintings can be experienced as being reference and context free. What I mean by “context free” is that her artworks float around in this curious nothingness. On further reflection, though, I do not really think that you can speak about her works as being context free, as, on the other hand, we may actually regard them as works with a kind of...
In the covering there is a search for the immediate. The non-insistent, as well as the enlarging. The spaciousness—expanding.

The history of a specific architectural room dwells inherently in every one of its fragments. If you look more closely at every single fragment, you'll be able to decode a certain amount of information about the original room for which the object was built and of which the object is a result. However, the extrication from the architectonic context is now complete.

I built a replica of an architectonically defined shelf structure. I dissected, performed an autopsy, and restored. The result was seven liberated fragments and the journey could begin. Each fragment, by this time, had become frozen in its present position. The flexibility that was previously found in the wooden skeleton has now been eliminated in favour of an eternal embedding inside the fibreglass's skin. For the hand, there is no longer any change that remains possible. Now it is up to the mind to lead the journey onward. The dead skeletons that lie there covered in white fabric are now waiting inside the burial chamber for the time that will come when the earth's surface has to be broken in order to lay the material down.

We are sailing along a dark ocean, where spectral luminous furnishings tranquilly float past. We are sailing on through them as though we were gliding through a forest of transparent trees. Bumping into icebergs, multistorey buildings, a church altar, a ship with wedding dresses enveloped in darkness, winds, and a dancing skeleton.

There is a vested interest in seeing what is concealed. Accepting the emotional attachment to certain structures and spacious states. Digging out micro-universes that virtually are invisible. In the re-production of the shelf, there is also a wish to excavate. As much as this is a reproduction process, it's also an excavation process. Accordingly, a way of digging the object free from its architectonic context. The tension between unearthing and constructing is often present in my works. If we are speaking about the construction of the shelf, this might be taken to signify that here, for the hand, a building process has been carried out, while, for the mind, there is an unearthing process that has been carried out. This is what I believe because every single stick and every single piece of wood in my replica of the shelf actually only exists as a memory of the original object. What this entails is that the construction functions as an unearthing of the very memory of the object. The unearthing of memory is one aspect of the tension between unearthing/construction. Another aspect of the unearthing is the wholly tangible disclosure of the shelf's back side, which was originally concealed in its proximity to the architecture (by virtue of its placement, facing the wall), while, in the replica, it comes to be brought to light in the open air.

Well, and then an urge to change the material arose. To liberate the structure. To let it pass universalistic context. They could have been made in many periods other than the contemporary era, and they could have been made in many contexts other than the American. (But what, exactly, is the difference between these—the context free and the universal—in the first place? If the two were to be placed on a circle, wouldn't they meet, perhaps, at the same point?) Whereas in the work of artists like Richard Serra and Robert Smithson you get a sense of a stronger connection to time and place, through the influence of the scale in the North American landscape and through direct relationships with and reactions to the immediate surrounding environment (as can be seen, for example, in Smithson's three "flows": Asphalt Rundown, Concrete Pour, and Glue Pour [all 1969], as well as, of course, in Spiral Jetty [1970]), the relationship to the work, for Martin, is far more introverted (in fact, it is totally and completely introverted—lonesome [with a positive valuation]), and I think that it is largely the introversion and the choice to paint with her "back to the world" that gives rise to the sensation of her work being context free—when in fact it might be just the opposite that is happening: the context is universal, that is to say, it is not bound to time and place.

The line is a cornerstone in Martin's work. I perceive her paintings as spacious emotions. In this respect, the meeting with them actually becomes an architectonic experience—an organisation of space, surface, and relations. All at once, mathematical and emotional.

But even trying to write about Agnes Martin's paintings actually feels altogether like a self-contradiction from the outset, precisely because the paintings extend so far beyond language. And now let's hear from the artist herself:

We pick up an emotional response beyond nature. If you get up in the morning and you feel very happy ... and, you know, everything seems good ... that's without cause. See, that's what I paint about, what is without cause. And, we live a transcendent emotional life, all the time. All day long.

I had a brother that was ... you know, he mediated, and everything ... one time he told me what he found out meditating. I don't agree with him, and he said that people all like each other. And they want to be kind, you know. And they like to help and all that. So he called it goodwill. And he said that everybody has goodwill towards everybody else. And it's growing. And he said that when everybody has perfect ... goodwill towards everybody else, it would be the millennium. ... And you know what he died saying? He was in the war and he flew for three years over Germany ... every day meeting the enemy for three and a half years. When he was dying, he actually was saying, you know, "love is all." [Laughter] And he was trying to convince my sister and mother. You know, that love ruled the world. They didn't go for it. But yeah, he's brilliant. 15

Richard Serra, Language, Architecture, and Sculpture
Richard Serra regards the architectonic and the sculptural languages as two categories of one another, completely interdependent when it comes to the unveiling of the essentially architectonic and the essentially sculptural. That is to say,
into a different (material) condition. In the transparent, spectral skin that has now frozen each and every fragment into its present position, there is a fixation on invisibility. On seeing what was never meant to be seen.

OK, all this stuff about seeing the whole society as one individual. Or maybe it’s just the reverse? Seeing the individual as an entity that contains all the branches that are sprouted by society. Accordingly, seeing that the individual has a need for a subjective relation, maybe an interaction, with the whole societal body. That is to say, a big man with a bulging belly who finds his bearing in the darkness. Where somebody is dusting themselves off around the toes, or where somebody is making repairs on the machinery around the ankles, so that the whole circulation is affected and so that the blood flow momentarily comes rushing past with increased pressure, with the result that he who happens to be sitting around with the organs and conjoined with a liver that is so smooth that it simply constructed, and when this gets opened up in the end and conjoined with the lungs, the whole thing was constructed, and when this gets opened up in the end and conjoined with a liver that is so smooth that it simply glides down into the lung, and when, then, on top of this, what is established is a swimming pool, how is this going to be sensed by he who is sitting and taking care of the machinery around the ankles, so that the whole circulation is affected and so that the blood flow momentarily comes rushing past with increased pressure, with the result that he who happens to be sitting around with the organs and conjoined with a liver that is so smooth that it simply glides down into the lung, and when, then, on top of this, what is established is a swimming pool. How is this going to be sensed by he who is sitting and taking care of the machinery around the ankles? The body’s overall bone structure is most certainly affected by the heightened pressure on the chest, from spire, lung, liver, and swimming pool, but does the man down at the ankles stand any chance of sensing the heightened pressure before the bone explodes? And what happens to the veins if a leak from the swimming pool should start to develop or if the waste pipes and veins get confused and the body becomes filled with chlorine?

And when the body comes into contact with another body? When the two are united? When he consequently has to get up to glide together with the other body, having a swimming pool jutting out from his chest is, above all, inconvenient. But moreover, we’ve got to think about what happens with bath water, bathers, beach toys, palm trees, French fries, and parasols. All this spills out as soon as the upper body rises to a vertical position and, in all likelihood, it spills out over the body itself. Maybe out over other bodies in the near vicinity.

It was like this: I imagined having a discussion where questions were being asked about boundaries and the solid. Peace of mind. Can you actually manage to go around with a hangover tomorrow? What would happen if you didn’t make it to the university? The plans are upset. But in point of fact, it’s not at the university sculpture is strictly necessary for the architectonic context, not merely as a being in itself but also as a structural reflector—an interlocutor. Two languages, of each other, totally interdependent, in order to be able to see the structures as they are, fully and completely. Thus the distribution of public space transpires in a negotiation between the architectonic and the sculptural languages. “Every language has a structure about which one can say nothing critical in that language. There must be another language dealing with the structure of the first and possessing a new structure to critique the first,” says Serra. “Often, if you want to understand something, you have either to take it apart or to apply another kind of language to it.”

Many of Serra’s sculptures can be apprehended as volumes of silence. An interruption in the urban landscape via the meeting with the enormous monotonous surface, for which his large steel constructions create space. This can be seen, for example, in St. John’s Rotary Arc (1980) and in Street Levels (1986–87). Street Levels was placed amid dense construction and St. John’s Rotary Arc was situated in an open square; both of these works evoke a deep silence but also a spacious condition that allows us the luxury of getting caught up in the complexity of our thoughts about space around an object other than the surrounding architecture. Here, they are busy speaking with the buildings around them and they are asking: What does it mean to build? What does it mean to structure space and surface? What is happening emotionally in the body’s meeting with a material?

The meeting with a ruin also creates this opportunity for the mind to get caught up in the complexity of a spaciousness other than that of the functional architectonic. In much the same way as Serra’s works, the Acropolis establishes a moment of silence in Athens, as it stands there and poses questions to the surrounding urban structure. One contemporary artist who deals with the ruin as material and idea is Cyprien Gaillard, in whose work we hear echoes of Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Hubert Robert. Does this comparison between the ruin and the sculpture wind up in an allegation that the present-day sculptor’s role is to produce ruins rather than actual sculpture? Many of our contemporary urban environments have sprung up, since the 1950s, with a snap of the fingers, and therefore exist without any past or materiality that can pull us out from the immediately and presently existing spaciousness and temporality.

Richard Serra, St. John’s Rotary Arc. (1980): Enclosed between traffic and industrial construction on a plaza terrain that functions exclusively for letting in vehicular traffic coming from New Jersey to New York City, this 200 x 12-foot line of steel rose high. The Arc’s presence on the plaza terrain imparted a sculptural definition to the place. As the only sharp rise on the plaza terrain, the Arc established a transition between the square’s flatness and the surrounding architecture’s frontality. Serra explains it like this: “By aligning itself with the tops of the trucks and the bottom of the footbridge, by cutting into and partially masking the first floors of the surrounding buildings, the horizontal spans of the Arc establish a cross-sectional reading of the entire field and redefine the scale of the site.” This work redefined rather than represented its context. In doing so, it fashioned the possibility for a new perception of the place. The Arc’s monumental simplicity
that you’re going to find the truth. The truth, that’s something you’ll find only in the day. Truth and freedom. “What’s the difference?” I heard myself saying yesterday at the bodega. It seemed a bit gloomy when I woke up this morning. I held on to the solid. But what about the day? I cannot make it to the studio. But I know that very close to this thought lies the certainty about the journey into the upset plans. Today I am travelling around between soil and water and articles of furniture—that have to be washed. I wash the soil off from the furniture and sense the depth of the earth’s smell, which is taking root in my soul. The smell of earth embedding itself inside my body, depositing itself softly between organs, joints, and bones. And I sense the meaningfulness. I believe in life.

Getting back to the place where everything glides: it’s something like standing on shaky ground. I have heard expressions of concern about the leap in scale when we move from the architectonic model to the finished building. Trial run: I believe in a way of building that is always unfolding itself in the here and now. Whatever human hands cannot take in and embrace cannot be built. If we build in this way, all construction will be tailored to our bodies. But what this has to do with is being fully and wholly present in the building process. Precisely in order to look for the unknown. And it’s this that I mean to say when I speak about standing on shaky ground or about gliding, this manner of standing some place where you do not quite know where it is. You don’t really know where you are and don’t really know where you’re supposed to go. But you know that if you can manage to refrain from insisting, you’ll be guided along the right path. One has to throw oneself out into the unknown. You start by building a circle, in order to make your way past triangles and squares, columns and depth established a striking contrast with the surrounding industrial buildings—standing there ringing forth like a simple sentence, maybe even a single word, while the buildings all around are busy shouting, all at once, in confused, imaginative, monotonous, and lifeless torrents of speech.

Here, at the Rotary, there’s really no “viewer” involved; it would be more appropriate to speak about the “driver” and the “pedestrian.” Due to the Arc’s curved character, the form in itself, as well as its intersection with the silhouetted profile of the surrounding buildings, would constantly have changed character with respect to the cars’ speed from the drivers’ point of view. By this means, a centrifugal reading would be attained. In Serra’s own words: “Driving around the Rotary, both the Arc’s convexity and concavity foreshorten, then compress, overlap, and elongate. The abrupt but continuous succession of views is highly transitive, akin to a cinematic experience. The entire field of vision is condensed, concentrated, and extended within minutes.”19 Neither the “driver” nor the “pedestrian” “can ascribe the multiplicity of views to a Gestalt reading of the Arc. Its form remains ambiguous, indeterminable, unknowable as an entity.”20

“I did not want to accept architectural space as a limiting container. I wanted it to be understood as a site in which to establish and structure disjunctive, contradictory spaces.”21

Serra’s Arc stood on the Rotary at the exit of the Holland Tunnel, contemplating the surrounding industry and the traffic as it moved in from New Jersey, giving rise to echoes of Robert Smithson’s study of precisely that place.

Robert Smithson, Monuments, and the Freedom to See Robert Smithson’s essay “A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey” (1967) has its basis in the picturesque—sublime—a category and a praxis organised around strategies of experiencing a landscape. According to Ron Grazini, “The
that are falling through the air, to ivory, to space that breaks on through itself in order to wind up in a palace. Or the other way around: you start out in a palace and quietly begin to dismantle all superfluous ornamentation. Away with friezes, candelabras, claw-foot furniture, rustling textiles, clinking wine glasses, silverware, not to forget the polish, dishtowels, and the closets and drawers to lay it in. All of this becomes separated, and cleaned, only to wind up, at last, in the groundplan (or the circle). What can now be seen on the bare clean walls are faded fields left behind from mirrors and paintings. Now, from the bare walls extend columns of light that are being kicked in through holes, cracks, and windows.

What is the most important thing, it has been said, is to think one's way through art. But what prevails now is rather a sentiment that art is thinking for itself, that it has its own brain. But what then did it mean, when all is said and done, to think? The endless stream of words and images that tumbles around in the interior? Is it thoughts? And feelings? How can we separate feeling and thought? What about moods? Frames of mind? And if we assume that thought can be brought to a halt through meditation, what does this mean, then, in relation to our view of artistic thinking? For isn't artistic thinking precisely a meditation in itself? Or is it the other way around: that meditation arises precisely where thinking (the brain) exists inside of the art itself, that is to say outside the performer. There where art is thought in itself rather than being used to think one's way through.

We have to remember that language lies. That most sentences end in imprecise attempts to physicalise emotional material. Also this one.

I form in order to see. I form that which I see through. I form in order to be inside the form. If this will break, I will break. A quest to find a given material's internal logic. To understand your essence.

On TV they were speaking about severed limbs, exploded bodies. I walked outside so that I could dig a hole.

modern theory of the picturesque revolves around how a natural setting is 'staged' in artistic terms—that is, the (art)ificial mimicking the natural, yet as if the chosen latter had imitated the former."23 In this experience, what transpires is an objectification of the physical environment, which is experienced here as a painting or a drawing. The landscape's immediacy is distanced; by this means, it is perceived as a form of aesthetic experience with predefined standards: "Before long, the aesthetic category of the picturesque-sublime had become a series of artistic practices that gave visual shape to a kind of dialectical nonplace, wedged as it was between a nostalgia for Edenic pasts and the fears of what that meant in futuristic terms."23

Smithson's essay contains a personal travelogue through Passaic, New Jersey—the artist's hometown—as well as a number of photographs of the "monuments" he encountered:

Playing into the genre of promotional road photography that had since the beginning of the post World War 2 Federal Highway expansion program celebrated the "open road as the way to the future now," part of the artist's Passaic tour included one of those construction sites, the New Jersey Turnpike. Although Smithson, in turn, used the parameters of the urban picturesque to celebrate its "future in reverse."24

On this trip, it's easy to lose one's temporal orientation. Is this place under construction or under demolition? Are we in a ruin or are we standing in the middle of a construction site for the future's structures? Or has everything been frozen at the point just prior to a collapse? On his trip around this landscape, Smithson carried out a subjective selection of structures and places, which he appoints as monuments. In the course of his wanderings, Smithson spotted a sign with the message: YOUR HIGHWAY TAXES 21 AT WORK. He describes the encounter thus:

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. This anti-romantic mise-en-scene suggests the discredited idea of time and many other "out of date" things. But the suburbs exist without any rational past and without the "big events" of history.25

The New Jersey Turnpike construction site is one of the monuments that Smithson selected. As long as this monument was without past and history, it would not come to survive its immediate future either, since it would disappear along with the completion of the highway. The monument is thus situated in a peculiar non-site between what was to be and what is to be. The selected monuments have materialities and qualities in common with Rome's classical ruins. But in contradistinction to the Roman ruins, Passaic's monuments do not embody any kind of history into which the observer can project herself or himself.
"Has Passaic replaced Rome as The Eternal City? If certain cities of the world were placed end to end in a straight line according to size, starting with Rome, where would Passaic be in that impossible progression? Each city would be a three-dimensional mirror that would reflect the next city into existence. The limits of eternity seem to contain such nefarious ideas."26

With a certain degree of ironic distance, Smithson wants, with an archaeological gaze, to scrutinise the layers of history that exist in New Jersey’s landscape. As an archaeologist would study the ruins in a city like Rome, Smithson seems to be asking: What are our own day’s monuments?

"Instead of causing us to remember the past like the old monuments, the new monuments seem to cause us to forget the future."27

Further references


Critical & Pedagogical Studies

MFA, Year 2

Hans Carlsson
José Tomás Giraldo
Laila Svensgaard
Hans Carlsson

Gruvhacka, year unknown. Photograph. Hans Carlsson
Photograph courtesy of The Swedish Museum of Natural History

Photographic reproduction of a watercolour painting of the extinct genus Cortaides, painted by Thérèse Ekblom in 1916. Photographic reproduction of a watercolour painting, Hans Carlsson
A Complete Refurbishment of These Rooms

Introduction
Peter Gidal’s Room Film from 1973 opens with a white surface that slowly shifts into something that resembles a spatiality. The camera moves unsteadily and shoots some details of the interior; the image becomes blurred again. At the end of the film I get the feeling of going through a doorway. I don’t know where I am, and I fumble for something on which to focus my attention. What is happening before my eyes gives me no comfort; it is impossible to identify a room where I as a viewer can be. This is of course a carefully devised strategy.

Gidal writes in Materialist Film, regarding his film Condition of Illusion from 1975, that “the viewer is fractured from her/his superior position of consumer of knowledge, ... fractured from full self identity, which are the prerequisites for narrative completion.” The viewer created by the television industry is exalted and made passive through a conjuring trick that at its base has to do with the complete absence of reference to the production medium itself. Television and cinema usually shut off the viewer’s means of understanding how images of reality are created, and in the end also the image of the presumed viewer. Through a series of interventions it is, however, possible to break the illusion. But it takes cunning to defend oneself against the spectacle. Gidal mentions a number of failed examples of art films from the ’60s and ’70s that purport to account for their structures and creation but that fall back into the trap of illusion, because of, among other things, far too great a demand for total abstraction, which in itself becomes too uniform, and thus an illusion. What is required of a truly emancipatory film is instead constant motion between an elucidation of the materiality of the film and its ability, through cutting, time shifts, and other visual effects, to create an illusion of reality (which, because of the presence of moving images in the age of mass communication, has become the norm). Detail is foregrounded, to the advantage of the whole:

Each “image moment” thus does not mean a moment of “fullness”, it merely designates moment, not static, not essential, not somehow quintessential ontologically “filmic”, simply a clinical description of a moment or piece of time. It is through the capacity to produce unexpected moments that action can be decoupled from illusion and instead become the “empty signifier” that it in reality is. The consequence of this then is that the viewer’s identity is not confirmed, nor are all of the other norms attached to this identity (middle-class, white, male, heterosexual). Instead, a “non-identity” is created that is continually in the process of creating itself and questioning the foundations of its own identity.

In spite of Gidal’s scepticism, during the infancy of cinema in the late nineteenth century completely different ambitions prevailed than those of what would later become an unscrupulous Hollywood. The first moving images were shown in cabinets with peepholes and were created in the 1890s in New Jersey, US, by Thomas Edison with the help of his assistant William Kennedy Laurie Dickson. The Kinetoscope, as Edison’s invention was called, has been described as a closed system of representation by art historian Philippe-Alain Michaud in his book Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion. The backgrounds in these early films consisted of completely black rooms, and the focus was on the movements or facial expressions of individuals, or on shows consisting of dance or mime theatre. The environments required for production—that is, small, dark, closed spaces—were also the spaces that were best suited for showing the films. Michaud claims that these early film productions reflected an almost animistic attitude in the men who eagerly attempted to recreate reality in moving pictures. They dreamed...
of film as a technology that could recreate human movements, and, through this, something of the human soul. Sometimes this desire to represent reality and the life it contained could manifest itself in odd ways. An example of this is when Edison described how he imagined the first sound film, which was meant to reproduce sound synchronised with an image, not in order for ordinary people to be able to listen to the film in a calm and secure home environment but because this would recreate the event exactly as it appeared in reality:

If it is desired to reproduce an opera or a play I will get the company to give a dress rehearsal for me. I place back of the orchestra on a table a compound machine consisting of a phonograph and a kinetograph, with a capacity of thirty minutes continuous work. The orchestra plays, the curtain rises, and the opera begins. Both machines work simultaneously, one recording sound and the other taking photographs, recording motion at the rate of forty-six photographs per second. Afterward the photographic strip is developed and replaced in the machine, a projecting lens is substituted for the photographic lens, and the reproducing part of the phonograph is adjusted. Then by means of a calcium light, the effect is reproduced life-size on a white curtain, reproducing to the audience the original scene with all the sounds and all the motions of the actors exactly as in the original scene.

Michaud, however, claims that the reality created in early cinema would be nothing but a memory already prior to the beginning of the twentieth century. Soon various attempts to make the place for cinematic representation into one that referred to locations other than the film studio would become praxis for
the capacity of the image to create participation and emancipation—which can be juxtaposed with the more sceptical, critical idea of the passivity-inducing, intellectually impoverishing but simultaneously seductive qualities of the medium of the image. In many ways these two attitudes have to do with subjectivity and the place of the individual in relation to a visual expression—which he or she is seen as an active co-creator in the relationship between image and individual or just as someone who is deceived and seduced and whose participation in the mental process created by visual media simply is a result of, and a reaction to, the ideologies and ambitions of the creators of the image.

At times my discussions will be theoretical, but my intention is to link them to the work done during my two years in the Master’s programme in Critical & Pedagogical Studies at Malmö Art Academy. It is my hope that the text will be of use to anyone with an interest in museology, historiography, and representation, but what is written below is also an attempt to leave my position as analyst of my own practice and become both the eye that views my actions from without and the producer of something that can be viewed by other people.

The Science and Maritime House
Malmö Musee (Malmö Museums) have a branch for the history of technology and maritime history, the Science and Maritime House (Teknikens och sjöfartens hus). A long, narrow mezzanine floor in the museum bears the name “the Science Shelf” (Vetenskapshyllan). Here is displayed the history of science with respect to the province of Scania (Skåne) according to a familiar chronology: as one moves along the passage, early modern scientific discoveries and innovations (a fascination with vacuum and pneumatics, and the presence and motion of various forces in nature) are replaced by Carl Linnaeus and the age of classification and classical science, only to conclude with the scientific revolution, industrialisation, and finally even nanotechnology (everything, as mentioned before, placed in a regional context).

In the photographic archive of Malmö Musee one can find photos from the recent history of the Science Shelf. One series of photographs depicts an earlier survey of science that focused exclusively on Scanian industry. This earlier exhibition, which closed in 2007, was more representational in character than the one presently showing at the Science Shelf. The sections dealing with the production of sugar had little models where the production of sugar cubes from beet to cube was visualised with great realism; the section dealing with the production of coal was little more sceptical, critical idea of the passivity-inducing, intellectually impoverishing but simultaneously seductive qualities of the medium of the image. In many ways these two attitudes have to do with subjectivity and the place of the individual in relation to a visual expression—which he or she is seen as an active co-creator in the relationship between image and individual or just as someone who is deceived and seduced and whose participation in the mental process created by visual media simply is a result of, and a reaction to, the ideologies and ambitions of the creators of the image.

I want to let Gidal’s and Warburg’s different attitudes to the image frame this text. There can be discerned two threads: the affirmative, life-endorsing one—the faith in
had existed at least since the 1980s. Before the exhibition was dismantled, someone (as documented and archived by the museum itself) had posted a note: “The nuclear exhibition and the Höganäs mine represent an old-fashioned view of exhibitions. We plan for a complete refurbishment of these rooms. Meanwhile we apologise for any inconvenience.” One can only guess what was considered obsolete about the old museum exhibition; presumably it was precisely the representationalism that was considered outmoded. The representationalism would then perhaps have been replaced by a more interactive environment, something that occurs considerably more frequently today at the Science and Maritime House.

The display cases are brightly coloured and many of them are adapted to the height of a child. The visitor encounters sound and image through the push of a button or a tap on a screen. Elsewhere in the museum the interaction between the museum’s interior and visitors is even more elaborate. On the top floor of the museum is a large room that informs the visitor about the laws of physics; here the visitor can toss balls, pull ropes, and spin metal stands in order to get an idea of various physical phenomena, of how irregularities and regularities in nature arise and function.

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For a couple of years I have rummaged through various archives for material regarding the mining of coal in northwestern Scania. During this work I began to understand coal as a metaphor for non-linear time. I also studied more closely issues surrounding the museum as a creator of participation and repeatedly reflected on the visualisation of history in text and image—above all within a scientific discourse, and not least in museums. The outcome of this work was the installation A Complete Refurbishment of These Rooms (En fullständig förnyelse av de här rummen), which was shown at the Science and Maritime House during March and April of 2015. The installation mainly took the form of a circular panorama with a diameter of four metres, which was placed in a room at the end of the Science Shelf at the Science and Maritime House (closest to our contemporary world, if you wish).

The panorama has its own history, on which I will comment below. I used this as a method for artistic representation that I understood as a way of working in dialogue with a technology for visual spatial mediation that had its roots in the subject-creating media landscape of the eighteenth century. On a completely practical level, the circular form allowed for the display of archived material from three different archives: the archives of Högänäsbolaget (the Höganäs company)/Stawfordska sällskapet (the Stawford society) (henceforth the Höganäsbolaget archive), of Malmö Museer, and of the Swedish Museum of Natural History (Naturhistoriska riksmuseet), in accordance with a logic that followed purely aesthetic rather than scientific criteria, that is, those that linked the various images on the basis of their horizons.

Among the images in the panorama were photographs of the industrial landscape and the mines of Scania and of the plant fossil rooms of the Swedish Museum of Natural History. In the panorama were also reproductions of paintings depicting the Scania of 170–200 million years ago, produced at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries by artists employed by and in close cooperation with researchers at the Museum of Natural History.

During the opening of the exhibition A Complete Refurbishment of These Rooms, I read from a text that linked the idea of a desire for outlines and outlooks during the late eighteenth century—a passion for overloads and dizzying heights—to the scientific achievements of Alfred Gabriel Nathorst, the founder of the Department of Palaeobotany (plant fossils) of the Swedish Museum of Natural History. The text read during the opening of the exhibition was subsequently also available in the form of a folder in the installation, and it has formed the basis for significant portions of this paper.

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During the 1990s the discussion about the concept of the “new” museology intensified. This concept is controversial and multifaceted but can be summarised in a criticism of a museum procedure that appears to be far too loyal to the museum as a producer of objective knowledge. The interactive museum—which allows the visitor to be physical, to be active, to point, press, and physically interact with the exhibition’s environment—is an example of a museum strategy that has been expressed in terms of a reaction to a more sender-receiver-based museum interior; similarly, various target group-oriented pedagogical efforts have been foregrounded as a strategy that enables museums to produce a new, and less authoritarian, voice in the community. There are, however, those who claim that interactivity in itself is not a solution to the imbalance of power that arises when an institution tries to convey its view on history, and that interactivity and target group-oriented pedagogical efforts do not create sites where a critical attitude to history and identity can be produced. Similar to former Swedish minister of culture Bengt Göransson’s description of a development within politics during the second half of the twentieth century whereby ideology has been replaced by a customer-oriented idea of adaptation, these critics imagine that a logic of adaptation merely scratches the surface and attains a semblance of participation that at bottom does not change a structural view of history, politics, and society.
• The Science and Maritime House was initially a regional venture. Various associations with an interest in technological development, primarily Skånska ingenjörsklubben (the Scanian engineer’s club), called on politicians and industrial representatives already in the 1940s to create a place where Scanian industrial history could be showcased. The present Science and Maritime House opened in 1978. It is interesting that at that time no one made any claims of presenting a comprehensive writing of history, as the then director of the museum, Per Ragnarson, put it. Instead, people looked to the US and the American science and technology centres. In close cooperation with industrial representatives, American museums had managed to create an inspiring environment and a spectacular exhibition architecture where an affective relationship to American history, on the basis of certain carefully chosen perspectives, could be created. The Swedish version of the concept was referred to as a “knowledge carnival” (kunskapstivoli), and the desire seems to have been to convey a fascination for technology’s power and capacity to change society (for the better) through a carnivalesque environment and exhibition architecture.

Linear Time
The Science Museum in Malmö has from the beginning been a museum that, consciously or unconsciously, has been constructed along the lines of ideas that can be derived from the late twentieth-century view of the function of a museum. The new museology, with its mixture of high and low, affect and pedagogy, interactivity and knowledge, has, it seems, been present throughout the museum’s history. However, something that also seems to have been inscribed in the halls and rooms that make up the institution is a type of idea of progress—where progress and the future are seen as functions of human energy and a human ability to take control of and shape our surroundings: of labour, technology, and natural resources. This idea of the future as a foundational concept of society is, of course, not new. In his book *The Birth of the Museum*, Tony Bennett claims that the museums (historical museums as well as art museums and ethnographic collections) created in European countries during the late eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries cemented the idea of a national history that gave political legitimacy to the state (that in its new, modern guise from the late eighteenth century began to be increasingly representative, i.e., seen as an expression of the people’s well-being and will) and its continued existence. This was done by, among other things, placing humans in an evolutionary history, wherein museums of history and natural history explained the passage of time, from the first fossils to the visitor’s and the nation’s contemporary time. Often this led to non-European cultures, and also women, ending up far behind in the evolutionary idea of time and development, and with the help of architectonic and museum technical methods the white man was not infrequently presented as the crown of creation.

In Sweden there is the example of the Swedish History Museum (Historiska museet), which opened on the lower floor of the National Museum of Fine Arts (Nationalmuseum) in the middle of the nineteenth century, where the halls were arranged in accordance with the then novel division into Stone Age, Bronze Age, Iron Age, and Middle Ages, and where attempts were made to identify the legitimate “roots” of the nation. The research director of the Swedish History Museum, Fredrik Svanberg, has described how this search for origins led to history being described as a series of “wars of extermination,” in which “lower” races were supplanted by the race that was to populate Sweden in modern times (in other versions of this history it was instead suggested that the Swedish race had inhabited the country since the Stone Age). One interesting detail is that the first exhibition in the new premises the museum was given in the 1940s on Narvavägen in Stockholm was entitled *Folk och försvar* (People and defence)—a purely propagandistic exhibition about the need for a strong army and people’s will to stand up for their nation in a possible future characterised by war.

The desire to define and measure time that has already passed in order to create an idea of what is to come is thus a well-established method and an important foundation for many museums of history. However, I wish to suggest that this also is an activity that is changing. The future as a political concept has its own history, on which it is worthwhile to dwell.

Futures
Historian Reinhart Koselleck describes, along with other places in the essay collection *Futures Past*, how the present began to be “temporalized” during what, in an act of precisely this type of temporalisation, has come to be called the “modern” era (approximately the late sixteenth century to the mid nineteenth century). The two end points on the timeline of the modern era are, to Koselleck, Martin Luther and Maximilien Robespierre:

For Luther, the compression of time is a visible sign that, according to God’s will, the Final Judgment is imminent, that the world is about to end. For Robespierre, the acceleration of time is a human task, prescribing an epoch of freedom and happiness, the golden future. Both positions, insofar as the French Revolution descended from the Reformation, mark the beginning and end of our period.

After the religious wars that followed the Reformation in large parts of Europe during the sixteenth century, religious doomsday prophecies eventually began to weaken. The recurring wars did not lead to the final
Apocalypse. The conflicts instead moved towards peaceful solutions. Concurrently with something that resembles the development of national states during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, prognoses instead began to replace prophecies; politically strategic decisions became important for the creation of a future that could be predicted at the national level. When the political climate eventually hardened, and in some places turned into revolution in the eighteenth century, political pressure had made the future completely uncertain but simultaneously, for the first time, something that truly existed. The words of the French encyclopedist Denis Diderot are on one occasion reproduced by Koselleck:

Under despotism the people, embittered by their lengthy sorrows, will miss no opportunity to reappropriate their rights. But since there is neither goal nor plan, slavery relapses in an instant into anarchy. Within the heart of this general tumult there can be heard one cry: “Freedom!” But how can this valuable thing be secured? Nobody knows. And soon the people are divided into various factions, eaten up by contradictory interests. … After a short while there are only two factions within the state; they distinguish themselves by two names, under which all necessarily have to include themselves: “Royalist” and “Antiroyalist”. … What will succeed this revolution? No one knows.26

The political consequences of understanding the future as an unpredictable fact were great. After the French Revolution, a number of -isms promised what the future would be like, supported by analyses of what the past had been like: liberalism, Marxism, communism. At the same time, a number of -isms criticised too precipitous political consequences, for example, conservatism. However, the future itself could not be avoided, and this changed people’s manner of speaking and temporalised it. The word “revolution,” for instance, was given a new meaning. From having been a word describing recurring cyclical events it instead gradually began to be used in Europe during the eighteenth century to denote a break, a shift, and a novelty. Words like “crisis” and “emancipation” also occurred more often in philosophical and political texts during the century of revolution. In addition, the awareness of the future created an idea of history as having a changing character and of being written precisely from a “present-day” perspective.

Several scholars have pointed out that the gradual invention of the future as a political concept coincided with geological discoveries that made it possible to explain the origin and age of the earth.28 Now, time no longer stretched only forward but also backward, and human civilisation acquired roots that reached beyond the biblical Flood. The geological view of history was also directly related to modernity in a sense other than the discursive Flood. Many geological discoveries could develop as a result of mining and excavations in the earth for minerals. This happened, for instance, in Scania, with the mining company Höganäsbolaget.29 At an early stage the company had contact with the Swedish Museum of Natural History in Stockholm and the research that was conducted there. One example of the close links between the mining industry in Scania and the scientists at the Swedish Museum of Natural History is the five-volume work Stenkol och lera (Coal and clay), an outline of, among other things, the local and global history of the mining concern, of Scania, of the mines, and of fossil fuel, which was published by Höganäsbolaget between the years 1953 and 1959.30

This thousand-page work describes how coal in Europe began to be used on a larger scale because of a general deforestation during the second half of the eighteenth century, and how, because of a lack of wood, people began to learn how to use this fossil fuel as a source of light and heat.31 But also longer perspectives on history are included, which is why the geologist Assar Hadding, in the first part of the series, soared from the highest point in Scania in a dizzying presentation of history. He wrote: “From a viewpoint on Söderåsen [South ridge] we would have been able to look out across a tropically luxuriant primeval forest, where water glistened among the trees. It grew in a swamp, a mangrove swamp, where humidity, heat, and mud created favourable conditions for vegetation.”32 The forest depicted is described as the original source of the coal.

The early contact between the Swedish Museum of Natural History and the officials of Höganäsbolaget yielded fossils from coal mining that originated in the regions surrounding Bjuv, Billesholm, and Höganäs to add to the collections—fossils of plants and animals that had lived during the Rhaetian age (a period in the evolution of Earth, about 170–200 million years ago). The Department of Palaeobotany of the Swedish Museum of Natural History, which had responsibility for the museum’s representation of and research about ancient plant fossils, was founded in 1884 and its first director, Alfred Gabriel Nathorst, was also appointed then.33 Nathorst arranged the material in the new premises in Frescati in the district of Northern Djurgården in Stockholm when the museum moved there in 1916. In connection with the move, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences published a book on the history of the museum. In a watercolour by Axel Ekblom reproduced in the book, it is early summer in an idyllic landscape where the hay has recently been mown.34
The illustration depicts Frescati the way it appeared before the stronghold of natural science changed the landscape. Axel Ekblom worked together with his wife, Thérèse Ekblom, in the Swedish Museum of Natural History as an illustrator. The couple painted and drew for researchers in botany and palaeobotany. Among other things, this was in order to reconstruct the prehistory that was hinted at in the fossil material collected in Scania. Axel and Thérèse had five children. One of them, Sven Ekblom, was also employed as an illustrator by the Swedish Museum of Natural History.35 In Stenkol och lera, one of Sven’s attempts at a reconstruction “of the vegetation during the Rhaetian age in Scania” is reproduced.36

In the picture can be seen horsetails, cycads, ferns (including what is described as a probable seed fern [pteridosperm]), ginkgos, and conifers.

- Alfred Gabriel Nathorst was not just the founder of the Department of Palaeobotany at the Swedish Museum of Natural History. During two summers, in 1898 and 1899, he travelled to the Arctic Ocean in order to make geological observations and prospect for natural resources. The journey was depicted in a book that can best be described as a combination of a geological, scientific report on an area and a travelogue.37 Even if Nathorst was outside Swedish waters, he was careful to point out that he had a certain national prerogative to explore the area scientifically. Among other things, the geological finds made in Kong Karls Land in northeastern Svalbard, the “if not by Swedes discovered, then nevertheless by them in geological literature first mentioned and introduced land,” attracted the adventure-loving geologist.38

In Jordens historia (History of Earth), a lavishly illustrated, two-volume work from 1894, Nathorst describes both the history of Earth and the history of geology itself in the terms of popular science. He criticises the fact that the biblical myth of Genesis destroyed the embryo of a “correct” description of Earth’s origins that could be found in the work of some writers from antiquity.39 Then he outlines a conventional history of science in which knowledge of the history of Earth continues to increase substantially as a greater understanding of geological strata is gained following careful examination of fossilised parts of animals and plants.

Linnaeus is commended for the way in which he, even if implicitly, defied the biblical injunction regarding the young age of the earth and opposed arguments that fossils had been laid down in the ground during the Flood.40 Nathorst also makes a point about Linnaeus’s historical imagination, reproducing a quote that resembles Hadding’s, from a lookout point near Helsingborg: “I feel dizzy as I stand upon this height and look down across the long ages that have passed just like the waves in the Sound, and left behind almost whisked-out traces of the ancient world, and which are now capable only of whispering, since everything has fallen silent.”41

- Early on, I took a liking to the lookout-time metaphors that were used to describe the Scanian landscape, because they corresponded well with my own relationship to photographs of the landscapes of yesteryear that I found in various archives. In the archives of Höganasbolaget I found images of the development of the mining landscape: from early etchings depicting the burgeoning mining industry of the eighteenth century to aerial photographs of the brickworks in Höganas—images that put me in a position to see, from my historical distance, past times and the gradual industrialisation of northwestern Scania.

In the large-image photographs from Nathorst’s travels that are kept in the archives of the Swedish Museum of Natural History are magnificent landscapes, in this case characterised by sea, ice, and mountains in the northern part of the Atlantic. Here I also found the reproductions of the landscapes that were painted by the Ekblom family across generations, created in accordance with the rules of perspective. Sven Ekblom’s survey of the vegetation in Bjöv was considerably more pedagogic in its nature than his parents’ somewhat mystic depictions of dense woodland scenes with the light lingering on the horizon at the edge of forests consisting of now extinct Cordaites and Neocalamites.

What made me continue working was the idea that the various materials I had found had something in common in the sense that they represented the view of modernity concerning landscape, nature, time, and natural resources: a view that had something to do with the human desire to understand, but also to describe (and to some extent to exploit), the surroundings. After some attempts to sketch various solutions for arranging the photographs in my studio, I eventually decided on the panorama as a model for the installation.

I worked spontaneously with the images from the archives I had visited and tried to place them along a line that could be printed and fastened to the wooden structure that was to become a panorama. Various times and places ended up next to each other; the relationship between light and darkness and visual similarities in the landscape determined the composition—the Ekblom family watercolours, a bison hunt from Nathorst’s travels, the mine at Nyvång, workers’ housing in Höganas. Strata of time, layer upon layer.

Earth Time

The exhibition presented at the Science Shelf at the Science and Maritime House in 2007 was an attempt, as mentioned above, to relinquish too great a claim to being a comprehensive historiography. The museum has continually had a goal of creating links between
region and person through interactive strategies. The linear attitude to time has, however, remained throughout the various guises of the institution. In *A Complete Refurbishment of These Rooms* I tried to assume a position vis-à-vis these different ideas—the various discourses of place—on time and museum practice. One flaw in my installation was that it did not make the most of the museum’s different dimensions of interactivity in its artistic design. The aesthetics were unobtrusive. This was because I took a stand against tendencies that, by means of various methods, attempt to turn the viewer into a co-creator. These tendencies were already present in the museum, so instead I wanted to offer an observation on viewing, a bit like the break with convention described by Peter Gidal. This is not least because a dialogue about how a linear conception of time, which is closely connected with partly problematic ideas about progress as a foundational concept for society, was what I wanted to foreground and discuss.

Now, after the fact, it seems clear that my attempt at a critical discussion about the museum did not quite work—the panorama installation became instead an example of an older type of museum practice, whereby certain codes and ways of seeing became exclusory because they presupposed a certain kind of reading.

Tony Bennett describes the tendency to create visual norms for an educated few as unusually strong in museums of modern art. Supported by the theories of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, Bennett suggests that the modern museum of art has driven the idea of regulated social behaviour in connection with visits to the museum to extremes, and he claims that the whole concept of the art museum builds on making invisible the order and the criteria of quality that are the rules of art and that form the foundation of a canonised selection of works.42 This is all too true of *A Complete Refurbishment of These Rooms*, not least because the subtly presented information about the work that was available in the form of a small folder left far too many visitors without any means of contextualising the images I was displaying. This is of course hypothetical self-criticism—because how
Höganäs industrial park, year unknown. Photograph. Hans Carlsson
In the literature about Höganäsbolaget there is often a positive, future-oriented faith in what technology can create. As it is in Bacon’s New Atlantis, the art of engineering is highly thought of. Coal provided prosperity and was an important piece of the puzzle on the road to an industrialisation not only of Scania but of the whole of Sweden. In many ways then, all the disasters, strikes, suspensions in production, and personal tragedies that have characterised the coal industry are disregarded. In fact, for long periods of time the coal mines were not even profitable. Sometimes they were only used in order to heat the ovens for the production of earthenware. During the second half of the twentieth century, one after the other of the Scanian mines were closed, and in the 1970s all pits had filled up with water and were inaccessible. There is, however, material that testifies also to this part of the history.
The smokestacks in the film Ångcentralens skorsten faller + 12:ans skorsten [The steam power station’s smokestack is falling + the smokestack of No. 12] stood, until they were demolished in 1988, on the industrial premises of Höganäsbolaget, and the smoke that rose from them came from the steam power station that generated electricity for an energy-intensive industrial landscape. This energy came from the burning of coal until 1961, when the last coal mine under the company’s management was closed and oil began to be used. During the same period when the demolition of the smokestacks occurred, Höganäsbolaget went through significant changes. The company was listed on the stock exchange and became part of a global stock market.

A stock-controlled industry also changed the view on the nature of work. In 1986 a new point rating system was introduced at Höganäsbolaget for employees who were paid by the hour, which meant that their work was assessed on the basis of three criteria: flexibility, efficiency, and quality. The film Höganäs eldfast [Höganäs firebrick] from the same year shows the entire production process for firebricks. Some work was done manually but much of the production was done by machines.

By 1986 Höganäsbolaget had already produced a large number of films about coal and clay. Most of these films (which are today held in trust by Stawfordska sällskapet, whose members are former employees of Höganäsbolaget) are well-directed, and the people in them act in accordance with the requirements of the production. As is the case with the literature on Höganäsbolaget mentioned above, the films do not provide many details about the conditions under which the workers lived, or about the often difficult circumstances that prevailed in the company’s mines during large parts of the twentieth century. Class conflict, epidemics, and poverty are conspicuous by their absence. But Ångcentralens skorsten faller + 12:ans skorsten is a privately made film that contributes a measure of disorder and popular festivity to the otherwise so rigid and loyal historiography that emerges from the Stawford collection of films. When I visited the archive in the winter of 2014 in order to collect material for

Photograph courtesy of Jenny Eliasson / Malmö Museer

The nuclear exhibition and the Höganäs mine represent an old-fashioned view of exhibitions. We plan for a complete refurbishment of these rooms. Meanwhile we apologise for any inconvenience, 2007. Photograph from the Malmö Museum Archive.
my degree project at the Art Academy, an employee told me that the rubble from the smokestacks was ground down and made into new bricks after the demolition.

**Seeing**

Visualisation of the past as something that can be looked at from a comfortably selected viewpoint where the epochs of history can be discerned and analysed from an elevated present recurs, as discussed above, in many writers who have described the history of science in Scania.

At the Science and Maritime House in Malmö, a visitor’s opportunity to merely view history has in many cases been complemented by an opportunity to press, feel, and choose “his” or “her” history. In some cases, this seems to be in order to enhance the affective dimension of the visit to the museum. This is not so much about a transfer through vision—via representations of landscapes and realistic illusions—but rather with a “join us in the creation of history.”

The archives of Höganäsbolaget offer an opportunity to sit down and let your eyes wander over a piece of local history caught on film. The company itself also let their customers do exactly this, by means of its extensive production of films, through which Höganäsbolaget could write itself into a historical narrative. In one of these films, which Stawfordska sällskapet, like the titles mentioned above, let me both see and borrow (one untitled DVD, transferred from a VHS tape of a film from the 1960s), the viewer is given an opportunity to follow a former miner (whom I have been unable to identify) down into the last open mine managed by the mining concern, the pit named Schakt Gustaf Adolf. On one occasion the film shows the mine cinema that had been used to show customers and visitors films about Höganäsbolaget: abandoned red seats and a rather cosy underground cinema environment. The possibilities of self-representation caught on film one last time before the physical reality of the mine would be nothing but a memory.

Vision has been described as modernity’s sense above all others. In his book *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary claims that during the early nineteenth century vision slowly became a sense that was disconnected from the experiences and sensations of other parts of the body. Crary uses as his starting point a method for the production of images that has been known since antiquity, the camera obscura, which created a relationship between eye, body, and image (in the closed space that was the camera obscura’s apparatus, while simultaneously being its design), and placed a person and his or her body in relationship to a represented reality. During the first decades of the nineteenth century a number of new technologies were developed that instead made passive, fixed, and diminished the importance of the body’s position in relation to represented visual events: above all moving dioramas and so-called stereoscopes (which occurred in larger, fixed models, but also as small hand-held devices where various layers of images created three-dimensional effects). Crary argues that this development occurred in parallel with a new understanding of light, visualisation, and vision, where vision was no longer understood as analogue relative to reality. The indexicality that was earlier imagined to exist between vision and reality was replaced with an idea of the eye as a chemically controlled organ where visual impressions were created in the cornea as a function of the differing wavelengths of light. Crary also mentions that the increased focus on consumption in society, visually attractive urban environments, and institutional practices with a focus on surveillance created a society where the information that was received by the eye triggered a control and consumption impulse that infiltrated large parts of society as well as human existence.

Tony Bennett’s description of museum culture in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe partly paints a different picture of the importance of vision, at least in the institutional practice that is the museum. It is true that this institution focused on vision as a pedagogical prerequisite for its activities, but movement through museum environments where the passage of history was represented by walking through history was equally important. Bennett argues that this control of movement in the museum corresponded to “new” patterns of behaviour in urban space. But if this latter practice focused on free strolling done by a flâneur, the former had a clearer focus on creating a regulated pattern of movement with a pedagogical aim. Bennett also stresses the point that the museum (like other public institutions such as amusement parks and marketplaces) created environments where people could see each other’s movements and patterns of behaviour, and that the public space that began to emerge at the end of the eighteenth century was a function of a state that shaped subjects who, to a great extent, educated themselves and each other through looking, conduct, and movement.

The oscillation between active and passive, between the fixation and the activation of the human body in the service of the museum (history, society, and time), indicates two different poles in the relationship between viewer and that which is viewed. The subject of the modern gaze appears to be on the one hand a self that has been fixed and made passive, on the other, a mobile person who is coordinated into certain behaviours with the eye and the body in symbiosis. These presumed spectator positions can also be found in the discussion on an early form of mass medium, the panorama.
Stephan Oettermann writes in his book *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium* about the relationship between the panorama and the Panopticon penitentiary that Jeremy Bentham began promoting in 1787. Bentham’s prison was circular; the prison guards were placed in the middle of the building with the cells on the perimeter surrounding the guard tower. The guards were hidden in darkness, while the prison cells were constantly illuminated. The important part of this surveillance model was that the prisoners were, theoretically speaking, continually monitored without being aware of this fact because they were unable to see their guards. It has been said about the creator of the first panorama, Robert Baker, that he got the idea for the panorama while he was in debtor’s prison.

The motifs that frequently occurred in panorama paintings mirrored the interests of a new urban middle class. These motifs were often taken from a countryside that appeared ever more inaccessible in the industrialised cities. The circular paintings, which grew in size and were given increasingly imposing architectonic exteriors during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, belong to the same category of early amusement industries as the parks, marketplaces, and amusement parks that arrived in the cities as the industrialisation of Europe progressed. Oettermann goes so far as to compare the panorama tradition with the medium of television and the passivity-inducing pleasure that the latter would come to offer:

> The television of today is a direct descendant of the panorama. As the body and mind recuperate from work that is all too often intellectually and psychologically deadening, an injection of vicarious adventure and excitement via television counter-acts those effects, while keeping the body immobilized. Psychological regeneration is effected through the eyes.

The very idea of taste sanctioned by some authority was challenged by the popular aesthetic expressions that industrialisation brought in its train. Apart from the rural motifs, classical battlefield scenes and urban views were often reproduced in the panoramas; during the nineteenth century, historical scenes of great national or religious importance also became increasingly popular.

Another popular early medium created for pleasure was theatre in the form of Spectacles de Décoration. One of the founders of this genre was Jean-Nicolas Servandoni, who called the entire experience a theatre without actors. Visual effects and an illusionary and strictly perspectivistic stage scenery were the highlights of the scenic experience. Also in this form of theatre, spectacular buildings, battles from wars, and urban views were reproduced, all according to the taste of the masses. But, as Oettermann makes clear, the theatre of spectacle was still restricted by formal limitations that ensured it never became a true mass medium. This form of theatre was aimed in a single direction in the auditorium: forward, towards the place where the most important members of the audience sat, i.e., the aristocracy, and in Servandoni’s case, ultimately the French king, Louis XV.

But it is nevertheless interesting that it is precisely the material, the colour, and the scenic experience that was meant to create identification in the Spectacles de Décoration genre. At the time of the panorama and its various predecessors and ancillaries, precisely such links appear to have been formed between spectator and material culture. In his book *Illusions in Motion*, media historian Erkki Huhtamo compares the structure of the panorama with Chinese garden art, according to which a visitor can experience a garden in three different ways: through a stroll, a ramble, or a more ritual procession. The first two attitudes are characterised by a more aimless presence. The last variant offers a more ritual way through the garden landscape. The body is restrained within a predetermined order. The various predecessors of the panorama consisted of, among other things, portable peep-show boxes, whereby manipulating a button or handle, or some other manual movement, caused the pictures to advance. These also came in larger variants, whereby a screen was rolled out before the spectator’s eyes (these paintings are called “extended panoramas” by Oettermann). In these media can be found the more ritual movement, but without movement of the body. Vision is restrained by a visual order that is not unlike that which was offered to the middle classes when they gazed out of a window in a train compartment or from a steamship. Sometimes the extended panoramas were double-sided and precisely depicted journeys along well-known rivers or roads. Sometimes the visitor’s platform was also shaped like a boat or a carriage.

But in the circular panorama, more room was left for an aimless “rambling” of the eye, something that Huhtamo also emphasises (evidently in opposition to the position Oettermann takes when he compares the spectators of the medium of television and the panorama), even though he argues that this medium also, like all forms of visual communication, imposes limitations for the eye.

Some conclusions can be drawn regarding the development of the panorama. It served the masses, and it was an attempt to create a visual experience that, discursively speaking, was closely connected with other visual experiences and performances in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries (for example, a fascination for viewpoints). The medium also made
Stenkolsfält i Skåne, year unknown. Photographic reproduction of map. Hans Carlsson
Photographic reproduction of a watercolour painting of the extinct species Cycadeoidea, painted by Thérèse Ekblom in 1916. Photograph courtesy of The Swedish Museum of Natural History.
use of the opportunity to bind the spectator to a ritualised viewing of images, whereby a fixed movement bound him or her to a particular order and a particular narrative. At the same time, the panorama allowed a certain measure of active participation and required the movement of the spectator. A third interesting finding is that the panorama broke down a relationship in art that had simultaneously begun to strengthen at the end of the eighteenth century: the development of originality and an enthusiasm for the creating artistic subject. In the panorama, an individual painter’s effort was less important; what was relevant instead was the experience that was created for the audience. In the same way, human performances were swept off the stage in the tradition of the Spectacles de Décoration. The materials and the objects were what created identification and what transported the spectator to different times and places.

A media-based discussion about the panorama, and later also the panoramas that contained moving details and light effects, could fill an educational purpose. Some people dismissed them as mere products for pleasure, while others argued that the pomposity of the expression could create a feeling of participation when it had to do with, for example, a feeling for the past.

Doing

The panorama was aimed at a collective. It is also interesting to note that this collectivity also permeated the craftsmanship that went into constructing the gigantic paintings.

The European panoramas of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries could cover a surface of approximately five hundred square metres. The early versions were, as a rule, smaller than the ones that would be realised later; this was because the visitors to panoramas that were too small often became afflicted with vertigo—the illusion of depth and perspective could not be connected with the perception of the limits of the room on a surface that was too small. The important thing when a panorama was constructed was precisely that it would become a closed world where the illusion concealed how the painting was constructed. Often the work was preceded by sketching at a chosen site, which could take weeks to complete. Careful research into details and special characteristics were desirable (not least because the future audience would easily be able to see through a deficient degree of veracity in the reproduction of clothes, architecture, and so on).

The painted screen in a panorama was usually sewn together from many smaller sections of fabric; it was an art in itself to get the seams between the sections to be as invisible as possible. The foundation was then nailed up a little bit at a time on boards along the ceiling and floor, a grid was drawn on the entire surface to facilitate the transfer from sketch to painting, and eventually work could be commenced with paint and brush. The painting itself was also done collectively. Often experts in various areas were employed: architecture was painted by one person, animals by another, and people by a third. In this craftsmanship, artistic originality itself was challenged by the popularised circular forms of painting. The demands of the audience reached into the craftsmanship process that was needed to represent the various panoramic motifs as realistically as possible. Because several artists usually worked on the same panorama, the painters had to relinquish their individual styles in favour of the group and the best result for the painting. The worst thing that could happen was for one of the painters to try to outdo the others in skill, as demands were high for a coherent experience. One critical visitor, for instance, complained that the smoke from the chimneys in Thomas Horner’s Panorama of London (1829) moved in different directions, and that the painting thus lacked a consistent wind direction!

My own attempt at a kind of model of the panorama, or at an installation with the panorama as a model, demanded significant resources to realise, and in many ways was a task that depended on people other than myself. At the time of the installation of my work, the Science and Maritime House built a large aquarium in the main building of Malmö Museer; the little help I had been promised quickly vanished. After lengthy inquiries I eventually had to find a person who could assist me with the lighting, another who could lower the sound in the surrounding exhibitions, and so on. I knew one technician from earlier at Malmö Art Museum (which is a sister organisation to Malmö Museer), and I was given help putting up a wall text that welcomed visitors. In this wall text I also mentioned a number of people who have been of great help in my work, and without whose assistance I would not have found any material and would not have been given a context for the photographs I used in the installation: museum staff, volunteers in archives, and artist colleagues who have been working with coal extraction in their own art. Of course, I also made use of the help that was available at Malmö Art Academy in the form of machines with which to saw and shape wood, transport help when I needed material, help with carrying things, tips, and advice.

In the book The Craftsman, sociologist Richard Sennett dips into the history of craftsmanship. He poses questions about what it means to do a good job from a social and community perspective. Sennett also investigates the various contexts that have surrounded craftsmanship in history, for instance the medieval workshop, and what consequences these contexts have had for people.

During the Renaissance something that resembled artistic quality began to be contrasted with
craftsmanship and more functionally directed value judgments. Benvenuto Cellini, the sixteenth-century nonpareil goldsmith, is mentioned by Sennett as an example of the new relationship to expressivity and subjectivity with respect to the work of the hand during the Renaissance. Cellini did not see himself primarily as a craftsman, but had demands that the materials he used would be given expressivity and character. The headstrong goldsmith still depended on his workshop and the collective work of other people, but he, just as his clients, had increasingly high demands for a personal, autonomous expression in the products that were manufactured. Paradoxically enough, this led to the disappearance of a certain social security that had existed in the medieval workshop.

Sennett argues that medieval workshops, which were, among other things, the workplaces of the goldsmiths’ guild, were places where social relationships and ritual rules for skill prevailed and created security. Here, craftsmanship and social sustainability depended on the relationship between freedom, authority, and singularity. As the industrialisation of Europe increased, the relationships between people in early modern contexts of production, which had already been challenged by artistic autonomy, would be complicated by an increased mechanisation of work and production. This, argues Sennett, laid the foundation for a kind of harsh criticism of modernity, including John Ruskin’s ideas of human—the hand’s—activities and feelings of existential well-being.

For Sennett, craftsmanship is a process that stems from the direct communication with a material, whether this is music, text, clay, or steel. Through knowledge from practice and transformations of the material he or she has at hand, and knowledge about his or her own shortcomings and an openness towards these, the craftsman becomes a pragmatist. The social implications of people living out their capacity of performing a job well, or of learning a craft, is that they are placed outside themselves and attain a capacity to critically reflect on their own deficiencies vis-à-vis themselves and other people. Sennett also argues that societies that do not create an opportunity for people to develop their professional skills and professional pride suffer from such deficiencies that they in the end risk becoming inhuman and counterproductive. People must have an opportunity to become producers of their own existence and have the power to shape their own lives.

Interesting parallels can be drawn between Sennett’s ideas and an environment that was discussed above, the Swedish Museum of Natural History in Stockholm. Science historian Jenny Beckman has investigated how the museum has, since the end of the nineteenth century, based its research on close cooperation among research assistants and other more technically oriented personnel, artists, and scientists. Mr. and Mrs. Ekbloom, Thérèse and Axel, the artists who worked with presenting Scania in paintings the way it looked 170 million years ago, were one of the cogs in the social machinery. They worked hard at the end of the nineteenth century, not just for the researchers in the Department of Palaeobotany, but also for researchers in botany and biology. Thérèse came from a family of artists; her father was a scenery painter at the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm, and her husband, Axel, had grown up in a family of gardeners on Kungsholmen in the same city. As mentioned previously, the couple’s son followed in their footsteps, but also the couple’s daughter Viola (who in an amazing picture owned by the Bergius Foundation can be seen sitting on a leaf of a giant water lily in Victoriahuset in the Bergius Botanic Garden near the Swedish Museum of Natural History) would eventually work as a museum assistant. Also, their daughter Karin Linnea would work at the museum for portions of her life. Beckman argues that the Ekbloom family were “craftsmen rather than artists” and “assistants rather than researchers.” In social terms they did not differ significantly from curators or research assistants. However, Beckman claims, a certain touch of artistic “glamour” nevertheless characterised the family, who had plants named after them and who had a close and mutually respectful relationship with their employers, the researchers.

The job of research assistant was a step on the career ladder at the Swedish Museum of Natural History in the direction of jobs that involved greater responsibility and possibly power. In my work at the museum I benefited greatly from my relationship with Ove Johansson, who is presently employed as a curator and research assistant there. He has helped me fact-check texts in my work with coal, museums, and watercolours with prehistoric motifs. Ove also gave me access to digital archives and to the amazing premises that house the Department of Palaeobotany. Researchers, research assistants, and other participants in the research process at the Department of Palaeobotany today sit side by side in what once was a museum, which is why Thérèse Ekbloom’s dense paintings of prehistory cover the walls.

On one occasion, Ove clarified that the Cycadeoidae, an extinct seed plant that appears in one of Thérèse’s paintings (and which was included in the panorama installation) was incorrect, and that new research findings have explained that the flowers were not as open as the watercolour from 1916 suggests.

Another person who was important in my work with A Complete Refurbishment of These Rooms was my supervisor, the artist Matts Leiderstam. I discussed with him...
what should be done with the joints that would necessarily be visible in my installation. It transpired that the large-format printer I was using could not produce an image twelve-metres long, so instead I papered the image section by section onto five modules that, once they had been prepared, were joined into a circle. After a miscalculation (the inside of the wood of course became shorter than the outside of the curved modules), I had to cut off one centimetre of image from each module. However, this made no difference; in fact, it was not noticeable at all once the light had been adjusted in the museum, and a person in the middle of the panorama would experience a totality and the flow of the horizon through the various images.

As mentioned above, in the great European panoramas everything was done to maintain the illusion and to transport a spectator’s senses to other places and times. Apart from the already mentioned demands of an aesthetic homogeneity, other factors regarding light and composition also had to be considered. Because the panorama, logically speaking, had to go from light to darkness in its composition, and daylight in many cases was the only source of light that could be used in the circular buildings, the painting was often planned so that the north in the painting also was north in reality. Therefore, the illusion was often at its most powerful when viewed at the same time of day as was represented in the painting. As already mentioned, the spectator was also surrounded to the point of vertigo by the reality of the panorama. The only place where the eye could go was the wall surface; a small roof above the viewing platform screened off the top edge of the painting.

For my own part, the illusion was instead something I tried to avoid, in spite of my problems with the far-too-obvious joints. It was important to keep the construction of the panorama itself visible. The first thing that the visitor encountered when entering the room I had at my disposal in the museum was the back of the construction, and it required a voluntary act, a slight bending of the body, to get into the panorama, to get inside the circle of images. As already mentioned, I also broke off long sections of the horizon with close-ups and less distinct perspectives. This was, however, not done without creating a certain totality and a feeling of being surrounded by a reality of one’s own. The photographs measured approximately 30 x 20 cm in size, and behind them the wooden surface of the MDF boards in the construction were visible. The images were placed at the average eye level of an adult, so that while the surrounding reality could be seen—the ceiling and the floor of the room—a natural relaxed position of the head would lead the eyes back into the story I wanted to tell. The goal was to achieve an oscillation in the visitor’s attention, an oscillation between virtuality and the meta-consciousness of the space and the production that had gone into what was being viewed.

The collectivity that once characterised the construction of the classic panoramas, and which in part was repeated in A Complete Refurbishment of These Rooms, was in many ways conspicuous by its absence in the finished work that this essay has discussed. The problems with authority and singularity that, according to Sennett, were characteristic of the dissolution of the guild system can perhaps be compared to the process through which I, in my work, allowed a large number of initiatives to disappear into a very hermeneutic end result. In brief, this was an interesting aspect of the work that did not remain in the final installation. As fascinating a story as artistry in the service of science as the example of the Ekblom family could have formed the point of departure for such work, which could also have been tied to the social relationships at the Swedish Museum of Natural History (and at Malmö Museer) today.

In the same way that fixed positions were maintained between me as an artist and other participants as passive co-creators, I never moved beyond a dichotomy where the fixed position of the observer in the museum space was determined in relation to the material that was viewed. As mentioned above, this was a conscious choice that I made in relation to the partly populist aesthetics that I thought I could see as characteristic of the Science and Maritime House. But I am at the same time aware that a more circular respect for attention, doing, and understanding that places the observer by turns inside and outside himself or herself, like Sennett’s ideal craftsman, would have been able to add many dimensions to my work and to the results of it. A museum is a public place that has a responsibility for the well-being of its visitors and their capacity for feeling like complete and participating subjects. It would have been interesting to combine the consistent iconoclasm of Peter Gidal with Richard Sennett’s optimistic ideas about personal development. The question is, however, how that could have been done with an honest enough attempt so as to enable a serious discussion about museum (and other visual) conventions, such as, for instance, the concept of linear time.
2. Ibid., 13–14. Among other things, Gidal mentions the films of the artist Paul Sharits.
3. Ibid., 11.
4. Ibid., 12.
5. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 52.
10. Ibid., 94–95.
11. Ibid., 67–70.
13. Susanne Beckman (curator at Malmö Museer), e-mail exchange with the author, April 16, 2015.
15. See, for instance, Peter Vergo, introduction to the anthology *The New Museology*, ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion Books, 1989), 1–6, and Fredrik Svanberg, *Museer och samlande* [Museums and collecting] (Stockholm: Statens historiska museum, 2009). In his introduction to the anthology *The New Museology*, Vergo mentions that what separates the “old” museology from the “new” is that the former is too preoccupied with the museum method of collecting and categorizing, while the latter is more concerned with the knowledge produced by the museum, how it is received, and how it can be analysed from perspectives that are critical of power (see also Svanberg, 3). A recurring discussion within the new museology concerns distinctions between benefit and pleasure, knowledge and entertainment, and how to value and what attitude to take regarding various audiences and various horizons of understanding; see, for instance, Paul Greenhalgh, “Education, Entertainment and Politics: Lessons from the Great International Exhibitions,” in *The New Museology*, 74–99.
20. Ibid., 96.
21. Ibid., 96ff.
The history of the Swedish Museum of Natural History: Its origins and development

The company has had various names from the eighteenth century until today, among others Gustaf IV stenkolsverk [Gustaf IV coal works], Hoganasbolaget [the Hogañas company], Hoganas-Billesholm AB, and Hoganas AB. In this essay the name Hoganasbolaget will be used for the company in all its various guises.

The museum was founded in 1801 and became part of the new Swedish Museum, in Naturhistoriska riksmuseets historia [The history of the Swedish Museum of Natural History: Its origins and development] (Stockholm: Kungl. Vetenskapsakademien, 1916), 246–73. See Axel Ekblom’s illustration Djurgårds Freskati före uppförandet af det nya riksmuseet [ Frescati at Djurgården before the erection of the new Swedish Museum], in Naturhistoriska riksmuseets historia, 69.


A.G. Nathorst, Två somrar i Norra ishafvet [Two summers in the Arctic Ocean], vol. 1 (Stockholm: Beijers bokförslags-aktiebolag, 1900).


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A.G. Nathorst, Två somrar i Norra ishafvet [Two summers in the Arctic Ocean], vol. 1 (Stockholm: Beijers bokförslags-aktiebolag, 1900).

60  Ibid., 132.
61  Bennett, The Birth of the Museum, 186ff.
62  Ibid., 59–88.
64  Ibid., 44.
65  Ibid., 71.
67  Ibid., 44. The description of a historical transfer of the spectator’s position from active to passive during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries corresponds well with the theories of Jonathan Crary mentioned above.
68  Ibid., 79.
69  Ibid., 54.
70  Ibid., 59.
71  Ibid., 52.
72  Ibid., 52, 55.
73  Ibid., 55.
75  Ibid., 67–74.
76  Ibid., 73.
77  Ibid., 56–65, 80.
78  Ibid., 106–18.
80  Ibid., 299ff.
81  Ibid., 304ff.
82  Ibid., 307.
83  Ibid., 306.
84  Ove Johansson (curator/research assistant at the Swedish Museum of Natural History), e-mail exchange with the author, June 4, 2015.
85  Oettermann, The Panorama, 57.

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Photographs and illustrations

Other unpublished sources
Beckman, Susanne (curator at Malmö Museer), e-mail exchange with the author, April 16, 2015.
José Tomás Giraldo

Jimmie Durham, 56, är en internationellt uppmärksammad konstnär, kulturskribent och poet av Cherokee-häromst. För att förverkliga sin första svenska separatutställning har han valt att tillbringa hela augusti i Lund där han i det sommartomma galleriet skapat ett tjugoal"nordiska" skulpturer.

Vistelsen i Lund har satt sina tydliga spår: så har exempelvis både Jätten Finn och den svenska kräftan försett Durhams konstnärskap med nya skulpturala idéer.

Välkommen till pressvisning i konstnärens närvaro fredag den 30 augusti kl 15!

Med vänlig hälsning

[Signature]

“That every individual life between birth and death can eventually be told as a story with beginning and end is the prepolitical and prehistorical condition of history, the great story without beginning and end. But the reason why each human life tells its story and why history ultimately becomes the storybook of mankind, with many actors and speakers and yet without any tangible authors, is that both are the outcome of action. … The perplexity is that in any series of events that together form a story with a unique meaning we can at best isolate the agent who set the whole process into motion; and although this agent frequently remains the subject, the ‘hero’ of the story, we never can point unequivocally to him as the author of its eventual outcome.”
—Hannah Arendt

PART ONE
Atmosphere of the 1990s and a Meeting with Jimmie Durham

Twenty years ago, in September 1995, art dealer and gallery owner Anders Tornberg (born in Stockholm in 1937) and artist Jimmie Durham (born in Washington, Arkansas, in 1940) met for the first time and had lunch in Brussels. One of Tornberg’s methods of approaching an artist he was interested in was to purchase a piece or two of his or her work. That year—1995—Tornberg acquired an untitled piece by Durham from a gallery in Antwerp. He would later acquire two more 1995 works by Durham with a reference to clothing: Tie, of unknown provenance, and Ropa Vieja, from Nicole Klagsbrun Gallery in New York.

Beginning in 1992, Durham’s sculptural work had entered what could be called a “PVC tubing” period. He first used the material for his participation in that year’s documenta, the large-scale exhibition in the German city of Kassel. After the purchase of the first piece, Tornberg travelled to Brussels to meet the artist in person, with the perspective of organising a solo exhibition in the south of Sweden, where his gallery was located. Upon Tornberg’s return to his home country, the artist and the dealer began corresponding, through letters, faxes, and telephone conversations:

Osiyo, Anders,

Thanks very much for the catalog! And forgive me for taking so long to send your fire box back. … First, I found a story in the New Yorker Magazine about a man named Anders. Unusual in the U.S., so I thought to send it to you. Then I lost it. Then I moved to the Netherlands. Anyway, as you see, I’ve removed the flame producing chemical container so that we could not accidentally cause an international incident.

See you whenever.
Jimmie Durham
The year 1995 was also when the economic situation in Europe had bounced back from a deep crisis. The European Monetary System (EMS) crisis, as it was called, had a deep effect in the art market and caused many art galleries to close, with Tornberg’s being among a few in Sweden that remained open. At the time, the gallery had developed a good relationship with Knight Landesman and Anthony Koerner, the American publishers of *Artforum* magazine. As a comment to the situation of the art market, and in particular to that of privately owned art galleries, Tornberg published a two-page ad in the September 1993 edition of the magazine. One of the two pages of the ad features a photograph of Tornberg holding two live lions, one on each of his arms. The caption below reads: “Still in business.”

**Tornberg’s Beginnings as a Professional Art Dealer**

Exactly thirty years before this ad was published, Tornberg acquired his first ever artwork. The year was 1963. Around ’65, he met Barbro and Holger Bäckström, two artists based in Lund who became very fond of him and participated in his open organised activities as well as his private celebrations, which, at the time, weren’t yet related in any way to fine art. Tornberg had moved to Lund in 1958 to begin university studies.

Two years after he met the Bäckströms, in 1967, they introduced the young Anders to Yngve Lundquist, who was seeking to establish his architectural practice with his colleague, Hans Rendahl, in Lund. Lundquist had been talking to Leif Nielsen, an art dealer based in Stockholm, about the possibility of opening a gallery in Lund. This is how Tornberg became an art dealer and started making art exhibitions in a gallery.

The architect had bought a house in the heart of the city centre, just behind the medieval cathedral, to accommodate his offices on the upper floor, with plans to build the art gallery on the ground floor. The house, Kungs gatan 4, had been a slaughterhouse and a meat shop since 1889 and had a small brewery in the backyard.

**Galerie Prisma IV Opens**

The structure of the house was changed and Tornberg—thirty-three years old at the time—was hired as a director of Nielsen’s gallery in Lund. Even though Nielsen’s agenda was to disseminate printmaking and graphics—which were his speciality—Tornberg demonstrated autonomy in the gallery’s programming from the start: Galerie Prisma IV opened on Saturday afternoon in the third week of February 1970 with an exhibition by Torsten Renqvist, an artist who once had—coincidentally—been in the hospital at the same time as Tornberg’s mother, to whom he was strongly attached.

**PART TWO**

**Notable Exhibitions 1997–80**

By the time Tornberg and Durham started a conversation in 1995 towards the making of an exhibition, Tornberg had accumulated twenty-five years of experience in exhibition making and had built up the private art gallery with the most international connections and the best visibility in Sweden. This international reputation had grown throughout the years thanks to exhibitions of artists such as Martin Kippenberger (1997 and 1990), Richard Artschwager (1996), Janine Antoni (1994), Rosemarie Trockel (1993), Günther Förg (1994, 1991, and 1988), the musician John Cage (1984), who is known as an artist for his conceptual work with the piano, and the American post-minimalist Richard Tuttle (1995, 1987, and 1984). Some of these shows were important introductions of seminal artists to the Swedish context.

**Changes of Name**

Richard Tuttle’s first exhibition at the gallery, in 1984, was the last held before the name change from Galleriet (the Swedish word for “the gallery”) to Anders Tornberg Gallery, which was implemented to match the gallery’s international outlook. Regardless of the success following the change, some of the gallery’s long-time followers still hold a special attachment to the local feel of the pre-1984 years.

The name Galleriet had been implemented in 1973 when Nielsen—the dealer from Stockholm who had hired Tornberg back in 1970—withdrew due to the sales of the first three years not meeting his expectations. Tornberg had taken over and had become his own boss: the first exhibition of the Galleriet years was a solo of Annika Wide, a painter who left Sweden and is currently painting and living on the Caribbean island of Dominica.


**Conflict with the Artist**

After a series of letters, faxes, and telephone conversations, held between the first meeting in Brussels in September 1995 and the end of spring 1996, Jimmie Durham’s exhibition finally crystallised and was programmed to open to the public in the early fall of ’96. The archived correspondence has a smooth and joyful beginning, but suddenly reveals a moment of friction between the art dealer and the artist:
Dear Anders Tornberg,

Thank you for your call, sorry I was away.

I informed you, and other gallerists, that I was no longer represented by Nicole Klagsbrun, simply as a professional COURTESY, and in the most simple and straight forward way. I do not, therefore, understand why you say it is a gossip. Would you rather I had not told you?

But it now makes a more complicated situation ... you and I have been speaking of the possibility of a show this fall, but you have said nothing concrete about any details, for which I was waiting.

Five years of my work has just been stolen, and I have no recourse, no solution.

Now I will tell you some "art gossip": I am 56 years old with no money for an automobile, for health insurance, for a real house or even a studio to work in.

If that seems [in parts] of the art business that I need not be given normal respect as an artist, it is only their own foolishness, but I cannot easily be involved.

Let us consider any plans between you and I to have not worked out.

Thank you for your interest.
Jimmie Durham³

The City of Lund

Lund, a small city in the south of Sweden, has the highest percentage of student population among the well-known university towns in the world. As a consequence, there is a large number of scientists, researchers, and educators living there. Lund’s university has helped build its strong cultural and scientific traditions. The city is also known as the home base of Swedish companies like Tetra Pak and the original Alfa Laval, known all over the world for their scientific innovation and commercial expansion.

The Gallery’s Audience

This environment—academic and entrepreneurial—was the context in which Tornberg’s gallery operated throughout the years. Hence a significant part of the gallery’s audience was, in one way or another, related to the academic life of the city. Students, lecturers, and researchers from various disciplines attended the gallery and allowed their passion for contemporary art to grow hand in hand with the gallery’s development. The gallery inspired and guided a group of locals who became interested in art on different levels: some evolved as enthusiastic buyers and others as more committed collectors. Many of them were introduced to contemporary art through Tornberg; others had previous experience but enhanced their appreciation thanks to the gallery. One person, a professor in neuroscience, regular buyer, and friend of Tornberg’s, mentioned that the inner circle of the gallery was composed of “Lund’s high society.” Such an elite is to be defined not by economic wealth but by intellectual capacity.

Part of this society consisted of a group of scientists and researchers of the highest rank. Tornberg was a provocateur, an instigator of this high society. He operated partly as a demanding entertainer and in many ways as an advocate for contemporary art. Tornberg innovated in a field that would naturally catch the attention of the sciences; that is, the fine arts.

The ambitious exhibition program, delivered by such a gallery in a small medieval academic town, attracted public from outside Lund and attention from all over the world. Eventually the gallery’s “chemistry” casted for itself a utopian character, a mythical aura that is revealed when looking closely at its history and considering the eccentric personality of its owner.

PART THREE

Tornberg’s Persona

Tornberg’s largest passion was to develop friendships that he could associate or connect to art. One of his closest colleagues and dearest friends, Claes Nordenhake (who is currently based between Berlin and Stockholm), met Tornberg while living in Malmö in the mid 1970s, where he started his own gallery practice a few years after Tornberg began his. As did other konsthändlare of the time, both benefited from the economic boom of the 1980s that preceded the EMS crisis—the prosperous years between ’82 and ’91. Tornberg and Nordenhake’s relationship developed into a warm and powerful human dynamic that was fed by disciplined communication and joyful information sharing:

We pretty soon identified ourselves as the leading galleries. And we had a lot of things in common. We tried not to thread, to interfere, or to compete on the same things, more intuitively than outspokenly. I would suggest to Anders, “When you are in New York go and see this person,” and he would say, “Why don’t you go and see this guy?” We would always participate in each other’s activities. I would go to every opening of his and most likely to a wild party afterwards. He would come to my openings. Probably some people have told you about Anders personality: he was like a clerk in the gallery, everything was arranged immaculately, and then he had one drink and “zzzzzz” … which was incredibly funny.¹

It may be accurate to say that the dividing line between public and private in Tornberg’s persona often disappeared, and this is perceived as a characteristic of his complex personality. Therefore the gallery is mostly known as a complex endeavour as well. The essence of a privately owned art gallery is related to its idiosyncrasies. Tornberg had already been a notorious person in Lund since the early 1960s, when he had become well known for his flamboyant behaviour.
 Extroverted and enthusiastic in his manners, he took on his first organised business activity around 1962, right after he earned his filosofie kandidat (Bachelor of Arts) in literature and sociological studies from Lund University. Tornberg arranged and implemented bus trips to Pamplona’s San Fermin festival every summer of that decade. The festival is a seven-day “fiesta” during which participants “drink themselves into an absolute stupor” and is mostly known for its grotesque running of the bulls. The trips unfolded with Tornberg introducing his groups to his acquired local contacts and establishing a relationship with the local authorities.

Between seasons of this celebration ritual and bacchanalia—the occasion of wild and drunken revelry—Tornberg took a job in 1963 as interview manager and editor at a marketing firm called Marfo in Lund and taught for a period at högstadiet (grades seven to nine in a high school system) in 1964. Tornberg had dreamed of becoming a journalist and volunteered for several amateur newspapers before moving to Lund for his studies. By the end of the decade, just before getting hired at the gallery, he was employed in Tetra Pak’s marketing department.

Those pre-gallery years are symptomatic of how Tornberg led his double life: a meticulous perfectionist exemplified in his obsessive placement of things—plates and cutlery at the breakfast table or the millimetric hanging of works of art—blended with the seemingly irrational and spontaneous acts performed when the night came, carried out with relentless passion and often on the verge of chaos.

Tornberg had experience as an amateur actor in the 1960s, so he was well aware of the role his own body played in what he did, and this also affected how he developed and carried his knowledge about art in an embodied form, once he became an experienced gallerist.

A lawyer and client from the later years of the gallery recalls:

I can’t remember why, but suddenly we had some money, my wife and I. We had basically nothing on the walls, and we didn’t want to just put some shit on the walls. So, when we had some money, we went to Anders and said, “We would like a kind of a starting kit.”

So he helped us with five, six, seven pieces of art or something. And then he came home and hung it on our walls. And that was a fantastic experience. And then every time we bought something new, he came home and rearranged the hanging and he was just fantastic. But it was so fun. We usually had dinner for him when he came, but he came in in sneakers and I asked him:

“Should I fix hammers and nails?”

“No no no, I bring all that.”

In a plastic bag he had hammers and nails, and he went right up on the sofas: “I hope you don’t mind some holes in the walls.”

“No no no, please hang.”

We didn’t realise how many holes he was talking about! [laughs]. When we moved out of that house the—basically the walls were perforated [laughs]. He’d been up everywhere. And then he’d move back, and: “Oh! That’s bloody good,” and he went on. That was the show for the evening when he came to our house, and it was so fun.”

**Dinner Parties**

Remembered as a very playful but serious and generous person and professional, Tornberg’s pedantic precision coexisted with his debauched revelry performed at private dinners, which were celebrations for the exhibition openings.

These dinners, also invested with a legendary character, were an essential part of the gallery’s activity. Tornberg’s taste for ritualistic celebrations of extravagant character had evolved into formal dinners, which turned into an important part of his practice.

Jan Håfström, a long-time friend who met Tornberg in 1958 when they were both switching between literature and philosophy studies at Lund University, remembers these events:

The dinner parties after the openings were unbelievable. That was also an important part of it. Oh, yes. To eat and drink and sing and dance. Some of these parties were, I mean, on the border of total chaos. He was really a complex person. He had a perfect order of things, and how he wanted things to be. His clothes, the show, the gallery, the hanging—it should be perfect. But after an opening, the day after, everything seemed to be kind of a battlefield, you know?

**PART FOUR**

*Jan Håfström*

Håfström is the artist who had the most exhibitions at the gallery: seven in total. His first show in 1975 marked the beginning of a collaboration between the artist and Tornberg, who had encouraged Håfström’s new direction in painting. Tornberg often constructed exhibition narratives based on his profound attachment to the biographical, which he constantly referred to as a motive in developing his program. On Tornberg’s entry point to the art object, Håfström had this to say:

Yes, the biographical aspect is important, I think—that he saw this connection between the artwork and the life of the artist. And that’s why he wanted to see the artist, be with him or her, see the surroundings, meet the people, understand what kind of life and who they were. And that moved him. He thought that was fantastic: to get close to somebody. And the only way to do that was to spend time in the studio, but also to go to restaurants and bars and meet people, and feel the atmosphere. That’s why he loved New York, of course, and that’s why he wanted to introduce,
to give people in Lund and Sweden, give them a sense of the world on the other side.'

_Lars Thulin and Expansion of the Gallery_

Håfström’s second exhibition at the gallery, in 1977, caught the attention of Lars Thulin, at the time a thirty-seven-year-old businessman from Lund. Thulin and his wife, Lena, had developed a mutual interest in fine art. They started acquiring art in 1978. Soon after, in 1979, Tornberg and Thulin met more formally.

In 1980, they became very good friends and began travelling by car throughout Europe together. The destinations were where the central, large-scale European art exhibitions take place: the cities of Basel, Venice, and Kassel. Münster was also included. Tornberg would drive, Thulin would read the map.

Their friendship developed, and eventually Thulin became the gallery’s principal supporter. This came about after minor debts generated by the gallery’s only experience at Art Basel—in 1979—were paid to Lars Cederholm, a civil engineer who met Tornberg in the early ‘70s and who would later travel to New York with him around 1974. Influenced by Tornberg, Cederholm eventually moved into the arts and became a cultural project manager and an enthusiastic buyer of art.

Over the course of these summer travels with the Thulins at the birth of the new decade, connections to other art dealers and their galleries were established, mostly in Germany and Italy. The gallery’s European connections crystallised during these years—1981 to 1986—and went on to inform the exhibition program of the 1980s and ‘90s. The Thulins’ private art collection is very much informed by the establishment of these connections.

The growth and expansion of Anders Tornberg Gallery has undeniable roots in this friendship. I have the tendency to see their interaction as a kind of collaboration with a common goal. In addition to other projects of relevance, the creation of the publishing firm Propexus in 1986 arose from Thulin’s conversations with Tornberg, who communicated the importance of producing books associated with the exhibitions. One of Thulin’s many contributions to the gallery was an enhanced version of the traditional dinner parties. Starting in 1982, Lars and Lena Thulin arranged and paid for a dinner with each artist and twenty-eight guests. The Thulins had a quota of ten guests while Tornberg was in charge of gathering the other eighteen. Artists and people involved in cultural work came from all over Sweden, especially from Stockholm. The guest lists for the dinners weren’t always fully decided before the opening, so there was always the possibility to spontaneously invite people the afternoon of the same Saturday, which was the day of the week openings were held throughout the gallery’s entire history. Having access to the after-the-opening dinners became a treat, a thrill of a special kind.11

At the start, these gatherings took place at Tornberg’s home. The dinners were already famous before, in the ‘70s, but in the ‘80s Thulin asked for more structure: “At Anders’s it was much too messy with people not sitting down, running around …”12

_Interdisciplinary and Social_

Tornberg made many friends in the circles of arts and culture in Lund and elsewhere. The gallery turned into a meeting point far beyond the openings once a month. The office space at the gallery was always busy with people dropping by and having conversations, often for many hours. As the gallery matured, the groups of interested people became more diverse, and the circle closest to the gallery ended up being not only composed of people with a professional relationship to the arts, but was also permeated by philosophers, medical scientists (for example, a microbiologist and a neurologist were eager intellectual supporters and enthusiastic buyers), psychologists, and musicians. This is a crucial factor in grasping the universe of the gallery. The interdisciplinary character of the dialogue within Tornberg’s social circle would soon come to define the spirit of his endeavour.

Tornberg’s social persona was very much about bringing people together, making them meet, and creating new opportunities to develop life,13 a notion that was among his most passionate interests. The gift of friendship, always connected to art. The economic dimension of his practice, however, is not to be put aside—that would be to ignore the very nature of his endeavour, which, one should not forget, was a business.

An objectified version of the social and economic dimensions of Tornberg’s work can be found in hundreds of letters and faxes of conversations and planning of the exhibitions, carefully filed as the working papers of the gallery. These are technically known as the records of an organisation. This objectified form of Tornberg’s work is a treasure for provenance research, a valuable asset for art historians and curators.

_**Intellectual**_

Nevertheless, it’s the social and intellectual spirit of the gallery in Lund that seems to want to be freed from these paper documents, and in that sense from any collection of objects whatsoever. We can witness a vivid memory and lively conversation when asking about the activity of the gallery and of its owner. Olav Christopher Jenssen, an artist based in Berlin since 1982 who had solo shows at Anders Tornberg Gallery in 1989, 1993, and 1996, said in an interview in the summer of 2014 at his studio in Kreuzberg:
I think Anders Tornberg found an interest in this context because he was not only seeing himself as a commercial gallerist, but had an option of showing art he could include in his artistic universe. He had his gallery in Lund because of the intellectual capacity of his environment, where he could communicate and have this discussion within a community in a different way. It was a very, very clear decision not to have his gallery in Stockholm but to have it in Lund. Closer to Europe, and finding Stockholm, in his open-minded worldview, as isolated. He wanted to show internationally. He wanted to be an international gallery, to have an international gallery. And to have this international discourse about art and also about the meaning of art, being a person very alive as he was. He had so much enthusiasm. His enthusiasm was very, very, unusual, and this was the main energy of his gallery as well. 14

Eclecticism and Representation

On the intellectual, eclectic, and enthusiastic personality of the gallery and its gallerist, Claes Nordehake had this to say:

Anders was an intellectual laboratory, his gallery—and I guess this gallery [Nordehake] also is. But [there was] this jump to total eclecticism, which was a great asset in Anders, whereas I was more interested in trying to organise and pursue certain rules. But this very playful eclecticism was a great asset in Anders’s gallery, no question about that. If you look at some of the exhibitions, there are a lot of artists who now maybe you feel are not so interesting, which is the case for every gallery. I think it’s very interesting to remember the enthusiasm with which our friend presented some things that I could absolutely could not see [in my gallery]. And I hope vice versa. That was a very personal identification process. 15

Jan Håfström is instead hesitant to identify the intellectual in Tornberg. He accepts the potential of seeing the gallery as a laboratory, in the sense that Tornberg’s practice was personal, exploratory, and constantly changing in content; this could be assumed to be experimental in quality. Nonetheless, Håfström underlines that Tornberg’s endeavour was determined to undermine the notion of the bourgeois intellectual, sometimes favouring *cros over logos*, via the unleashing of raw emotions. “He had his own ‘homemade style’ so to say,” affirmed Håfström. 16 Such a phrase speaks of Tornberg’s self-education.

The gallery’s eclectic program was one of its most notable features. A plethora of reasons could be stated in describing the origin of this declaration. A defining aspect of the gallery’s way of working is that it didn’t have a fixed group of artists the gallery represented exclusively or locally.

The conventional model of representation had been previously attempted with the support of Lars Cederholm, who financed the gallery’s participation in Art Basel in 1979. The idea was to represent the artists Jan Håfström and Susan Weil. The results did not meet their expectations. This was the first and only occasion Tornberg participated in an art fair other than the Stockholm Fair—which the gallery didn’t miss for a single year of its existence. The gallery’s position on art fairs outside Sweden had been set by the results of this one-time tryout in Basel.

Recurring artists returned because they wanted to exhibit again in Lund. Lars Thulin insisted on bringing in new artists and preferred to see new work over art that had already been shown in the city—thus becoming more expensive to buy. A list of artists with four or more shows reveals some of Tornberg’s most cherished artist friends. 17 Instead of following a single coherent stylistic line (modernism), the gallery’s program was a mixture of approaches, origins, and styles (postmodernism): from John Cage, to Joseph Beuys, to Barbro Bäckström, to Richard Nonas, to Francesco Clemente, to Martin Kippenberger, to Günther Förg, to Janine Antoni, to Jan Håfström. The gallery’s program is a testimony to Tornberg’s understanding of trends; nevertheless, he was known for not having blind faith in the fashion of the moment.

ANALYSIS

Tornberg’s Gift

At the beginning of this study, in 2013, I had attempted to look into Marcel Mauss’s *The Gift* as a possible reference for writing. Something in Mauss seemed to suggest a key to the question of “What was Anders Tornberg’s approach to art?,” or, more informally, “What was Anders Tornberg’s ‘thing?’” I asked the question, and now I’m not surprised no one was able to give me a concrete answer. “Tornberg’s thing” was many things at the same time; a reflection of his eclectic personality.

My curiosity for Mauss and his work in *The Gift*, a book introduced with an old Norse poem about generosity, 18 ended up coinciding with another text on the same topic—also titled *The Gift*—but published in 1979, 19 more than half a century after Mauss’s essay first saw the light.

Tornberg kept *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property*, by American author Lewis Hyde, as one of his most—if not the most—treasured title in his personal library. 20 (One should not forget that Tornberg majored in sociology, literature, and philosophy.) In this book Hyde proposes that a work of art is better off understood as a gift than as a pure commodity. Further, it has a double existence, a double life that gives art the unique capacity of existing simultaneously in a gift economy as well as in a market economy. Hyde’s assumption is that an artwork is art because it carries a “gift portion” that a pure commodity doesn’t. Art can and most often should be sold in order for the artist to continue to produce, but art, Hyde
affirms, can continue to be art even if it is not sold. So, in short, pure commodities and art do not share the same mechanisms of circulation and purpose.

Fifty years before Hyde, Mauss noted that gift economies are marked by three related obligations: the obligation to give, the obligation to accept, and the obligation to reciprocate (that is, to give back); this is important to understand, on a basic level, for these exchange operations are part of any group or community. Mauss’s most relevant and talked about finding is that gift exchange is a total social phenomenon, one whose transactions are at once economic, juridical, moral, aesthetic, religious, and mythological, and therefore their meaning “cannot be adequately described from the point of view of any single discipline.”

Tornberg must have been informed by Hyde’s writing on “imagination and the erotic life of property” and he must have believed in the following approach: the economy of art is essentially—though not exclusively—a system of generosity that can exist in a market economy. Hyde’s ideas help clarify Tornberg’s ways; that is, how he handled the artworks and his relationships with friends, buyers, and supporters. For instance, the way he encouraged artists so eagerly to collect the work of other artists is an indication of this kind of exchange, one that takes place among a group of people envisioned as an extended family.

During my research, it became evident that Tornberg’s endeavour was not focused on the specific act of “making the sale”—that is, being a salesperson, which Tornberg clearly wasn’t. With further interviews and conversations it became clear that I was talking to a group, a small group, that constantly mentioned and underlined Tornberg’s personality over the actual work of the gallery. His integrity, his sense of humour, his capacity for entertaining, his playfulness, and his almost sacral approach to handling art—not dealing it but handling it. It was also intriguing and somehow uncomfortable that the testimonies of his seriousness and his expertise were often juxtaposed with stories about his early adventures in Pamplona. Upon further analysis, one can say that the Pamplona trips had an essential similarity to his gallery endeavour: they were an act of service that involved nourishment, combined with a marked polemical and even agonistic character.

Nourishing, polemical, and agonistic are all defining aspects of the potlatch, a form of tribal celebration found in its purest form in the American Northwest and as an act of service that involved nourishment, combined with a marked polemical and even agonistic character. Mauss affirms in his notes that both potlatch and auction share those same features. This contextualisation is essential in accepting the suggestion that Tornberg was so keen—either intuitively or consciously—to cultivate and nourish the inner circle of the gallery, protecting it, almost in a combative or defensive way (also characteristic of the potlatch), working hard to bring what he thought was a sincere outcome of his investigations of the international art world to his own environment in Lund. This can further be used to make a conjecture about why he never left the city, not even the location where he first started: he believed in this idea of extended family and that the work he had done to build up this group around contemporary art in Lund could not be reproduced elsewhere. This community around the gallery was his creation. Thanks to Hyde, we may safely understand it in this way.

Tornberg’s Potlatch

Going deeper into Hyde’s writing, a hair-raising and slightly sinister reality is revealed. Hyde says: “In a group that derives its cohesion from a circulation of gifts the conversion of gifts to commodities will have the effect of fragmenting the group, or even destroying it.” This is what may have happened when Tornberg’s own collection was auctioned in 2004. A rereading of Mauss’s text prompted the reformulation of an initial idea, which saw this auction as preventing the preservation and passing on of Tornberg’s legacy.

To come to terms with what I had termed “the ghost” of the collection—which, I argued, had been running around my research process—I realised that instead of ignoring the event of such an auction, I actually had to confront it and analyse it. With further understanding of the role and character of the potlatch, I was able to develop an understanding of the auction by correlating it to two main moments of Tornberg’s biography and practice: the Pamplona trips (1962–69) and the gallery years (1970–97). All three moments, including the auction, respond to the elements of potlatch mentioned above (nourishment, polemic, agony). Mauss affirms in his notes that both potlatch and auction share those same features. Such realisation gives shape to the following hypothesis: If one is attentive to Tornberg’s biographical facts and professional trajectory, the auction of his personal art collection in 2004, even if it was not carried out by himself, is a coherent outcome of his own personality and practice. His forms of action and approach invested his own collection with the energies that prompted its auction (licitatio). Further research could try to unfold if auctions are events that really turn works of art into commodities. A step towards this clarification would involve interviewing auctioneers with the central question, “Is an auction an event in which artworks are turned into commodities?”

The primary work on gift exchange has been done in anthropology not, it seems to me, because gifts are a primitive or aboriginal form of property—they aren’t—but because gift exchange tends to be an economy of small groups, of extended families, small villages, close-knit communities, brotherhoods, and, of course, of tribes.
Wider Circles

Although originated and developed in the heart of the gallery’s inner circle, Tornberg’s diversified notion of the economy of art resonated far beyond this group. Tornberg’s friends and acquaintances, and the influence he had on them, which—again—I would put forth as the reason why he never left Lund, was not the only group addressed by the gallery. The gallery also created wider circles. Many mention the influence the gallery had in Stockholm, others have testified about the multiple forms of visibility the gallery had internationally.

Tornberg’s utopian cast radiated from the gallery in the form of an unparalleled experience of care and attention, opportunities for professional and personal interaction, visibility, and—in many cases—excellent sales and connections to other galleries and institutions, which translated into proper economic and social revenue for the artists. All from a small and peaceful city with a qualified audience that, nourished by the gallery’s perseverance and generosity, poured all its energy and capacity into the exhibition installed. It was an environment where critical discussion and economic—as well as cultural and intellectual gain—coexisted in balance.

Durham’s Lesson

On the topic of forms of contract, Tornberg relied heavily on verbal agreements. For instance, over three million Swedish crowns (approximately 325,000 EUR, in today’s exchange) were loaned to the gallery without a written contract, without payback dates, and without any interest. Other verbal agreements of the kind can be tracked in the interviews for this thesis and in the everyday life of the gallery objectified in the records. Perhaps one of the few thoroughly written conditions for an exhibition found in the gallery records are the written terms Jimmie Durham faxed to Anders Tornberg on June 1, 1996, in preparation for the artist’s exhibition that opened August 30 of the same year:

Dear Anders Tornberg,

Sorry if I have forgotten to give you my fax here in Lille (France) where I am staying for the next weeks. In fact, it might be difficult for me to get to Lund for a visit. … but thank you very much for your offer.

I understand from our previous meeting that I can stay at your house, and use the gallery itself as a studio during the month of August. That is perfectly good, and other contractual conditions are simple: (1) I am responsible for paying for material to make work for the exhibit, although transportation of various things from within the Lund area to the gallery, as well as other normal logistical help would be appreciated. (2) You are responsible for my travel. Brussels/Lund/Brussels.

(3) Money from sales will be divided 50% to you, 50% to me. (4) All work not sold is my property, and, with consultation, can be used by me or you in other exhibits during a one year period after the opening. (5) as you like, you may keep the unsold pieces on consignment for one year after the opening, longer if desired; after consultation. (6) Unsold work will be returned to me at your expenses. Building of crates and other permanent packing is not necessary.

So, Anders, you see that I am not asking for anything at all unreasonable.

Hope you agree,

Jimmie Durham

It is notable that the terms were prepared and communicated by the artist, not by the gallery. The historical and intellectual value of this document reveals a paradox: the artist—of Cherokee origin—demonstrates a keen knowledge about the importance of the written contract for this particular exhibition (Durham had earlier, in another letter, criticised written contracts “partly because they cannot cover every situation”). One would have to navigate the whole correspondence to perceive the nuances of this exchange. Durham’s way of communicating demonstrates a need to have clarity in written form. In following the correspondence in the lead up to Durham’s exhibition, the curious enquirer may perceive certain key aspects not only of Tornberg’s method and personality but also of Durham’s crafted way of communicating, his keen professionalism, and his personal strength.

The episode constituted a lesson for Tornberg and for the writer of this essay. In the words of Inger Tornberg—whom Anders met in the ’70s at one of the Mikro exhibitions and who would much later, in 1990, become gallery partner, and then Anders Tornberg’s wife in 1996—this was one of the few moments of conflict the gallery had with an artist. Tornberg was devastated, fearing disaster with the possible cancellation of the exhibition, partly because he had already announced it, and quite proudly, for Durham was already at the time an artist with an extensive international reputation, who had just recently arrived (or more correctly, returned) to Europe, and was seeking to establish himself on the continent. The correspondence unfolds into a rush of art activity and new opportunities for the artist in Sweden and the rest of Scandinavia: the year following the exhibition, Durham went on to become part of the first group of artists-in-residency at the International Studio Program in Stockholm, IASPIS, an institution that initiated activities in 1996 and whose first director, Sune Nordgren, had exhibited at the gallery back in 1973 while he was still working as an artist. Also in 1997, Durham acted as guest teacher at Malmö Art Academy, an institution that opened two years before, in 1995.
The confidence that twenty-five years of exhibition making and handling of social and economic operations related to exhibiting art was—for a moment—put into question. Looking at this moment—a rather short but acute moment of crisis—is an opportunity to learn about the ongoing strong liaison between gallery and art practice. And, departing from this opportunity, a chance to continue to model new ways of working with artists, to stimulate their practice, and to attempt to reduce the distance between the art object with its potential recipients.

Afterword
Anders Tornberg’s art gallery practice involved a series of activities, forms of exchange, social events, and exhibition concepts in which economic transactions constituted only one element among a much more general and enduring agreement. A central observation of this study is that such an agreement was consistently bound to friendship and departed from significant acts of generosity. With the theoretical support of the essay The Gift by Marcel Mauss, first in published in 1925, it is possible to describe Tornberg’s gallery endeavour as a “system of total services.”

The detailed historical description of some aspects of Tornberg’s life (1937–97) and gallery practice (1970–97) reveals the proximity of the society of art (which he helped to create and nourish) to the theory and practice of ancient law and primitive forms of exchange. Posthumous events such as the auction of his personal art collection also reveal this analogy.

Forms of exchange, such as gift exchange, total services, and potlatch, in non-Western or ancient societies were a central preoccupation of anthropological enquiry during the last quarter of the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century. The tradition of this concern is documented in texts by James G. Frazer, Franz Boas, Marcel Mauss, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Through this line of study, these authors assumed the challenge of understanding societal configurations that revealed premodern or outside-of-modern state models that—although clearly deliberate—feature a less instrumental, more intuitive spiritual character. All of these anthropologists are attached in one way or another to the conception that “the main mental characteristics of man are the same all over the world” and that “certain patterns of associated ideas may be recognized in all types of culture.” To understand practices of international character such as Tornberg’s, it has been useful to revise these concepts.

In its focus on the work of one of these authors—Marcel Mauss, as well as his later influence on Lewis Hyde (whose writing influenced Tornberg’s gallery practice)—the present study reveals a non-mediated, direct connection between Tornberg’s version of the business of art and the circulation of things, people, and services researched in these iconic anthropological texts. Such research is reappropriated in this thesis for the purpose of developing a theory about a rarely studied cultural phenomenon that has had a profound influence in the development of the fine arts since the nineteenth century: the contemporary art gallery. The present study doesn’t claim anthropological or sociological validity but acknowledges the value of the enquiry from the perspective of art history and art practice.

The system of script writing relied on serendipity as a method for discovery. Distinct academic methods were implemented without losing the emphasis in the attempt to contribute to the artistic body of knowledge, always with the goal of rendering more powerful artistic and precise historical results. Academic rigour provided a more fertile terrain for association and gave space to coincidence in a more or less controlled research environment.

Note: The manuscript used for the lecture is included here as the historical account of the gallery. The fifth and last part of the lecture is presented here as the Analysis section. The Analysis section contains additional writing generated after the public lectures presented at Malmö Art Academy (May 14), Skissernas Museum in Lund (June 3) and Malmö Art Museum (August 30) all in 2015.
Andlig spis i köttaffär


Hänt, Utceania 27.3
Artist and close friend Jan Häfström writes a postcard from Morocco. Anders Tornberg Gallery Records, Lund University
Invitation card for “About Round, Round About” a group exhibition at the gallery held in 1990. Anders Tornberg Gallery Records, Lund University
José Tomás Giraldo


3 Jimmie Durham, fax to Anders Tornberg, May 14, 1996, sent from Brussels. Xerox copy of fax document, Artist Folder: Jimmie Durham, Anders Tornberg Gallery Records, Lund University. This communication is preceded by another fax, dated May 8, 1996, in which Durham informs the gallery in Lund of his friendly parting from the relationship with his gallery in New York.

4 Claes Nordenhake, interview with the author, December 22, 2013.

5 Lars Cederholm, interview with the author, May 22, 2014.

6 Peter Oscarsson, interview with the author, December 20, 2013.

7 Jan Håfström, interview with the author, June 3, 2014.

8 Steven Henry Madoff, Modern Melancholia (Lund: Kaleidoskop/Propexus AB, 1986), 120.

9 Häfström, interview, June 3, 2014.

10 “The collection has grown spontaneously. The collection consists mostly of works bought from Anders Tornberg Gallery and galleries who were friends of Anders and me that we met every year in Art Basel e.g. with three exhibitions: Barbro Bäckström, Richard Nonas, Nino Longobardi, Ernesto Tatafiore, Donald Lipski, Michelle Stuart (four), Barton Benes (four), Paul Osipow (four), Susan Weil (six), Jan Håfström (seven). Artists with four exhibitions or more: Donald Baechler (four), James Brown (four), Ted Kurahara (four), Michelle Stuart (four), Barton Benes (four), Paul Osipow (four), Susan Weil (six), Jan Håfström (seven). Artists with three exhibitions: Babro Backstrom, Richard Nonas, Nino Longobardi, Ernesto Tatafiore, Donald Lipski, Richard Tuttle, Jene Highstein, O.C. Jenssen.

11 I have never found a man so generous and hospitable that he would not receive a present, nor one so liberal with his money that he would dislike a reward if he could get one. That friendship lasts longest—if there is a chance of its being a success—in which friends both give and receive gifts.

12 Lars Thulin, interview with the author, June 11, 2014.


14 Jenssen, interview, June 2, 2014.


16 Häfström, interview, June 3, 2014.

17 Artists with four exhibitions or more: Donald Baechler (four), James Brown (four), Ted Kurahara (four), Michelle Stuart (four), Barton Benes (four), Paul Osipow (four), Susan Weil (six), Jan Håfström (seven). Artists with three exhibitions: Babro Backstrom, Richard Nonas, Nino Longobardi, Ernesto Tatafiore, Donald Lipski, Richard Tuttle, Jene Highstein, O.C. Jenssen.

18 “I have never found a man so generous and hospitable that he would not receive a present, nor one so liberal with his money that he would dislike a reward if he could get one. That friendship lasts longest—if there is a chance of its being a success—in which friends both give and receive gifts.

19 Lewis Hyde’s book was first published in 1979 as The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property.

20 Inger Hägglund Tornberg, correspondence with the author, 2012.


22 Tornberg was aware of two important aspects of the art object and its exchange: 1) Things have a personality and an inherent power. They’re not just inert objects; 2) The handing over, passing on of a thing creates a (legal) tie or a bond (nexum).

23 See Paul Osipow, Anders Tornberg Gallery på Konsthögskolan i Malmö (Lund: Lund University, 2002). See also Jenssen, interview, June 2, 2014. The gift must move on. By looking at Tornberg’s activity we track his approach to his professional network as a familia (“house” in Sanskrit): Things form part of the family: the Roman familia includes the res (things and services) and not only the people. Selling a work of art created a nexum, a bond between the gallery and the buyer that required follow-up.
“[Pamplona] That was an important step towards art. These things, they are centered around the death, and the San Fermin and the corrida, fiesta, and viva la muerte. All these things. The bullfight: that said something important about him and his interest in the toreros and the different character. … people who risk their lives every day, somehow. Like artists do. I think that’s the point. An artist takes a risk not becoming a normal citizen. Remains an outsider. Tornberg’s only way to do that, himself, was to become an art dealer. Then he got access to this extreme ways of living that he needed so much for himself to. … But I mean he always returned back home to his safe surrounding, where everything was in order; but outside that, he needed something totally different from that.” Jan Håfström, interview with the author, March 6, 2014.

Hyde, introduction to The Gift, vxi.

It is important to note that Tornberg’s potlatch was in a way Thulin’s potlatch. Thulin is a respected personality in the art circles of Sweden. Well known for his generous patronage to the arts, he was a member of the board at Rooseum in Malmö and is currently part of the board at Konstfack in Stockholm and Skissernas Museum in Lund. He has supported publication programs at IASPIS and Lilljevacs. As of May 2013, his private art collection is influenced by Tornberg up to 90 percent. Thulin is the private holder of most of the Joseph Beuys artworks in Sweden. Beuys exhibited at the gallery in Lund in 1981. Thulin started buying art around 1978.


From ancient Roman law we learn that reus—the responsible for the matter (res, i.e., things or services)—is a term that “belongs to the language of religion no less than that of the law.” The person who has received the res of another is above all his reus, that is: “the individual who is linked to him by the thing itself, namely by his spirit.” Mauss, The Gift, 66 and 173n31.

The Roman licitatio is the act of offering for sale or bidding at an auction: “It is even possible that the very old term of licitatio has still about it a memory of the equivalence of war and sale (by auction). ‘Bid in the market or go up and fight the battle’; says Festus under the word licitati. Compare the Tlingit and Kwakwutl expression ‘war of property’ for auctions and potlatches.” Ibid., 175n49.

Tornberg’s faithful devotion to his group and his disinterest in corporate-like expansion speaks to his own feminine cast.

Jenssen, interview, June 2, 2014.

João Penalva, tutorials, Malmö Art Academy, February–May 2013. See also Thulin, interview, June 11, 2014, and Hågglund Tornberg, interview.

Thulin, interview, June 14, 2014.


“Dear Anders Tornberg,

Thank you for your perseverance. But it is not simply the word ‘gossip’ that makes me nervous … Nicole Klagbrun and I had what I thought was friendship for 5 years, with no written contract between us. Now she has all of my work and I have no way to retrieve it.

I do not like to distrust people; it makes me feel stupid. And I do not like written contracts; partly because they canned cover every situation. Yet … (I want to say this very carefully of your feelings) you are friends with Nicole in some way, and I (therefore, kind of like) would like some sort of written agreement. I go to Lund and make work. Then what?

Can you write some general expectations, responsibility, etc?

Jimmie Durham”


Tornberg passed away the following year, in the late summer of 1997. Durham is seen here as someone who comes from a distant place and has some things of relevance to tell to a local audience. Not unlike Raphael in Thomas More’s Utopia or the Nolan in Giordano Bruno’s The Ash Wednesday Supper. This figure of the visitor is often found in utopian literature.

“Moreover, what they exchange is not solely property and wealth, movable and immovable goods, and things economically useful. In particular, such exchanges are acts of politeness: banquets, rituals … in which economic transaction is only one element, and in which the passing on of wealth is only one feature of a much more general and enduring contract. Finally, these total services and counter-services are committed to in a somewhat voluntary form by presents and gifts, although in the final analysis they are strictly compulsory, on pain of private or public warfare. We propose to call all this the system of total services.”

“Among all these very complex themes and this multiplicity of social ‘things’ that are in a state of flux, we seek here to study only one characteristic—one that goes deep but is isolated: the so to speak voluntary character of these total services, apparently free and disinterested but nevertheless constrained and self-interested. Almost always such services have taken the form of the gift, the present generously given even when, in the gesture accompanying the transaction, there is only a polite fiction, formalism, and social deceit, and when really there is obligation and economic self-interest.”


“Clearly, there will be no universal schema that will encompass all these developments. Furthermore, with the passage of time and a change of emphasis from encyclopaedism to empiricism, the range of functions demanded of collections expanded, and in the area of scientific investigation in particular the criteria required of the constituent parts became more narrowly defined: through a more rigorous approach to the documentation and analysis of specimens, it became possible to draw more accurate and more meaningful inferences from them. A tendency towards greater specialization in the range of material encountered in a single collection was a natural concomitant of this process. Growing connoisseurship in painting and sculpture led to the emergence of the gallery rather than the cabinet as the most widespread social manifestation of the taste for collecting in the eighteenth century. A whole new aesthetic was evolved within the confines of the collection.” Journal of the History of Collections 1, no. 1 (January 1989): 1–2.
### Further references

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All interviews and conversations were carried out in English and audio recorded unless noted. Transcription by Melissa Ratliff.

### Archives

- Anders Tornberg Gallery Records at Lund University
- Lund Stadsarkiv (Lund City Archives)
- Hans Tornberg Family Archive
- Inger Tornberg Hägglund Personal Archive
Experience – as an embedded, lived, bodily experience, something that is channelled out through the work. The body as an ingredient. The thing about knowing one self, or the world, or one another.

The discursive – that which belongs to the field of art with the known references that goes with it, something you have to know to be able to act in this field.

Language – in addition to the discursive, that which belongs to, but is greater than the sum of the known references. Something that you are introduced into, like learning a foreign language bit by bit, to be able to talk about what we do. Often we use some very loose terms such as "window in the ceiling" or "approach" as a kind of framing of what we do. The parts may be described or explained but the whole form stands outside of language. It is an intuitive process to be introduced to this language, something that comes with experience.

Choices – artistic knowledge formed in an artwork by means of options and rejections, like a knowledge that exists between two people in a relationship. A knowledge that is quite intuitive, and where habit may also play a role? Habits, how do we interact? Nested gesticulations. How are these choices made?

I shall reconsider human from the fact that we can
tell. This fact seems not easy to say exactly what it means. Take an example, we know a person’s face, and can recognize it among a thousand, indeed among a million. Yet we usually cannot tell how we recognize a face we know. So most of this knowledge cannot be put into words.

Recently introduced a metaphor to communicate much of this knowledge. pictures showing a variety of noses, mouths and other features. From these the witness selects the particulars of the face he knows and the pieces can form a reasonably good likeness of the face. This may suggest that after all, our knowledge of our appearance is given a description. But the police method does not previous to it we did could tell at the time. Moreover, only by knowing how to match the features we remember with those in the collection, and we cannot tell how we do this.

knowledge by starting know more than we can obvious enough; but it is know a persons face, and can recognize it among a thousand, indeed among a million. Yet we usually cannot tell how we recognize a face we know. So most of this knowledge cannot be put into words.

But the police have re-thought by which we can They have made a large collection of pictures showing a variety of noses, mouths and other features. From these the witness selects the particulars of the face he then be put together to likeness of the face.

we can communicate, of a physiognomy, pro-quate means for ex- change the fact that we know more than we can use the police method

we can know more than we can tell, 2015. Poster. 420 x 594 cm. Laila Svensgaard
we can know more than we can tell, 2015. Detail from exhibition at Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen. Laila Svensgaard
we can know more than we can tell, 2015. Sound installation, Duration 15:35 min. Laila Svensgaard


In we can know more than we can tell, Laila Svensgaard investigates various aspects of the sharing of artistic knowledge. Through conversations with a selection of Danish artists, she asks what is relevant knowledge in artistic work and practice and how this knowledge is stored and circulated.

The title we can know more than we can tell comes from the book The Tacit Dimension (1996) by Hungarian British scientist and philosopher Michael Polanyi. Svensgaard is interested in precisely this “tacit dimension”, meaning the silent or unspoken dimension to knowledge production that doesn’t happen consciously but is integrated in actions. This is reflected in Svensgaard’s project as something existing in the exchange that happens in artistic work, such as in studio visits or artist talks, through sound recordings, as the tradition of spoken history is the node where stories are gathered and passed on.

The audio recording can be visited online at: www.wecanknowmorethanwecantell.blogspot.dk

we can know more than we can tell, 2015. Opening performance. Exhibited at Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen. Laila Svensgaard

we can know more than we can tell, 2015. Detail from exhibition at Den Frie Centre of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen. Laila Svensgaard
Introduction

2013 was the year I returned to art education. I had applied to the Critical & Pedagogical Studies (CPS) Programme at Malmö Art Academy and was accepted on the two-year MFA course, a pioneering new programme where focus is not so much on the development of the individual student as on the collective development of the qualities of the team through a shared curriculum of theoretical and practical workshops. We were six people on the course, and together our individual practices shaped the structure and content of the teaching we were to receive. Being on this new programme—our group was only the second group to start—and being part of something this experimental and different from what I was familiar with in terms of art education was exciting and challenging for me right from the start. The last time I had been enrolled at an art academy was over a decade ago in the mid to late '90s in London. I had attended a BFA painting course at Central Saint Martins College of Arts and Design. A course where it seemed the pedagogical strategy—(or the lack thereof?)—was to provide the students with a space and leave them to it. This approach by the institution could certainly raise questions of the quality of education they supplied. This was in the heyday of Brit art. Damien Hirst and his peers were fresh out of Goldsmiths and the Frieze exhibition had launched London onto the international art world map as the new “New York.” Maybe this was why the Saint Martins painting course seemingly only addressed the making of an artist in terms of the modernist notion of the artist genius—and mainly male genius, I might add.

To illustrate my point I will tell you about an artist talk by one of the course’s main tutors. He showed his work, paintings of his wife, who also was a tutor on the course, in a pose that can best be described as lying on her back with her legs spread apart. But instead of talking about representation in painting or female representation in general, the conversations were all about composition, colour, and brushstrokes. This was in the '90s. There were a lot of exciting things happening—relational aesthetics, institutional critique, etc.—that would be relevant to include in an art education, one might think. Why would an institution or a course not choose to include this in their teaching of young artists? Things did change after that, I believe.

An Essay about Artists Teaching Artists

“The goal of education—any kind of education, but especially a humanistic education—is traditionally understood as being twofold. First, the students are supposed to acquire a certain knowledge, certain practical skills, and a certain professionalism in the field in which they are being educated. Second, the students are supposed to be changed as human beings, formed anew by their education—to become different, more accomplished, even a better example of humanity. The same is true of the traditional art education that has a goal of producing a ‘true’ artist. Yet in the case of contemporary art education, both traditional goals of education lose their plausibility. The tradition of modern art rejects all the established criteria of artistic professionalism. Since its beginnings, the artistic avant-garde called for abolishing the art system, of art as a specific professional activity—in fact, of art per se. Contemporary art, of course, is the heir of the historical avant-garde. …

Today art education has no definite goal, no method, no particular content that can be taught, no tradition that can be transmitted to a new generation—which is to say, it has too many. Just as art after Duchamp can be anything, so can art education be anything. Art education is an education that functions more as an idea of education, as education per se, because art education is finally unspecific.”

—Boris Groys

I would like to thank Søren Andreasen, Yvette Brackman, Dag Erik Elgin, Jørgen Michaelsen, Olivia Plender, and Miranda Whall for their positive responses, time, and willingness to participate in my study.
Another Head of School had been appointed the year I graduated and consequently the majority of my course received very low grades, issuing a strong political message about the seeming quality of the course.

However, since the subject of this essay is not the painting course at Saint Martins nor the discussion of the qualities of education in art in general, I shall go no further down this path. My intention for including the above information is purely to contextualise the experience of the art education I had before returning to education in 2013—an experience that stands in stark contrast to the experience of art education I’ve had on the CPS programme at Malmö Art Academy. The type of education I received at the beginning of my career in many ways formed my path forward. It definitely did not instil in me much confidence as an artist, nor did it provide me with any knowledge of how to pursue a career in art per se. But maybe it gave me something else? And maybe it sowed in me a seed that grew into the curiosity of the formation of and the teaching of an artist that will be the subject of this essay.

In October 2014 I had my first experience of teaching art to artists—students at the Jutland Art Academy (DJK). Part of the CPS programme requires each student to conduct an internship of teaching at an art institution. I felt reluctant to engage with this part of the programme, to engage with the role of teacher—which made me curious as to why. Did this have something to do with the fact I still considered myself a student? That as a matter of fact I literally was one? And why would that be a problem? Was it because I did not feel I had any additional or extended knowledge that I could share or teach, because I was still learning myself? I have now learned that this is not an unusual reaction to have when starting out as a teacher. The artist Thomas Bayrle shares this about his first teaching experience at the Städelschule (Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste) in Frankfurt:

When I started teaching I quickly found out that I’m not the guy who has all the answers, students would have laughed at me after the first day if I’d tried to persuade them I did. So I decided to tough it out at the time. It seemed all my colleagues were using another method, as if they knew something, and they stood there and dispensed this to students. I was the only one who was like, yeah … in the wind. The result of this was that the students decided, OK, if he doesn’t do it then we have to do it, so they took advantage and gradually I found out that this was actually a very productive position.²

In effect, his uncertainties turned into a productive methodology of teaching. With my uncertainties at the back of my mind, I prepared two consecutive workshops for DJK, each lasting two days, that would take place at the end of October 2014. What I encountered from the experience of teaching these workshop, and the subsequent thoughts I have had in relation to how to teach and how to learn to be an artist, forms the parting point for this essay and the base on which I formed a study of twenty questions. I found the reluctance that I had had to teach disappear in the situation of teaching. And I discovered a difference between imagining how something might be to experiencing how something really is. In the actual experience I had a sense of being in a double role. What do I mean by this? I will try to describe it: the sensation, anchored in the body, is an uncanny identification with the students and their quest for and lack of knowledge while simultaneously identifying with the teacher and being both wiser and older and more knowledgeable, all at the same time. I felt myself like a student yearning for the same knowledge that I had as the teacher yearning to give to the student. This experience of the double role of the teacher-student fascinated me, and I became curious as to how we share our knowledge as artists and as teachers. In practical terms, what is it we do? What is this knowledge in art that we pass on? Can we teach this knowledge? Or what can we teach young artists, if anything, outside of the discursive subjects of art history and art theory?

QUESTIONS?

imagination >difference< experience?

student >difference< teacher?

How do we share knowledge as artists and teachers?

What do we do in practical terms?

What do we pass on?

Can we teach this knowledge?

Or what can we teach?

Meditations on Education

One:

Definition of education in English:

noun

[MASS NOUN]

1 —The process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at a school or university:

a course of education

1.1 —The theory and practice of teaching:

colleges of education

1.2 —[COUNT NOUN] A body of knowledge acquired while being educated:

his education is encyclopedic and eclectic

1.3 —Information about or training in a particular subject:

health education

2 —(an education) An enlightening experience:

Petrus is a good workman—it is an education to watch him³
Two:
“Well, art is taught. But nobody seems to know how,”4 replies the “I” character when asked by the “He” character if he agrees with John Cage:

The same story appears over and over again in the annals of Zen Buddhism: the student comes to the teacher and begs him for instruction. The teacher says nothing; he is just sweeping up leaves. The student goes into another part of the forest and builds his own house; and when he is finally educated, what does he do? He doesn’t thank himself; he goes back to the teacher who said nothing and thanks him. It is this spirit of not teaching that has been completely lost in our educational system.5

Three:
When the artist Paul Ramírez Jonas was asked the question “What was the most valuable lesson —whether in the classroom, during a crit, or from a fellow student—that you learned in school? Why? Who taught it to you?,” part of his answer was:

I went both to a university (for undergraduate studies) and an art school (for my masters degree). This has shaped me in a particular way. I learned about 95% of what I need for my art practice, as well as what I need to simply be in the world, at the university (a professional art programme gave the other 5%). I find it difficult to understand how one can be an artist without first, or at least simultaneously, being educated. By educated, I mean a very traditional idea of a liberal arts education: the studying of a curriculum aimed at imparting general knowledge and developing intellectual capacities, such as critical and analytical thinking. Ideally there should also be a component that includes spiritual and emotional education —two things I sorely lack even today. Whether it happens in a formal setting is less important.6

The Cage allegory I referred to in meditation number two implies that an education is not necessarily something you only get from a teacher, that living life itself can also educate you, something Ramírez Jonas’s thoughts on education both questions and includes. Although viewing the lack of the spiritual and emotional in education today as a missing component, he at the same time more greatly values the university degree for his career as an artist than a professional art programme, which probably would include the components he sorely lacks.

The Artist Interviews

Thoughts on How To
This is a critical paper in the form of an essay and it will be in line with the genre and in line with the course guides for Critical & Pedagogical Studies, including abstract considerations, personal experiences with the material, and deliberations about the material. This essay is not a thesis but rather an unfurling of an investigation about artists teaching artists.

My interest in this area of investigation stems from my own experiences of art education, both as a student and as a teacher, as mentioned earlier. As I see it, this subject is core to my education in Critical & Pedagogical Studies, and I have been given the impression through my own research and supervision that this subject could benefit from further studies.

Though I have not written this essay following a clear academic structure, I seek to make use of an academic tradition to ensure validity. Therefore I will now make some speculations on empirical methods and ways of analysis.

Selecting Artists to Interview
I selected the artists using the following criteria: they are professional, practising artists who have sufficient experience teaching young artists—with a minimum of ten years teaching experience; of both genders—to ensure a certain form of representation; and from various institutions of education and teaching—to represent different institutional structures in art education today. I have not considered nationality because the criteria would be too broad to cover within the practical restriction of time, and the aim of this essay is not to produce statistical representational material. A selection will always be biased by the mere fact of my choosing, but by trying to clarify my choices I hope to enable the reader to gain a foothold and take a position.

Conducting the Interviews
I have conducted an interview of twenty questions with six artists. The questions for the interviews were decided by me and have been approved by my essay supervisor. My considerations regarding the questions have been to expose several aspects about being an artist and teaching art to artists. The interviews have been conducted by e-mail, even though the optimal situation would have been to interview face to face; however, due to restrictions of time, this proved to be impossible. The advantage has been that the questions are open to the artists’ interpretation because I was not present with gestures and accentuation. Therefore, the questions were open to angles and interpretations I did not foresee; the weakness of this was that the questions were also open to misinterpretation, which also happened a few times, but luckily without decisive importance.

How to Analyse
I decided to relay and analyse the material in a reflexive manner rather than through comparative analysis. The study contains far too small a number to provide
material that would be useful to give a statistical view, as mentioned earlier, on the teaching of artists by artists. Instead I decided to treat the material as a collective pool of thoughts and experiences from different artists who teach and to take subjective freedom to dip into and pull from selected material to discuss in a criss-crossing manner. I intended to contemplate freely without the limitations a statistical analysis would present. In my view, this proves for a far more interesting read and, as already mentioned, my intention is not to prove a thesis but to write an informed critical essay.

I have divided the analytical part into eight sections and subdivided the questions into the following categories: 1) Teaching Experience versus General Structure; 2) Visions of Teaching versus Concrete Structures; 3) Teaching Methods versus Structure; 4) Feedback versus Structure; 5) Environment versus Structure; 5½; Role of Artist-Teachers versus Structure of Institutions; 5¾; Student-Teacher Relations versus Structure; 6: Can Art Be Taught? and Can Only Artists Teach Art?

Questions number 1 and 8 are attached to “1) Teaching Experience versus General Structure.” Questions number 11 and 20 are attached to “2) Visions of Teaching versus Concrete Structures.” Questions number 6, 9, and 10 are attached to “3) Teaching Methods versus Structure.” Questions number 19 is attached to “4) Feedback versus Structure.” Questions number 16 and 17 are attached to “5) Environment versus Structure.” Questions number 7, 12, and 13 are attached to “5½ Role of Artist-Teachers versus Structure of Institutions.” Questions number 15 and 18 are attached to “5¾ Student-Teacher Relations versus Structure.” Questions number 4 and 5 are attached to “6) Can Art Be Taught? and Can Only Artists Teach Art?” Questions 2, 3, and 14 are not included in the investigation because their purpose is primarily of an informative character.

This division of the questions is mainly to render intelligible the relevant information from all questions. All parts of the analysis relate to the different structures of the institutions where the interviewed artists are currently teaching or held their latest position of full-time teaching. For the analysis I used the institutions of art education where the interviewed artists teach and not the institutions where they took their education. This is because my questions are in regard to their positions as teachers.

The institutions identified in this study are: the Jutland Art Academy (DJK) in Aarhus; the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen; the Academy of Fine Art (KHiO) in Oslo; and Aberystwyth University (Miranda Whall). Olivia Plender mentioned she teaches at both the Royal Institute and Konstfack, but I have chosen to concentrate on the Royal Institute because that is were she holds full-time employment as a PhD candidate.

The Institutions

For purposes of clarity, I have identified four areas in each institution to be considered in my description and comparative analysis: 1) Educational methods: What courses and workshop do they offer? How do they structure teaching, etc.? 2) Educational vision: What do they want for the student and how do they teach this? 3) Academic structures: Are they Bologna accredited? Do they offer PhD programmes, etc.? 4) Environment: How large is the institution? Where is it located, etc.?

The Jutland Art Academy (DJK), Aarhus, Denmark

The Jutland Art Academy is the only institution where two of the interviewed artists have taught. Søren Andreasen held a full-time position as lecturer from 2003–10 and Jørgen Michaelsen currently holds both the position of lecturer and Head of Education. The academy is structured as one unit without medium-specific departments. The studies are cross-disciplinary and all students have access to any course they may wish to sign up for at all times, independent of the year of study they are in. The education is structured in two parts. The students are assigned a supervisor and together they organise and decide which courses the individual student should attend. The education consists of lectures, courses, technical workshops, and study groups. Art theory and art history classes are mandatory for the first three years.

Students are encouraged to work in any medium, and the studies take their point of departure in the art practice of the individual student. The academy emphasises that support is given to the development of this. Students’ experiments in art are also emphasised, as are discussions about art’s general role in society and culture today.

DJK offers a five-year further education programme in Fine Art. The five years of education is subdivided into three parts: three years standard education (including one basic year) and two years final education. The academy encourages students to exchange abroad for one semester in year four. Year three and year five concludes with an exam project and exhibition; year five also includes a written assignment, and both exams are evaluated internally and externally. DJK is the only institution in this survey not accredited according to the Bologna agreement and it offers no PhD programmes. Though not Bologna accredited, the education is of such a standard that it is recognised
by the Danish state and students attending are eligible for Danish state student grants.

The total number of students is approximately forty, thus making it the smallest of the institutions in the survey. The academy currently resides in small and worn buildings in central Aarhus, the second largest city in Denmark and a thriving university community. DJK is the most tightly financed of all the institutions in this survey; it receives only a fraction of the amount of funding the Royal Danish Academy in Copenhagen does, and the main part is from the municipality of Aarhus and not the Ministry of Culture. It also has the least facilities and workshops on site.

The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, Denmark
The Royal Danish Academy consists of the Theory department and seven professor schools: Time-based Media; Painting; Sculpture; Language, Space and Scale; Graphic; Media; and Walls and Space. For the first two years students attend a foundation school, followed by one year at one of the professor schools. The last three years (MFA) are based in one of the professor schools, supplemented by tuition at the laboratories and in academic activities in the form of interdisciplinary modules, projects, and workshops. During the first two years of the MFA programme, the student, together with the professor, will outline an individual study plan. There are nine different technical workshops (laboratories) at the academy: serigraphy; wood; video; etching; colour; photography; construction; ceramics; and the laboratory for art and cultural studies. Though its primary function is for the mandatory curriculum in the foundation school, it also is intended as a place students can use to reflect theoretically and/or historically in relation to their own practice.

The Royal Danish Academy’s goal is to develop students’ individual practice to become professionally practising artists. Therefore, there is a strong focus on individual supervision and the teaching of practical and theoretical disciplines relating to the subject of visual arts.

The academy has recently undergone structural changes and now has full accreditation as per the Bologna agreement. It offers BFA and MFA programmes in visual arts. It differs from other institutions in this survey in that the duration of its MFA programme is three years, which reflects the original structure of a six-year education prior to Bologna accreditation. This means that structurally the institution is different today than when Yvette Brackman taught there in 2000–07; however, the Danish Royal Academy was and still is a professor school. Although it states it offers a PhD programme, the programme is affiliated with the University of Copenhagen, which is also where the qualification of the PhD takes place. The PhD is not funded by the academy either, but privately by Novo and Carlsberg.

The Schools of Visual Arts at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts have around two hundred students and fifty employees, of whom twenty-two are artistic and academic staff. The academy is located in the centre of Copenhagen at Charlottenborg, a former palace and today a listed building, where it has resided since its foundation in 1754. Unlike DJK, the Danish Royal Academy belongs directly to the Ministry of Culture.

The Academy of Fine Art (KHiO), Oslo, Norway
The Academy of Fine Art in Oslo emphasises artistic practice as being at the core of its education. Studies are across media, disciplines, and approaches and deal with formal or material concerns, as well as concerns of post-conceptual, social, and political issues. Students may specialise in disciplines such as painting, photography, sculpture, installation, performance, sound, video, and text and can be provided with technical classes within each discipline. For both BA and MA programmes, the studies are organised into five areas: 1) independent practice, focusing on studio work and individual tutorials; 2) group critiques, in which work is discussed collectively; 3) practical and theoretical seminars and workshops; 4) writing practice; 5) exhibition practice in on-site and external galleries. KHiO considers itself a unique collective of singularities where artists from a variety of backgrounds, countries, fields, genders, and generations come together to create what they believe to be the ideal space for the development of their practice.

The academy is Bologna accredited. It offers a three-year BA and a two-year MA. It does not offer a PhD programme.

The Academy of Fine Art is part of the larger institution Oslo National Academy of the Arts, which consists of six departments: Design, Arts and Craft, the Academy of Fine Art, the Academy of Dance, the Academy of Opera, and the Academy of Theatre. It is Norway’s largest college of higher education in the field of arts, with over five hundred students and two hundred employees. Currently, the Academy of Fine Art has one hundred and five students within the BA and MA programmes, four research fellows, and eighteen faculty members. In 2010, all KHiO’s facilities were relocated together on Seilduken campus, an old building that previously housed a sailcloth factory.

The Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm, Sweden
The Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm offers teaching in traditional techniques as well as in contemporary
media and materials. Each student is assigned a supervising professor and supervision is given both individually and in groups. The teaching within the professor group is in the form of discussions and presentations of one’s own and others’ work, as well as other art-based activities. The Royal Institute of Art offers a selection of technical workshops in digital media, photography, printmaking, interactive systems, artists’ material, monumental techniques, painting, sculpture, and video. Most teachers in the workshops are professional artists in order to provide an artistic understanding of the students’ work and process. They give basic technique and material courses as well as individual guidance.

The aim of the studies is to give the students the possibility to develop their skills and distinctive character as well as an independent attitude and critical thinking. The studies are mainly individually arranged and planned together with the supervising professor, with the aim to support and develop each student.

The Royal Institute of Art offers a five-year programme in Fine Arts, an MA Programme in Fine Arts, a project programme for professional artists, one-year continuation courses in architecture, architectural conservation, architectural theory and history, and art and architecture. There is also a wide range of artistic research and development projects carried out at the institute. The institution is Bologna accredited and it hosts practice-based PhD projects, artistic development, and research projects.

The Royal Institute of Art has its roots in the early eighteenth century. It has approximately sixty members of staff and two hundred and thirty students. The institution has its own administration office with approximately twenty staff. Since 1995 the institute has had its own campus on the island of Skeppsholmen in central Stockholm, comprising student studios, workshops, a library, computer rooms, exhibition spaces, and lecture halls.

Aberystwyth University, Aberystwyth, Wales, United Kingdom
Tuition in Fine Art at the School of Art at Aberystwyth University is available in painting, printmaking, drawing, photography, book illustration, experimental film, installation, and site-specific performance. Throughout their degrees, students may also choose from the school’s portfolio of art history modules, which span the Renaissance to present day, and from vocation-oriented modules, such as “Art Gallery Education” and “Staging an Exhibition,” which engage with the curatorial study of art. The school’s methods of teaching are traditional and include lectures, seminars, tutorials, practical workshops, and field studies. It is possible to study medium specific or across disciplines. The students are assigned a tutor whom they can turn to for guidance and help at any time, related to academics or pastoral matters.

The way Aberystwyth University presents its vision, in my view, reflects that tuition fees apply, and the education it gives appears to me much more like a product than any of the other institutions. For instance, it is the only institution that mentions employment percentage after graduation: “91% of our 2014 Art graduates were in employment or further study 6 months after graduating (DLHE 2014).” It also emphasises that the studies encourage creative problem solving, improve the ability to adapt in a changing world, and enhance interpersonal liaison skills. And, “assets, sought after in today’s job market as transferable skills, are actively promoted during your course of study at the School of Art.” Its courses aim to give the students a competitive edge by enhancing their portfolios and skills. This seems to me much more market orientated than any of the other institutions, and it is the only one that doesn’t seem to primarily emphasise the development of the individual student’s practice.

It is also the only institution that is a university in the sense that prevalent university disciplines in arts and science are taught. The studies in Fine Art belong to the ILLCA institute (Institute of Literature, Language and Creative Arts). The BFA in Fine Art is a three-year programme and the MA is one year. The university also offers degrees combining Fine Art with a selection of different subjects, such as art history, English literature, history, Irish, film and television studies, creative writing, and education. Tuition fees apply throughout. They accept PhD candidates and are of course fully Bologna accredited.

The university is scenically located in the remote town of Aberystwyth in Mid Wales. Originally a medieval walled town, located between countryside and sea, it is in an area renowned for its environment and spectacular scenery. The School of Art is the oldest university art department in Wales. It has a distinguished history that goes back to 1917, when it was one of only a few British universities to be concerned with the art and crafts movement. The campus is an Edwardian listed building and seen as a symbol of the school’s aim to link the traditional and the contemporary. Approximately one hundred students a year are enrolled in the department of Fine Arts.

To Sum Up:
Most institutions stress in their own way that they have interdisciplinary studies, even the two professor schools, the Danish Royal Academy and the Royal Institute of Art. At DJK the interdisciplinarity is meant to enhance the development of the individual student
and at KHiO it is to invite the artist to broaden her or his horizons. All institutions have in common the importance they place on the teaching of art history and theory. Two of the institutions are distinctly different from the other three. One is ILLCA, which belongs to the University of Aberystwyth and is governed by generic university structures; furthermore, it promotes education as a product and tuition fees apply. It has combined art degrees in art and describes itself very differently to the other institutions included in this essay. The second is DJK, which is the only one that is not Bologna accredited and is the most financially challenged. All institutions emphasise the allocation of supervisors/professors/tutors, and all of the institutions use similar methods of teaching, such as seminars, one-on-one tuition, practical workshops, study trips, and group discussions. All focus on students’ own practices, though some focus more on group dynamics than others.

Because of similarity in structures between the institutions, it has not always been possible in my analysis to correspond specific institutional structures against specific answers, but the answers are analysed to correspond against a present abstract influence of institutional structures.

Analysis

1. TEACHING EXPERIENCE VERSUS GENERAL STRUCTURE

In this section I will look at how the artists’ experience as students has formed them as teachers today and how the abstract concept of structure has played a part in this formation. By abstract concept I mean that it has not been possible for me to identify and analyse specific structures in relation to their education. Only the general structure of an art institution stands forth. First and foremost I note that four out of six of the participants have experienced a lack in their own education that they now as teachers act upon and address the need of in their own teaching. Only one rises above the question and answers positively, bringing with her and including a positive experience in her teaching today.

Søren Andreasen recounts how the academy was paralysed by the changing social and cultural role of art, so students in effect were left to educate themselves. Therefore he, in his own teaching, found it important to establish a structure among the students whereby they could speak and behave across media, method, and social background. Olivia Plender describes her formative art education as leaving school in a state of rage with the feeling of not having had an education, which is why she finds it most important, in her own words, to give people some education. She experienced her gender playing a role that made her feel sidelined and irrelevant, and subsequently it has been important for her to get students to question the myth of the genius and focus on working in groups. Miranda Whall is the only artist who mentions positively having been very satisfied with her education, that it has taught her to work hard, and that she hopes to continue to do so to be a good teacher and to inspire hard work in her students. She even copied her own teaching method from the institutional structure she experienced as a student, and uses it at the institution where she teaches today. Another thing I note is that Dag Erik Elgin is the only artist who doesn’t specifically refer to education as a situation that has influenced him. He writes that he tries, in his teaching, to not to re-present but to provide for a coming into being. Thus in this he stands forth as the exception, the only one who generally does not bring with him any structural influences from his own education.

2. VISIONS OF TEACHING VERSUS CONCRETE STRUCTURES

In this section I will look at the artists’ vision of education. I did not specifically ask them this question, but in question 20 I asked them what the best they can do for teachers, and it is from this question I primarily have collected the information for this section. Relevant answers from other questions have also been included in this analysis.

In question 1, Søren Andreasen answers that he is convinced that the best he can do for his students is that they become their own teachers. This was his own experience when he was a student. Though it was never a conscious educational structure on behalf of his teachers, he has turned the absent potential of acting into a structure of education. To be your own teacher seems a little outside of the structure DJK promotes in its approach to and focus on the support of the individual student through the presence of a team of artist-teachers. Where his structure fits in is in DJK’s encouragement of potential students to collaborate.

Yvette Brackman’s answer is slightly more traditional in a university context. She believes the best she can do for her students is in collaboration with her colleagues to give the students a solid grounding in art history and art theory. It seems slightly against the structure of the institution at which she taught, in the sense that the Royal Danish Academy distinctly focuses on the practice of the individual student and subscribes to medium-specific, professor-run departments.

Dag Erik Elgin’s answer is more cloudy than clear. He thinks that the best he can do is to give his students
presence, here and now, which exceeds any pedagogical method. I will return to this in section 3. In question 2 he indicates that he considers teaching as a part of his practice, and in question 20 he indicates that to do this with teaching is some of the best one can do as a teacher: “to do” instead of “to teach.” His approach to giving and receiving education is very free and humble and has a strong human character to it. This is how

Miranda Whall also connects being the best teacher with being the best artist. She believes that she teaches at her best when she makes her best art.26

Jørgen Michaelsen indicates that it means to him “to catalyse, exacerbate, inform. Inspire artistic self-vision as teacher has focus on the individual. However, this is not the same as having focus on the individual in his methodology; I will return to this in the next section. Now to expand on this in relation to DJK: as already mentioned, it focuses on the support of the individual, so this fits. The structures of DJK are nearly identical to Jørgen Michaelsen’s view on his vision of teaching.

Olivia Plender is influenced by her experiences when she has to indicate what is the best she can do as a teacher. She believes the best she can do is to give people an education, similar to Yvette Brackman, but in addition she advocates protecting the students from the art market to expand their potential instead of narrowly focusing on their saleability.29 This fits with the structure of the Royal Institute of Art, where students are assigned one supervising professor throughout their education.

3. TEACHING METHODS VERSUS STRUCTURE

When describing the methods of the interviewed artists, I mean the methods they use in their teaching, including concrete techniques but also didactic deliberations. When asked “What are you teaching when you’re teaching art?,”29 the answers of course vary. In the previous section I mentioned Søren Andreasen’s focus was on his students to be their own teachers, but this is not necessarily an expression of his concrete methods of teaching. This is a method that, according to him, depends on the particular group of students, but in general he asks students to critically discuss their cultural upbringing and to focus on what they don’t know and can’t do.30 I think it is difficult to know exactly what this means, other than noting in his method Andreasen sees himself also as a facilitator for students to expand in groups. In question 9 he answers that he will use any method, depending on context. He shares with Olivia Plender the view on development through discussions and the group formation. Discussion is also central to Yvette Brackman.31 She uses discourse, group crits, workshops, seminars, and films, but mentions individual and group critique are central.32 Dag Erik Elgin, on the other hand, shows a philosophical approach, but summarises teaching is when something unexpected happens for both the teacher and the student. His methodologies profess to create something together with his students.33 This converges with the principles of KHiO. He doesn’t have a specifically developed method, he says, but to return to the essential of being present.

Jørgen Michaelsen, in contrast, mentions specifically individual guidance as the most important method, but will at the same time make use of a broad selection of different teaching subjects. Olivia Plender positions herself directly opposite when she describes how she for a long period of time could not see the point in one-to-one teaching. Now she can, but still focuses more on group work to encourage and develop an environment where everybody feels safe and able to speak.

Miranda Whall mentions one-to-one tutorials, group crits, and exhibition opportunities as her methods of teaching. She further elaborates on her plan of teaching,34 explaining how her eleven-week modules are usually made of three courses, each lasting three weeks, changing from one method to the next, including seminars, student-led seminars, and workshops. The workshops are three-hour sessions consisting of an introduction by her of an artist, practice, or theory, followed by a quick workshop in pairs, in groups, or as individuals, followed by a group crit/discussion. In question 6, Whall refers to two principles she follows in terms of a teaching methodology. Firstly the philosophy of “thinking through making”35 whereby she tries to get students to think through the physical, actual process of making to try to get them to realise that breakthrough thinking happens through and during the act of making. She describes the process as a triangle with the following at each point: experimentation/making at one, research at the next, and evaluation at the last. All are of equal value and all can be done through making. She emphasises to her students that even when stuck, moving through all three parts is important, because they will experience satisfaction and reward from the process, regardless. In this way, her teaching exemplifies a process-oriented methodology.

On reflection, are there any structural connections between the individual institutions? Generally I can compare, as in the previous section, the individual’s
approach against the institutional structure, but I will resist doing this because in many ways it will not, in this case, demonstrate any new information. Jørgen Michaelsen is still in agreement with DJK, while Søren Andreasen still doesn’t quite coordinate with it; Dag Erik Elgin still represents the interdisciplinary and collective approach of KHiO; etc., etc. Instead, I will debate the choice of methods against structure as a general term. In question 10, I asked how the artist-teachers experience freedom from the institution to decide their own methods of teaching. The most interesting thing about the answers I received is the consensus among them all of getting “total, sufficient, enough, complete, I do what I like freedom” in deciding their own teaching. I suspect that some, in reality, have more freedom than others; for example, some of the positions entail only six days teaching a month compared with one position consisting of four teaching days a week, stipulating that one day be admin and three days contact teaching. How I read the information from other positions is that within their six teaching days a month, they have freedom to decide themselves when and how they do admin work. Regardless, I think what is important is everyone’s experience of near total freedom when it comes to deciding how and what they teach. That is a unique position to have as a teacher in anything. Methodologies and curriculums vary, but they have great freedom. Structures as phenomena of course influence this, but it is not experienced as such by the artists I have interviewed. It can mean that the structures are not limiting or that they have become so embedded in the normality and discourse that they are invisible. The only person who problematises the visible institutional structures where she teaches is the person teaching at the institution I have identified as the most market driven of them all, and where educations seems addressed as a commodity: ILLCA at Aberystwyth University.

4. FEEDBACK VERSUS STRUCTURE

In this section I will look at how the artists get feedback from their students, and if institutional structures play a role or has an effect on this. Jørgen Michaelsen is the only one who refers directly to the structure of the institution (DJK), explaining that the cohort size of forty students allows him, in his own words, to organically sense the effect of teaching. Miranda Whall has specific structures to adhere to at Aberystwyth University. The students are given feedback forms to fill in at the end of every semester and they have to make comments on and vote for lecturer of the year. These comments are passed onto the lecturers. This reflects the character of the university I identified earlier, and it links to her answer to question 7, where she describes how she experiences the climate and culture of paying for education directly affecting her teaching and how students, in her words, seem to shop their way through their degrees. Filling in evaluation forms and assessing the teacher follows the university’s structure of education as commodity. In contrast, Dag Erik Elgin identifies witnessing a student’s total dedication to his or her work as the moment when he gets his feedback and is reminded about what being an artist is all about. For him, true feedback is about discovery and sharing something we are longing for that we don’t yet know.

On reflection, it would have been interesting for me to have followed up with more questions, such as how often the artists asks their student for feedback, in order to see how important they find feedback in relation to their teaching. And whether or not they consider feedback to be part of their teaching and whether feedback influences how they plan their teaching. Even without direct answers, the above does indicate that feedback is considered important by most and is a component that belongs to teaching.

5. ENVIRONMENT VERSUS STRUCTURE

In this section I will look at the environment, examining how it plays a role both in the geographical location of the institutions and how it plays a role in teaching. I will also examine how institutional structures can influence the environment. Miranda Whall explains how the environment where she teaches has, in different ways, had an impact on the students and the staff, and therefore the teaching. Geographically speaking, the university is located in a small Welsh town surrounded by mountains, facing the sea. Students specifically choose this place of study for a more traditional approach to art and few have interest in contemporary art practices, which, specifically in relation to art, she writes, seem a little “out of place” there. On a positive note, she finds that students can be more focused and have fewer cultural distractions, and thus are better able to carve out practices less affected by others. The traditional structure is not only reflected in the environmental location, but it is also reflected in the location of the teaching, which, as she mentions in question 17, only really happens in the studios, apart from the annual student residency. It is also reflected in the culture of the institution, as we see in question 7, where she explains how she feels marginal in her contemporary thinking and practice and is often confronted by students saying “this isn’t art” about contemporary art.

When Søren Andreasen interprets the environment, in his words, as the type of organisation that characterises a given art school, he sees it as hugely influential and determining of the students that are admitted and the
teachers that are hired. In this case, the loose institutional structure at DJK fits perfectly with his view on where his best teaching takes place; that is, any space with a table and chairs.39

Olivia Plender provides my last example of structural and environmental impact on teaching. She experiments with the environment where teaching takes place to see how it affects and relays the subject being taught. In one example she explains how the teaching of a historical event and the lack of physical traces today are visually noticeable when visiting the physical location of the event, and thus it is experienced differently than it would be if taught in a classroom. She alone mentions this approach to teaching, that is, experiencing something in a group structure that is not necessarily tied to an institutional location.

5½. ROLE OF ARTIST-TEACHERS VERSUS STRUCTURE OF INSTITUTIONS

In this section I will look at how the artists experience being teachers as artists, and I will examine any influences institutional structures may have in relation to those experiences.

Overall it appears institutional structures influence the role of teacher in one way or another. Four participants mentioned administrative duties to be one of the parts of teaching they particularly dislike.40

Olivia Plender specifically identifies the British system as rigid and explains that she felt trapped by the structure when teaching. She goes on to describe how she finds it complicated to be an authority figure, that she in fact wishes to give up authority, but she is aware that responsibility comes with the role of teacher. This clash she experiences between the role of the artist and the role of the teacher is expressed in her answer to question 13, in which she says that she sometimes sees teaching art as making art and sometimes not.

Miranda Whall experiences directly, in her teaching, the structure of Aberystwyth University imposing on the student-teacher relation. She refers to, in her words, the climate and culture of paying for education to have influenced students to expect and demand everything, so that they forget to give and put something into the experience themselves. She further mentions in question 12 how difficult she finds it to maintain the academic role she feels the university puts pressure on her to fulfil, with, in her words, totally unrealistic, unmanageable levels of expectations. She describes how it imposes on her own artistic practice and directly affects and shapes the choices and directions she takes in her own work. Therefore, making art and teaching are very distinctly different for her.41

5¾. TEACHER-STUDENT RELATION VERSUS STRUCTURE

This section is central to questions 15 and 18. I will examine how the interviewed artists experience their relations, artistic and personal, and how they experience the role of teacher affecting these relations. I will contemplate this in relation to the individual institutional structures.

There seem to be a fairly general consensus that an ideal teacher-student relation is that of colleagues. Art students are viewed by most of the participants as young artists, and therefore as colleagues, but as being at different stages of development in their art practices. The reality would be that the teachers are mentors who in time would possibly become colleagues and maybe even friends of the students. Olivia Plender speaks about the responsibility she feels addressing young artists as a mentor and of passing on knowledge and helping them get a clearer sense of what it is that they want to do. Dag Erik Elgin sees his students first and foremost as young colleagues and dialogue partners. In his words, the Academy of Fine Art is unique in that you can sit down on an ordinary Tuesday morning and talk about art—with no other obligation than to search for getting closer to what is at stake at that moment.42 Olivia Plender sees herself in a position of responsibility, while Dag Erik Elgin expresses equality. While Olivia Plender discusses her answer, Dag Erik Elgin emphasises that he has “no obligations.”43

Jørgen Michaelsen describes being colleagues with your students as an unrealistic ideal, so in reality he adheres to the role of mentor. The role of mentor is also the departing point for Yvette Brackman, but she is open to changes in the relations further on. This open attitude towards the development of relations is also present in Miranda Whall’s statement in which she describes herself as a mentor, facilitator, inspiration, guide, manager, and coordinator to the undergrads, while her relationship to the PhDs is of a more equal character. The categories “teacher” and “student” are fine by Søren Andreasen, and he relates to the students as “a group of students,” but he insists they are artists, too.

In relation to question 18, all participants indicated in various degrees how important it is to be able to speak about things other than art, though they all want to relate it to art or back to art. Almost everyone agrees that it is relevant and important to sense where students are coming from and what challenges they face. On another note, there is a risk, in one-to-one studio visits in particular, that the professional line between student and teacher can be crossed. Søren Andreasen finds it natural when critically discussing
art to include other subjects. For him, it is part of his method of teaching to ask his students to critically discuss their cultural upbringing (not social background).\(^4\) Dag Erik Elgin shares this point of view. He finds it equally important to not only speak about art. Yvette Brackman mentions the importance of being in tune with her students, while Olivia Plender explains that she will listen to students talk about their personal life and their complaints about other teachers, but only in relation to how those issues impact the artwork. She explains that important political questions and personal and mental health issues and feelings of inclusion and exclusion can impact the work or the ability to work;\(^5\) however, the focus has to remain on the artwork. You can be quite friendly outside of the institutional encounter, Plender writes, and art school is a blurry territory in that respect, but inside the school the focus should be on education. Here she leans against the teacher-student structure of the institution, but can apparently also leave this behind outside the walls of the institution. Søren Andreasen describes how he goes about the role of teacher by wearing specific clothes—a kind of uniform, he writes.\(^6\) Miranda Whall also recognises the issues of the one-to-one encounter of the studio visit. You can be confronted with difficult and sensitive life issues that you are not trained to deal with or manage, she explains, but she has guidelines to follow and student support to refer students to if a situation like that arises. Though the issues may still need to be discussed in relation to the student’s art practice, she mentions that it can also be a balancing act to manage exactly how much you should know or would want to know about your students’ lives and personalities. But in the end, it is the responsibility of the teacher to maintain a level of professionalism and to preserve the structure and dynamic of student/tutor.

The structure of institutions of education has an influence, in some degree or another, on how teachers see themselves in relation to their students. The embedded responsibility to impart information and education is passed on to the teachers. This applies to them all regardless of Bologna accreditation or not. In the answers from Miranda Whall, it is evident that she teaches at an institution with generic university structures to which she adheres in the way she describes the many facets of her role as teacher to the undergrads differently than any of the other artists do.

6. CAN ART BE TAUGHT? 
   AND 
   CAN ONLY ARTISTS TEACH ART?

For the purposes of conclusion, I have decided to take as a point of departure questions number 5 and 6. This I will do because these two questions stand out in comparison to structural considerations. I believe that the answers themselves contain structural characteristics. The answers below will thus not be related to the structures of the individual institutions.

Posing tricky questions like these doesn’t invite easy answers, especially when there’s a linguistic ambiguity in the phrasing of “Can you teach art?,” which is how I had phrased the question in the questionnaire. I realized upon receiving the answers that the intended plural “you” was read as an objective “you” by two of the interviewees, and as such “Can art be taught?” would have been a more apt phrasing and less confusing to read.

Polemic indeed, were the answers I received. The general consensus from the four who did not read it as an objective “you”\(^47\) is yes, art can be taught, but what sets the participants apart is perhaps the position from which they look at the definition of art. Søren Andreasen’s stance is a philosophical one, whereby art is understood as a state of being by your awareness of its existence. He considers art to be always already taught. He further understands organised art education as an institutionalisation of the meetings and the communities of shared interest that constantly emerge and take place in cafes and bars and in people’s studios. He considers these encounters to always have existed and that artists always have conversed with scientists, thinkers, writers, etc. This is one way he thinks art is always already taught. The other way he refers to this more generally is that art is a common institution in our society and, as such, is socially and culturally part of regulating the lives we live. Therefore, anybody who engages in art must always already be instructed about art.

Dag Erik Elgin points to the institutional perspective that the answer undoubtedly is “yes,” for otherwise an art academy would be a contradiction in terms. But he continues that art also can be found unexpectedly when teaching and that the concept of “refinding” is something crucial and a primary obligation for an artist who teaches is to develop sensitivity towards recognizing this. Olivia Plender describes twofold the teaching of art theory as a necessity to have knowledge of, but she also speaks of practical knowledge and of combining different knowledges in teaching. But first and foremost she speaks of art as a practice and that is what is tricky to teach.

The answers to the question “Can only artists can teach art?“ are fifty/fifty for yes and no, it seems. In line with previous answers, the question, for Søren Andreasen, is not about the ability to teach art but about the functioning, the status, and the being of an artist, which can only be experienced through calling oneself an artist. He states that the familiarity of being an artist cannot be taught, but art can be taught. Miranda Whall agrees,
and she would argue that only artists should teach practice-based art. Jørgen Michaelsen answers accordingly that the only way you can learn to be an artist is by practising persistently, with fierce resistance and by developing comprehensive and sharp visual senses, aesthetics, and critical thinking.

It appears, among the interviewees, that if we are speaking about the teaching of art as in teaching an art practice, only artists can do this. Because in order to know what one should teach, the teacher would need the experience themselves, whereas theory and practical skills can be taught by people other than artists. Olivia Plender, however, says no, she doesn’t think only artists can teach art, an answer that directly opposes the structures of the institution where she teaches. She suggests that people in the art world would benefit enormously by learning methods from other fields, and she further questions whether artists always are good at teaching, as in her view there is little discussion around pedagogy in art academies and she wonders if it would be more beneficial to have professional workshop leaders leading workshops. This specifically contradicts the structure of the Royal Institute of Art, where practical workshops are taught by practising artists with the aim of ensuring artistic understanding of the students’ work and their processes.

Conclusion
In this essay I have made an attempt to critically examine different aspects of being an artist teaching art. I have often accentuated the influence of institutional structures. However, it has taken me by surprise how similar the institutions appear in my investigation and it has proven difficult to refer the reflections of the interviewed artists to the respective institutions where they each teach. I think this has to do with the conformity of content and methodologies within art institutions in general. But of course I have also only been able to conduct to a certain degree a superficial examination of their structural content from the outside. To further delve into this would call for another and more detailed study.

If anything can be concluded from this study, maybe it is that art also makes a trajectory of its own by way of its education, in the sense that most artists would agree they have little or no control over the end result of an artwork while in the process of making it. The work has that control. The same may go for the teaching of art. Teaching art creates its own trajectory through the interaction between the student and the teacher, and the education that takes place will, to a certain extent, take place regardless of the teachers’ intentions and institutional structures. What is relevant, and something that I have learned from this study and from the research I have carried out to write this essay, is that the thinking of the artist is present and has a presence in the artist-teacher. This way of thinking does not follow on demand a preset path or a singular formula. I am also able to conclude that to teach art, in the understanding that art is a practice, it is crucial for those who teach to “do,” meaning to have the knowledge and experience of art practice, that is, to be a practising artist.

APPENDIX on page 314:

John Reardon and David Mollin, Ch-ch-ch-changes: Artists Talk about Teaching (London: Ridinghouse, 2009), 54.

Oxford Dictionaries Online, s.v., “education.”


Ibid.

Paul Ramírez Jonas, “Questionnaires,” in Art School, 316.

See “Questionnaire,” Question 2.


See “Questionnaire,” Question 19: Jørgen Michaelsen.


Ibid.

“Questionnaire,” Question 8: Søren Andreasen.

“Questionnaire,” Question 20: Olivia Plender.

“Questionnaire,” Question 8: Olivia Plender.

“Questionnaire,” Question 1: Miranda Whall.

“Questionnaire,” Question 20: Miranda Whall.

“Questionnaire,” Question 1: Miranda Whall.

“Questionnaire,” Question 1: Dag Erik Elgin.

“Questionnaire,” Question 1: Søren Andreasen.


“Questionnaire,” Question 20: Miranda Whall.

“Questionnaire,” Question 20: Jørgen Michaelsen.

“Questionnaire,” Question 20: Olivia Plender.

“Questionnaire,” Question 6.

“Questionnaire,” Question 6: Søren Andreasen.

“Questionnaire,” Question 6: Yvette Brackman.

“Questionnaire,” Question 9: Yvette Brackman.

“Questionnaire,” Question 6: Dag Erik Elgin.

“Questionnaire,” Question 9: Miranda Whall.


“Questionnaire,” Question 19.

“Questionnaire,” Question 16.

“Questionnaire,” Question 16: Søren Andreasen.

“Questionnaire,” Question 17: Søren Andreasen.

“Questionnaire,” Question 7.

“Questionnaire,” Question 13: Miranda Whall.

“Questionnaire,” Question 15: Dag Erik Elgin.

Ibid.

“Questionnaire,” Question 18: Søren Andreasen.

“Questionnaire,” Question 18: Olivia Plender.

“Questionnaire,” Question 12: Søren Andreasen.

“Questionnaire,” Question 4.

Further references


APPENDIX: Questionnaire

1. I want to start with where you studied and what you think influenced you as an artist and teacher.

Søren Andreasen
The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, 1989–95 (basic studies program + school of media art), Slade School of Fine Arts, 1994–95 (affiliate student).

At the time (post-modern, post-punk, post-human, post-media, etc.), it was not obvious which role art would be playing in the future, although it was certain that the social and cultural role of art was changing. The Academy seemed paralyzed by this challenge and art students had to generate modes of operation among themselves—it was my experience that art students taught art students. Therefore, when teaching, I am convinced that young artists are their own best teachers.

Yvette Brackman
Both my parents are academics, my father in History and my mother in Russian Literature. From the age of twelve I lived with my mother at Yale University and that environment had a big influence on my development. Many amazing people have guided me. My mother is an amazing teacher and seeing her relationship with her students has been a major influence on my approach to teaching. I studied at Yale, the School of the Art Institute, and the University of Illinois at Chicago. Spending the summer and fall of 1989 as the assistant to Miriam Gabo, the widow of the Russian Constructivist Naum Gabo, had a profound influence on my thinking about art and teaching.

Dag Erik Elgå
After two years at the University of Oslo (studying law and philosophy), I started my art education at the National College of Arts and Crafts Oslo (SHKS), followed by two years at the National Academy of Art Oslo (SKA), finishing with two years at the Kunstkademie Düsseldorf. When you ask me of influences; my primary answer is life. My father died when I was thirteen years old, and to this day it is this loss that has influenced me the most. My first existential encounter with art took place in the National Gallery’s Munch collection in Oslo at the same age. Moments when life and art coincide are still what matters to me. Important influences resonate with something familiar, providing a new, occasionally deeper understanding of what was already there.

Jørgen Michaelsen
I was educated as a visual artist at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen (1987–94). Before that, I studied philosophy at the University of Copenhagen for two years and I participated in Poul Borum’s author seminar (forerunner of Forfatterskolen writers’ school). All this official training has probably influenced me. But my commitment to work together on various publications, exhibition platforms, etc. (including Koncern*, 1989–93; Max Mundus, 1994–96; and Monsieur Antipyrine, 2014–15), has meant more to me as an artist and writer, and thus also as a teacher.

Olivia Plender
I studied at Central Saint Martins and I did a painting BA. It influenced me very negatively because it was a very poor course. I came into art school when I was seventeen and I thought that art was painting because that’s all I knew about. The course at CSM was a kind of expressionist course. We were taught by a bunch of neo-expressionists really, and I think it was full of all the clichés of the artist genius. I felt that they didn’t have much sense of knowledge that could be passed on. Because they were into the expressionist idea that everything comes from you and it was a very macho environment. As a young female I ended up feeling quite irrelevant and very sidelined. The course was also medium specific. What I remember was that when I went off and did a performance and then came back with photographs of the performance, the advice from my teachers would be that maybe I could get some of those images onto canvas. The message I received was that unless it was on canvas it wasn’t art. So I ended up leaving art school in a state of rage and basically went on to get what I consider my real art education, which was a lot of self-organizing, hanging out with artists, and working as an artist’s assistant. Then I started running artist-run spaces and editing a magazine, which was called Untitled. I did that for seven years. It was a way of doing research and that was how I learned about art.

Miranda Whall
2000–01 Associate Studentship, Goldsmith College, University of London
1989–92 BA Hons in Fine Art, UWIC, Wales
1991 Undergraduate Exchange Program, Emily Carr School of Art, Vancouver
1988–89 Foundation in Art and Design, Coventry University
1986–88 BTEC in Fashion Design, Mid Warwickshire F.E. College

One thing in particular comes to mind; on my degree at Cardiff Institute, (UWIC) Wales, UK, there was an empty room in the sculpture area. I don’t know what we called that room, and I can’t remember what other students did
in it, from visits to the sculpture department recently, before it closed, I saw that they had several of these empty rooms. It was such a benefit having this empty room; every few weeks I would take in structures, objects, materials, etc., that I had been making and working with to spend a few days setting up installations with lights, heaters, etc. Often students and lecturers would come and see what I was doing. On one occasion a lecturer bought her MA group to see my installation, which I always remember as such a boost to my confidence. Working in that space gave me the opportunity to “see” the work, to expose and explore the work with space around it in a mock gallery context. This monthly, regular process really helped me develop the work enormously, it helped me “realise” the work’s potential, invite a critically engaged audience: peers and tutors, and document the work in progress, all vital parts of the thinking through making process. So in my department at the School of Art I have created such a room, we call it the Project Room. The students book it out for three days at a time, its always left clean and empty, and I actively encourage students to advertise their projects to generate audiences from within the school and outside. I am absolutely sure that this helps the student on a professional level and in the development of their thinking, making, and critical analysis skills.

2. How long have you been teaching and where were you/are you currently teaching?

Søren Andreasen
Apart from the casual flow of workshops, critiques, and studio visits, I was a professor at the Jutland Academy of Fine Art, 2004–10.

Yvette Brackman
I have been teaching for twenty-four years, but not continuously, if you count the time I taught while in grad school.

Dag Erik Elgin
I was given the trust and privilege to teach at the National Academy of Arts in Oslo shortly after graduating, and since then teaching has been part of my practice. My current position at KHiO, the Academy of Fine Art Oslo, is, however, my first long-term engagement.

Jørgen Michaelsen
I have previously taught for shorter or longer periods at Årø Kunstnshøjskole (1999–2008). In 2009, I became employed as a lecturer and leader of education (60 percent position) at the Jutland Art Academy in Aarhus. My contract of employment here is valid until 2017.

Olivia Plender
I have been teaching for over a decade. My first teaching gig was running an education course at the Tate about how to make comics. I also ran a project for a year at Tate Britain for teenagers called “visual dialogues.” After that I started teaching in art schools, at Chelsea School of Art for a few years, and then Goldsmiths. Wherever I have shown, I have done teaching, so I have taught in art schools all over the world. At the moment I’m teaching mostly in Sweden at the Royal Institute of Art and also at Konstfack, where I’m teaching different courses at different levels. Right now I’m supervising a curating student and a student in a course called storytelling, as well as Fine Art students.

Miranda Whall
I started teaching as soon as I finished my postgraduate degree. I started by doing day visits as visiting lecturer in various universities and I had two days a week at the City and Guilds of London Art School. For a few years I taught part-time at Cheltenham and Gloucester University. I have been teaching full-time at Aberystwyth University since 2006.

3. How many days do you teach in a week?

Søren Andreasen
At DJK it was six days a month, I think ...

Yvette Brackman
Depends.

Dag Erik Elgin
100 percent, which includes 30 percent artistic practice.

Jørgen Michaelsen
On average I teach six to nine days a month.

Olivia Plender
That really varies. My teaching is totally flexible, so it is up to me to decide how much I teach. At the Royal Institute, where I am employed, I have a 10 percent teaching position, and the way I tend to do that is to run one course a year and I’ll do it as a kind of workshop. It will usually be something lasting a week and very intensive, or it might spread out over a few month where you do two or three days here and there. So in a week I might do no teaching or I might do full-time.

Miranda Whall
I am meant to teach 1,650 hours a year, which works out to about four days a week: one day admin, three days contact teaching, and then one day research. But teaching ends mid May and commences late September.

4. Can you teach art?

Søren Andreasen
Yes—art is always already taught.

(Organised art education is understood, in my opinion, as an institution-alisation of the meetings and the communities of shared interest that constantly emerge and take place in cafés and bars and in people’s studios, just like artists always have conversed with scientists, thinkers, and writers, etc.—that is one way I think art is always already taught. The other way is more general and has to do with the condition that art is a common institution in our society, that is to say, a social and cultural regularity, part of regulating the lives we live—anybody who engages in art is thus always already instructed about art.)

Yvette Brackman
Yes.

Dag Erik Elgin
At an institutional level, the answer is unquestionably that art can be taught, otherwise, for example, an art academy would be a contradiction in terms. Philosophically the answer is not that straightforward. Art might be found—sometimes unexpectedly—when teaching. I believe the famous remark (allegedly by C.B. Shaw) “those who can do—those who can’t, teach” ignores the existence of events that forcefully smuggle in “those who can do” in teaching. The concept of re-finding is crucial, and occasionally I have been able to re-find art when teaching. It is a primary obligation for an artist who teaches to develop sensitivity towards when and how this happens.

Jørgen Michaelsen
I will allow myself to assume that. In any case, DJK has chosen to extend my teaching contract for an additional two years.

Olivia Plender
You can but it is a very tricky thing to teach because it’s a practice. And I think art school sometimes slips into following an academic model. Theory is necessary and something young artists should have knowledge of, but that is not the only thing you need to know. You also need a practical knowledge. I think with teaching art there’s ways of combining different kinds of knowledge.

Miranda Whall
Yes, I teach art, all creative modules except professional practice. I teach interdisciplinary art to fine artists, experimental media to film studies students, and professional practice. But I have just been made Director of Creative Arts and will teach new creative project modules to creative art students.

5. Can only artists teach art?

Søren Andreasen
No—but only artists are familiar with the experience of calling oneself an artist; to experience the status and the function of an artist is probably the most troublesome aspect of an art practice.

Yes.

Yvette Brackman
Yes.

Dag Erik Elgin
No.

Jørgen Michaelsen
Ultimately, the only way you can learn to be an artist is in persistent practice, fierce insistence, and comprehensive development of one’s own ability to sharpen one’s sense of visual and other aesthetic and critical
thinking. A good teacher can at best provoke and stimulate this process. Much suggests that visual artists best teach visual artists visual art, i.e., artistic practices. These often share an (implicit) community of sensibility that other art-related individuals (art historians, curators, etc.) do not share.

Olivia Plender
No, I don’t think so. I actually think that we in the art world would benefit enormously by learning methods from other fields. I often teach with colleagues who come from other disciplines such as theatre, community video, fiction writing, and sociology. I’m very inspired by an experimental arts course called Art and Environment, which took place at the Open University, in the UK, in the 1970s, where the faculty were drawn from a wide range of disciplines including some of those I mentioned above. Another issue is that artists are not always good at teaching, as there is little discussion within art schools about pedagogy. It makes sense that students would want to be in contact with practicing artists, but sometimes it might better if a professional workshop leader mediated that contact.

Miranda Whall
I would argue that yes, only artists should teach practice-based art.

6. What are you teaching when you’re teaching art?

Søren Andreasen
Depends on the particular group of students, really—but in general I ask students to critically discuss their cultural upbringing and to focus on what they don’t know and can’t do.

Yvette Brackman
Looking at and discussing art made by the students and other artists.

Dag Erik Elgin
Teaching can be very concrete in that specific concerns related to a particular student or group is addressed. On a philosophical level, art cannot be taught without questioning whether it can be taught. To my experience, teaching of great significance happens when both student and teacher are confronted with something different than planned for, which, however, does not exclude planning. On the contrary, planning facilitates the unexpected. In my daily practice as an artist, I am frequently reminded that this is the closest I get to method.

Jørgen Michaelsen
Individual guidance, i.e., discussions empirically parting from the student’s own work or own ideas, is the most important. In addition, teaching disciplines such as semiotics, anthropology, sociology, (art) history, and philosophical thinking.

Olivia Plender
What I generally teach is performance and collaborative practice. That’s where I feel there’s a gap that’s not getting taught, as there is a lack of knowledge of collaborative methods in the visual arts field. I tend to set up workshops where young artists have to work together and work in groups. When you work in groups how do you have ideas? And how not to block the people you’re collaborating with? Decision-making is the main thing about group work, how do you reach a decision? It’s a way of working that I have adopted over the last ten years. I’m trying to explore this with students, I’m not an expert but together we can try and figure this out. I have this set of methods, we can try them out together and learn through doing. By trying stuff hopefully they get experience of working in groups and it starts to seem more possible for them.

Miranda Whall
That is a complex question, opening up a big discussion, but to put it into a nutshell, I think there are perhaps two strong principles that I follow in terms of a “teaching methodology.” Firstly I would say I teach using the philosophy “thinking through making,” discussed brilliantly in On Not Knowing: How Artists Think by Elizabeth Fisher and Rebecca Fortnum. I am trying to get the students to think through the physical, actual process of making, getting them to realise that break-through thinking happens through and during the act of making, but the process can also be described as a triangle with two other major parts of the whole triangle with the following at each point: experimentation/making at one, research at the other, and evaluation at the last; all are of equal value, but all can be done through making. If a student gets stuck in one of the three parts of the process, then they experience difficulty. As long as they move around the triangle from one point to the next, then the process is satisfying and rewarding. The cycle from point to point can take five minutes or five weeks. I would say the more often the better.

7. What do you enjoy the most and the least about teaching?

Søren Andreasen
To build up a long-term momentum with a group of students is very satisfying—when art students eventually teach one another. To watch art students who fail to meet their own expectations can be very painful as there is often nothing you can do about it, although you might have played a significant role in the process leading up to this type of self-confrontation.

Yvette Brackman
Most: talking about art. Least: administrative meetings.

Dag Erik Elgin
Most enjoyable: competence found in dialogue. Least enjoyable: fear of incompetence expressed in monologue.

Jørgen Michaelsen
I appreciate all aspects of teaching. On the other hand, I do not always find the administrative part particularly appealing; but this work is essential and undoubtedly has taught me a lot.

Olivia Plender
I do really like it. It’s very pleasurable being able to spend time with other people’s work, get it into it deeply, discuss it with them, and have access to the process behind the work. Having relationships with young artists on quite a deep level, where you’re involved in their process, is delightful. Seeing the development is also great. It’s a very touching thing. I have been trying to find a model of teaching that I’m comfortable with, because I didn’t enjoy being trapped in a rigid structure, like the British system, I got frustrated with that. Another unenjoyable part is when you have difficult students. And when you have to manage group dynamics, which are quite complicated and be an authority figure. I really struggle with that. And what it means to be an authority figure? Because I also want to give up the authority, but if you do that you’re not taking responsibility. So it’s about finding a balance between being authority without being authoritative. I really struggle with that because my instinct is to try to be friends with everyone. But you can’t, you’re the teacher. You have to keep an overview of the situation, and if there’s a problem, it’s up to you to sort it out and manage the group dynamic. I’m trying to get better at doing this and less upset if I have difficult students.

Miranda Whall
I really enjoy the one-to-one tutorial system, because I really enjoy the collaborative process of entering into the student’s process and thinking in order to move it forward, to take a student’s idea and move it forward conceptually and physically is so creative and rewarding. Then there can be a thrilling kind of experience when I see the student again in two weeks and see how the ideas that were developed during the collaborative discussion have progressed and developed, I love it when the student surprises me, when they have taken an idea beyond my expectations, when they have moved the project on beyond anything I could have imagined. I enjoy the student-led seminars that I do with all modules, where student present a paper on two artists that fit within the theme being taught and we discuss as a group. This always expands my thinking and again often supersedes my expectations.

The two things I dislike most about teaching is firstly the lack of thanks and acknowledgement I get from the students and the staff and institution. Sometimes I feel really drained of my creativity and time and taken for granted. Students seem less and less able and willing to thank people for things; I think it’s the climate and culture of paying for the education. They have started to expect and demand everything, they “shop” their way through their degrees, expecting more and more and putting less and less into the experience. It’s wonderful and always so appreciated just very simply to be thanked, it makes such a difference. In my institution, I have had to battle for an appreciation and
or understanding of conceptual, contemporary art practices. It’s a very traditional school of art, and so I have always been marginal in my thinking and practice, and so I’ve ended up kind of fighting a corner for anything and everything contemporary. Students often say, “this isn’t art” when I show them pretty conventional contemporary art. This is frustrating and annoying, so this is a more specific issue to me and my job.

8. Have you consciously included something in your teaching that you felt was lacking in the teaching you received when you were a student?

Søren Andreasen

Very much so—mainly to establish a discursive behaviour among students across media, method, and social background.

Yvette Brackman

I talk a lot about how important it is to continue the discourse we develop together in the school context with one’s colleagues and peers. I discuss the importance of maintaining a close group of peers with which to discuss work. I wasn’t really told about the importance of this as a student. I realized it later.

Dag Erik Elgin

I try to avoid re-presenting, instead providing for come into being. What comes into being, here and now, is crucial; close to art, exceeding a merely pedagogical approach.

Jørgen Michaelsen

Most definitely! The teaching—or rather, the absence of teaching—I experienced myself at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, I would never expose my students to.

Olivia Plender

The main thing I always try to get the students to do is to drop the idea of the myth of being the genius, the autonomous solo artist. Because I believe that if you do stuff together with a lot of people you can actually usually achieve a lot more than you can on your own. The myth of the genius is a lie, because if you look at art history everybody worked in groups or at least had very intense working relationships with friends. Art history narrates those stories about the solo artist, I mean the surrealists—group work—they were all doing performances and doing stuff together. Or Dada or ...

Miranda Whall

Two things come to mind when answering this question. Firstly my education specifically at Emily Carr in Vancouver and the Royal Academy School gave me a very high standard. I was taught by very dedicated, talented, committed artists amidst equally committed and talented peers, and so the high standard expected of us has remained very clear within me. I feel I hold it and carry it and expect nothing less from my students. I know the students consider me to be the hardest, most frank, and perhaps “challenging” of all my colleague, but they all seem to agree that my expectations of them do get the best results. I also continue to carry forward my own work ethic and deep deep passion for the subject. I find that I do hope and expect the students to have the same level of dedication and passion that I did as a student, i.e., being the first one in the morning and the last out of the studio at the end of the day!

9. What methods of teaching do you use? And which do you value the most (discourse, group crits, workshops, seminars, films, etc.)

Søren Andreasen

Any—method is a mean, not an end.

Yvette Brackman

All of the above plus study trips to see art. I would put individual and group crits first, then workshops and study trips as the most valued, and of course discourse around seeing films and reading literature.

Dag Erik Elgin

Apart from what is described above, I cannot say I have developed a method for teaching. My approach is rather a question of temperature than of format and can be identified in any situation reaching from, for example, individual conversations and group discussions to making exhibitions and performing practical tasks together. In connection with our participation in the exhibition Black Mountain—An Interdisciplinary Experiment at Hamburger Bahnhof this summer, we have researched archival material, made excursions, and done performative work together. Again, practice has reminded me of the decisive role personal investment plays in teaching.

Jørgen Michaelsen

One-to-one tutorials and group crits.

Olivia Plender

I really like the workshop format. Group crits have a value but there was a period where I was all about group work and I was not interested in individual work at all. Now I have come back to a more moderate position where I think there’s a value in both. I think it’s important to address people’s individual work, to allow people to develop their voice, but also address group work and to get people to collaborate. In a group crit or any workshop, you have to try to set up a situation where everyone is supported and safe and listened to, but also offered constructive criticism and offered constructive praise; to be offered both what works and what doesn’t work in the artwork, but in a supportive way. In the group crit I think I have always found it important to avoid a bullying situation. I think a problem with art school is that the teacher often becomes a charismatic leader and sometimes there’s a real lack of checks, where you can easily end up with a situation where people feel marginalized or bullied and no one is taking care of that. So I am quite careful about how much people speak, who is doing all the speaking, how to enable the quiet people to talk and try to manage that in a way that creates a very supportive, honest, and open environment.

Miranda Whall

My eleven-week modules are usually made of three courses, each three weeks, so one week is my seminar, the following week is a student-led seminar, and the third week is a workshop. The workshops are three-hour sessions consisting of an intro by me to an artist, practice, or theory, followed by a quick-fire workshop in pairs, groups, or individuals, followed by a group crit discussion. One-to-one tutorials and group crits, and exhibition opportunities.

10. How much freedom are you given by the institution to decide your own teaching?

Søren Andreasen

At DJK teaching was planned by the teaching staff together with the rector. Thus I had to coordinate my ideas with a general orientation of teaching—having an influence on that as well. To me this rather pragmatic set up is close to ideal, although a perpetual lack of financial means was a serious limitation!

Yvette Brackman

I was given total freedom while I was professor at the Royal Academy.

Dag Erik Elgin

Sufficient.

Jørgen Michaelsen

Great freedom. DJK is a small, distinctly horizontally structured institution, based on the continued commitment of all students and teachers.

Olivia Plender

At the Royal Institute, a lot. Basically it’s up to me. I can do what I like.

Miranda Whall

I have had complete freedom!

11. How much of your own practice do you bring with you when you teach?

Søren Andreasen

When asking students to focus on what they don’t know and can’t do, I have to ask that of myself as well—thus I bring the dark side of my own practice into teaching, you might say.

Yvette Brackman

I share my practice with the students by giving a talk about my work to introduce new students to my practice, but besides that I don’t involve my own practice directly in the program of study.

Dag Erik Elgin

Obviously, my teaching is informed by my own practice, although I seldom refer directly to my own work. However, in collaborating with students on various projects and exhibi-
tions. I sometimes do what I would have done in my studio, a situation I consider particularly valuable for teaching.

Jørgen Michaelsen
In principle I separate my own practice from teaching (unless I decidedly give a lecture, etc., about my own work).

Olivia Plender
A lot. I find that my practice and my teaching have merged together more and more in recent years. So if I’m doing a workshop, it’s completely about the things that I’m working on in my practice, techniques and methods that I’m trying to figure out, getting the students involved with that and trying to figure it out together. A lot of my practice is about education as a theme, thinking about the history of education, the paradigms of education, so it has become close.

Miranda Whall
I don’t always directly bring my current practice, project, interests into the projects, but an overall sense of my own journey, appreciations, persuasions, etc., are in my teaching.

12. How do you combine being a practising artist with being a teacher? Do you divide the roles?

Søren Andreasen
I divide the roles—down to wearing a kind of uniform, a certain dress code, when teaching, just to make it clear that I am not a friend, a father, or any other kind of psychosocial being, but a “teacher.”

Yvette Brackman:
No.

Dag Erik Elgin
I believe teaching strengthens and informs my own practice and vice versa.

Jørgen Michaelsen
In principle, yes, but on the other hand the students know my work well and probably often seek my advice and criticism precisely on this basis. This of course counts for all teachers at DJK, each representing different artistic positions. But I would argue that all teachers at the school aim to maintain the necessary distance between the role of teacher and the role/ function of artist.

Olivia Plender
Not really, but it depends on the project. Some projects that I have done are educational in some way, and then the line blurs. I made a collaborative film called Life in the Woods, where I set up a free school with a friend of mine called Patrick Staff, and we took a group of people to the forest to live with us for a week. It was like a summer school and then during that week we made a film together. The participants all ran various kind of workshops and there were some activities that we would run, and then we also had to make this film together and decide together what that could be and how to do it. I wasn’t a teacher in that project though; I was one of the fifteen people engaged in mutual education.

Miranda Whall
Well, my life is divided into four parts: teacher, academic, artist, and mother. It is a constant balancing act to keep all of these in the air! The hardest role to maintain is the academic; the university imposes huge pressures upon us to fulfill this role with totally unrealistic, unmanageable levels of expectation. The academic artistic practice is in some ways quite distinct from my practice as an artist, or at least would be, but it is now becoming the same role. The academic expectations, structures, systems, etc., have and are affecting and shaping the choices and directions I am taking in my work. It creates a tension that is interesting, challenging, and frustrating. I muddle through the roles, really; I find it very hard to multi-think. I can multi-act but multi-thinking on a deep level is hard for me, and so trying to manage projects while teaching is pretty hard for me. I can manage a project on a practical level, for example, if I am editing or drawing or doing anything physical and task oriented, but I find it very hard to conceptualise properly, i.e., to conceive of new projects or directions for projects when my mind is active and concerned with teaching. So I tend to wait until the summer semester (June to mid-September) to concentrate on my practice.

13. Do you see teaching art as making art?

Søren Andreasen
No!

Yvette Brackman
No.

Dag Erik Elgin
Not as a rule, but there are exceptions.

Jørgen Michaelsen
No.

Olivia Plender
Sometimes, yes. Not always, but sometimes.

Miranda Whall
No, teaching is not making art for me. It can be very creative, and in many ways very satisfying, but mostly for me it is a distraction from what I really want to be doing, which is my own work; I am frustrated. I am a selfish artist, I am always hoping for time on my own work … I long for it, crave it, yearn for it! But having said that, I know I need the interaction, I need the context, environment, participation to thrive fully. I know I need to facilitate others and that I cannot just be a working artist, it’s just that the balance has tipped too far in this full-time position. I would be most suited to a well-paid 0.5 part-time teaching post or teaching fellow.

14. How do you and your colleagues differ where you teach? (in terms of artistic practices, methods of teaching, etc.)

Søren Andreasen
I have collaborated with artists who were mainly conducting reading and critique classes and artists who preferred a learning-by-doing mode. It all worked well as long as a general orientation of teaching is discussed simultaneously.

Yvette Brackman
I am not currently teaching at an art academy.

Dag Erik Elgin
A vast question with probably as many answers as there are colleagues. One main difference is between artists who consider teaching an integral part of their practice and those who don’t (not a qualitative assessment).

Jørgen Michaelsen
I place great emphasis on the entanglement of language in visual arts, with particular emphasis on instrumental external factors (stereotypes, institutional traps, etc.). Awareness of this foundational state is for me the premise of critical thinking about artistic production in the general sense. Moreover, I could not answer any of my colleagues’ strategies in this regard.

Olivia Plender
I think we’re immensely different. But with the school, the Royal Institute in Stockholm, to be honest I don’t really know much about how my colleagues teach because I never see them teaching, so I only get a sense of that through the students. But I think it is very different just in terms of what kind of dynamic you set up with the students.

Miranda Whall
To summarise, I could say on the whole, as mentioned above, within my school of art department I am marginalised and work alone. I do not share many interests or connections with my colleagues at all; it has been extremely difficult and isolating. But my role is changing now; in my new role within Creative Arts, as the director and leader of core modules within creative arts, I am now working with staff from across the institute, so I need to facilitate others and that I cannot just be a working artist, it’s just that the balance has tipped too far in this full-time position. I would be most suited to a well-paid 0.5 part-time teaching post or teaching fellow.

15. How do you see your relationship to the students you teach? (as a colleague, a mentor, etc.)

Søren Andreasen
The categories “student” and “teacher” are fine with me, although I insist that an art student is an artist. I tend to relate to each student as being part of a group of students.

Yvette Brackman
A mentor who may become a colleague.

Dag Erik Elgin
Foremost as a young colleague and dialogue partner. An art academy is unique in that you can sit down on an ordinary Tuesday morning
and talk about art—with no other obligation than to search for getting close to what is at stake at that moment. This unique moment of non-instrumentalisation represents a counter-point to the forces of the neoliberal economy where an artist’s role frequently is reduced to that of being an efficient and stable producer. It is highly problematic that this figure of the stable producer is accepted as the primary parameter of success within the gallery and the biennial system. At its best, the academic setting of, for example, an art academy offers an alternative to this situation.

Jørgen Michaelsen
Ideally a colleague, but this is obviously unrealistic; therefore, rather a mentor. As previously indicated, a kind of catalyst in an appropriate location relative to where the student is at the given stage of their development.

Olivia Plender
I think both of those things. I think it’s good to address them as equals in some way. I mean, they are artists, so they are colleagues in one way, but they’re at a different development stage to me so I also want to address them as a mentor. There’s stuff that I know that they don’t know. I feel it’s my responsibility to pass on some of that to them, some of that knowledge, to help them with their work, and help them to get a clearer sense of what it is that they want to do, and to introduce them to stuff they can research, films, books, practices, and things they can explore.

Miranda Whall
To the undergrads I am a mentor, leader, facilitator; inspiration, guide, manager, coordinator... To the postgrads I am the same, but a little closer sometimes, sometimes more equal, and sometimes a close friendship emerges, as we might be close in age and life situation. With PhD students I am the same again, but also an equal practitioner and again sometimes a friend.

Miranda Whall
Yes, interesting question. This environment does impact and affect the students and staff, and so teaching. We are situated at the end of a train line, the train lines and the train system are so much part of the life of students here. It is not so much a case of whether the students are interested in art, but how the art world is interwoven with the student’s day-to-day life. If you sit around a table it is all about speaking, experience is really important and physical presence is crucial. The student are better able to concentrate and not be distracted.

16. Do you consider the environment to play a significant part in your teaching?

Søren Andreasen
I am not sure what you mean by "environment," but if I take it to mean the type of organisation that characterises a given art school, it is crucial—the way a school is organised determines which types of students and teachers are admitted and hired, and thus the kind of teaching taking place.

No.

Yvette Brackman
I believe in being with great texts and great works of art and in witnessing inspiring and wild minds discovering something of importance while they are lecturing. (You have to excuse me for not answering head-on.)

Jørgen Michaelsen
Mostly in the students’ workshops and in DJK’s auditorium.

Olivia Plender
Probably out on trips, like the one I described, going out and looking at things. Going out and finding different spaces to have an experience together. I think that is what I prefer.

18. Do you speak with your students about things other than their work, and how significant do you find this to be in relation to teaching art?

Søren Andreasen
When asking students to critically discuss their cultural upbringing (not their social background), conversations easily open up to anything from Facebook to revolution or photo-fiction. Art is woven into all types of cultural formation.

Yvette Brackman
If relevant, it is important to be in tune with students to sense where they are coming from and what challenges they face.

Dag Erik Elgin
Although the students’ work and its context define a natural point of departure, it is important to not always talk about art.

Jørgen Michaelsen
Cf. previous answers.

Olivia Plender
Yes, I do, but I generally try to bring it back to the work. There’s an emphasis on tutorials
particularly, where students want to talk to you about their personal stuff. Or they complain about the school, or they want your sympathy in complaints about other teachers. I’m happy to talk to them about that to an extent, but I’m interested in how those issues impact the artwork. I think there are important political questions there, personal and mental health issues, feelings of inclusion or exclusion, and how they impact on the work, or their ability to do the work. But I try and keep it focused on the artwork, because otherwise it can just become loose and more like a chat with a friend, which is something else. I’m happy to talk to them about other stuff outside of that encounter. I’m quite friendly or friends with a lot of my students. Art school is quite a blurry territory in that respect, but I try to keep those two roles separate, as I have a strong sense that some education has to take place in that encounter.

Miranda Whall
Difficult life issues are of course often raised or come to the forefront in one-to-one tutorials. I engage as much as I feel I need to and can. It is always a sensitive and difficult area, one which we are not trained to deal with or manage. We are asked to simply refer the student to student welfare and student support, but often more has to be discussed in relation to their studies and practice. Of course we talk about jobs, careers, social life sometimes. It is when I take students on the annual student residency opportunity in Spain that I find out more about the students’ lives and personalities. I always find it tricky to manage exactly how much I should know or want to know! It’s a balancing act. It’s good to know the students a bit, but not too much, and visa versa. A level of professionalism must be maintained to preserve the structure and dynamic of student/tutor.

19. How do you know you get feedback from the student?
Søren Andreasen
Good question. As the effect of teaching is often hard to detect, I tend to provoke a response: asking directly and right away if a particular course or critique was of any use to anyone.

Yvette Brackman
I ask questions.

Dag Erik Elgin
The greatest feedback is to witness a student’s total dedication to her work. This is always a moment of recognition, of being reminded what it is all about, what it takes to be an artist. One has constantly to be reminded of the fact that true feedback is about sharing the discovery of something we are longing for, which we don’t yet know.

Jørgen Michaelesen
DJK has only about forty students, and thus the school constitutes a small study environment. As a teacher, you often sense “organically” the effects of teaching. In addition, students very often report back quite clearly.

Olivia Plender
You hope to see some kind of development in their work over time. I think often students tend to give you quite a lot of feedback. If they like what you’re doing, then they are quite vocal about it. Usually I do get a lot of comments on the educational process, whether they’re appreciating what you’re doing or not. And when they’re not satisfied, I also think they give quite a lot of commentary.

Miranda Whall
I ask the students to fill in feedback forms at the end of every semester. Word of mouth. Other colleagues. External assessor. From the students themselves. They vote for lecturer of the year by submitting votes and comments and we are sent these comments.

20. What is the best you can do as a teacher?
Søren Andreasen
To encourage art students to generate modes of operation among themselves.

Yvette Brackman
Develop a program that fosters a productive situation where the central focus is the students’ work and experiments and the discourse grows out of situation, and work closely with other teaching colleagues to create a solid curriculum for the students in art history and theory.

Dag Erik Elgin
Paradoxically, one of the most generous things one can do as a teacher is to invest self-interest in teaching. Artistic urgency should be the lead for a teacher, securing that “to teach” does not differ from “to do.”

Jørgen Michaelesen
When my work is generating ideas and enthusiasm in me, then I can share with ease, grace, and patience. If I am frustrated and struggling in my work, then I am impatient and sometimes resentful—the same as in motherhood!

Olivia Plender
Give people some education, which sounds obvious, but I don’t think always happens in the context of art school. I think art school can sometimes be a very poor experience educationally. What is most important for me is that I really want my students to feel valued. I really want them to feel that they have a voice and that they are developing their voice and they have something to say and that is something of value. They should feel good about themselves and that they have had a great opportunity to experiment in a safe environment. I also want to keep them away from the pressure of the art market. I feel a little bit sad because the degree shows seem less and less experimental. The students are so desperate to get picked up by a gallery or curators that they get very uptight and blocked. I really want art students to feel that they can keep trying things out. I don’t want students to make artwork that looks like what already exists in a commercial gallery or in a museum show that they’ve just seen. I want them really to develop their own voice and try different forms and push themselves. Students do what they want to do, and if they really want to get picked up by a gallery, they’ll make work that fits that system. But I think from the start you have to instill in them a sense that that’s not what’s important, that that’s not the be all and end all. They can be insecure and they want to have careers and fair enough, I have a career. I can’t fault that desire. But they sometimes end up with this quite narrow idea of what an art career can look like, looking to a very narrow commercial art world. For example, in Stockholm they’re often looking to the Stockholm commercial gallery scene and they’re not helping themselves in the long run if they’re making work to fit that very tiny world.
Bachelor of Fine Arts

Year 3

John Alberts
Meise Fabricius
Julie Falk Christensen
Andreas Franzén
Andrea Furberg
Marianne Glimsdal
Oscar Hagbard
Golnosh Hosseini
Mads Juel
Tina Kryhlimann
Marcus Matt
Nicklas Randau
Jonas-Petter Wallner
Line Åxman
John Alberts

*Untitled*, 2014. Oil on canvas. 130 x 116 cm. John Alberts
From left to right: *Untitled*, 2014. Oil on canvas. 102 x 110 cm. *Shem*, 2014. Oil on canvas. 77,5 x 71,5 cm. John Alberts
Too much awareness in the beginning, in anything you do, brings with it the risk of fixating on something that leads to a predetermined end. My beginnings are often filled with ambitions and ideas. The ambitions exist because I have the outside world to relate to. It makes me anxious, and, unconsciously, paths leading to ends are created. One way to avoid this is to create a beginning that resides outside of a construction. To paint, write, speak, or draw like an idiot, despite yourself. There's always something that feels important in that mud. Not because it's good, but because it was made without any thought of any end that's supposed to produce something.

The picture from the beginning disappeared, bit by bit, and its "destruction" opened up something else instead. However, they have earned their place in the world. They came into being in the right way. It was as though I had failed, I thought. And in that failure, discovered something for myself.

In the "successful" works, I found my way to a point of self-realisation through painting. The result didn't say much more than that, besides the representation. The problem was that all that existed on the surface was a painting. There was nothing else there.

The fragments of the "failures" had something more than a picture. They stood up and stared back.

I wasn't particularly interested in Philip Guston's paintings, but I couldn't stop reading his texts. They put into words an artistic quest that I could relate to. They gave me the opinion that painting is about the surface and the paint and shaping them into something. Shaping without depicting. Depiction was too abstract for me, despite the interesting pictures it can create. But it is too abstract in that the piece becomes a fantasy, represented on a surface. The piece in itself has no body of its own, to stand up and make its own demands. What I'm talking about is the transfer between the artist and the object in the work.

The hand makes. The canvas is white, and a few brushstrokes have happened, truly themselves against the white background.

They are themselves because they are made with an open mind. They are made with an open mind because there is nothing else to relate to. To proceed from there is more difficult, as there is something on the surface that has become disconnected from myself.

In a conversation between Guston and author and art critic Harold Rosenberg, in Philip Guston: Collected Writings, Lectures, and Conversations, Guston said:

There is done a work which is recognized by yourself at some point as a separate organism. … The strongest feeling I have, and it's confirmed the next day or the following week, is that when I leave the studio I have left there a "person" or something that is a thing, an organic thing that can lead its own life.¹

What Guston is talking about here is what occurs when you remove or destroy excessively conscious choices made during painting. Denying yourself simple solutions in painting. As I understand it, it's about the search for the image through the intuitive and perhaps aggressive process of applying and removing paint. The search for a magical unity. He talks of the encounter with the artwork as an encounter with a person, something many of his colleagues in New York also did at the time.

Barnett Newman claimed that the encounter ought to be as direct as possible. The viewer shouldn't get caught up in a bunch of details, as this detracts from the metaphysical experience that results when the piece functions as a whole unit.

What Newman did so successfully was to create this encounter in his “zip” paintings. You could say that the European idea of the painting as a window is gone here, and instead what remains is an object to enter into dialogue with. The viewer's encounter with the piece occurs in first
person, unlike an encounter with a representative piece, when you have to determine what it represents before you can encounter the artwork. A dialogue in the space of the painting begins.

Here, perhaps ideas will arise along the line of “the more you show in a painting, the more you are excluding from the viewer.”

Judging by his texts, Guston wanted to achieve this same encounter through painting, but his claim was that the more you illustrate what you already know, the more you remove an element of mystery from the painting. From the creation.

Newman claimed that he and his colleagues were able to achieve this sublime encounter by virtue of their not being weighed down by the baggage of European concepts of beauty.

As Mark Rothko said: “What abetted the artist in his little game was the dogmatic unity of his civilization. For all dogmatic societies have this in common: they know what they want.” In his own way, Newman created a dogma of his own, revolting against Europe to create truly American art.

Doing the opposite of everything something does is the same thing as mimicking it, as you’re letting it control you.

Perhaps Guston wanted to get away from all of this by reaching a higher form of concentration and awareness that lies beyond dogmatic thinking in painting.

Taking risks in your work that cause you to lose track, opening up new possibilities. Which, for lack of a better word, come to you through the subconscious.

Maybe putting you in a state in which intention has completely given way to intuition?

“I should like the image in my painting to be as puzzling and mysterious to me as if a figure walked into this room... Who is he? What is this appearance? We can't fathom why he's here, who he is, what he does, and why he should look the way he looks—as in a story by Kafka.”

Later in this conversation, as an aside, Guston mentions he is fascinated by the idea of the golem when he paints.

The golem is first mentioned in the bible and later in other Jewish texts. It plays different roles in different myths and legends. What characterizes this being is that it is created from inert matter but comes to life through magic.

In the most famous legend, the rabbi Judah Loew ben Bezalel builds a golem out of clay and places a shem, a spell, in its mouth, which brings it to life.

He used this golem as an assistant. It could obey commands but not think or speak. Rabbi Elijah is also said to have made a man out of clay. He wrote the word emet (truth) on its forehead, and his golem came to life. His golem grew larger and larger, and when the rabbi began to fear it might destroy the world, he removed the first letter of the word, spelling met—“death,” in Hebrew.1

As it happens, the word “truth” is a very fruitful starting point for discussing both Guston and Franz Kafka. It’s the painting that’s about the painting. Or the narrative about the narrative being repeated like a mantra in the process until it acquires its own spirit, which seems to come from outside. Goylem is a Yiddish word used for people who are clumsy and slow, which might serve as a useful description of the process.

The comparison of an encounter with a golem in Guston’s art is perhaps a better likeness than that of an encounter with a real person with independent attributes.

Because this creature can’t give you any answers. All you can do is reflect yourself in the fact that it is alive and find yourself asking questions you wouldn't ordinarily ask. And think in a different way, beyond language.

Newman's paintings, on the other hand, are people, because they have a visual effect. They speak to the viewer in the space he creates on the canvas.

I don't like to take photographs when I travel or go on holiday. Something happens to you on a mental level when you do that. The brain sort of takes for granted that everything of value will have been documented and decides that there's no point remembering anything of the moment.

Drawing is a much better way for me to document travel. It's enough to sit and stare at something for fifteen minutes and draw what you see to make certain you will remember it. If you look at the drawing several years later, you can go back to the moment in a different way.

My eyesight seems more honest when I sleepwalk than it is when I am fully awake. It's like I see things for the first time. There is no body in that experience, no ego.

The ego you struggle with in painting. The self that you have grown into over the years in your attempt to understand the world around you. For a time, I would get up at night and draw some simple lines of what I had seen, so that I could bring something into my paintings and experience that same recall as with my travel drawings.

The state of these night-time experiences reminds me in a way of the interesting things that can happen in the actual work of painting. The day after, in the morning, I always remember everything I did. But I can't remember why at all! All I can remember is my own conviction.

My fascination in painting has moved on from pictures to situations, such as writing a book just to explore my own irrational thinking. This has made painting something existential rather than simply a way to communicate and present ideas.

Instead of beginning with the first chapter and working one's way to the end, and then correcting things...
Untitled, detail, 2014. Oil on canvas. 130 x 116 cm. John Alberts
and rewriting parts you’re not happy with, you could simply write a section that you just allow to flow out of you. After that, take on a different part, which seems unconnected to the first part.

In between them, an empty space will begin to form.

A gap in your thinking. An opportunity to give yourself up and leap into something unknown. You lose your ambition to make art. And win the drive to explore your own consciousness.

When I’ve written the ending, which I didn’t know was an ending at first, and written the beginning I didn’t know was my beginning, all I feel is a vague sense of conviction. Something has to be right for this to happen. Or maybe I just need to be having a good day? Or feel brave enough? It’s like when you had to jump from the high board at the indoor pool for the first time. Once you’ve made up your mind and actually jump, gravity handles the rest, and there really isn’t much to think about. Maybe it’s about letting go of your baggage. When I’ve come some way along this journey, I can begin to think about what I’ve done. If I do it too early, I begin to have doubts, and it all goes away. Most of the time I end up belly flopping.

I’ve continued to draw faces, because I enjoy it. I can get away from the analytical part of me that painting brings out.

Filling page after page with simple faces that take just a minute to draw. They’re just lines that make up a whole when taken together. In this process, I can tell if I had an idea of how a certain face would look from the start. In the cases where I control my hand within the confines of the rational thinking of language, the result is void of content. If, instead, I give the material and the hand leeway from the start, more often something exciting will be produced.

There is no direct translation from inner vision to the material world, whether through writing, speech, or, as in this case, drawing. Drawing or painting with your thinking connected to “speech” sends you down a detour, and you can tell that the medium you’re using isn’t reaching its full potential. Instead of something opening up within the image, all that has been produced is the mere idea of a face. Like a hologram.

The same rule applies to my painting, although in a more complicated fashion, as I’m easily weighed down by tradition, influences, and previous experiences. The paint is inanimate, of course, but it still lives its own life, which is something you also have to consider. It also happens to be a basic condition for making painting meaningful.

Chasing the image has taken up less and less of my attention as a result of these insights. There’s no reason to try to bend painting to my will, since that wouldn’t lead to an interesting situation anyway.

It’s when I give that side of things up that I find interesting situations in painting. The empty space in my painting, made of clay rather than lines. The space becomes the subject.

Like slowly wandering from the depths of the underworld to the physical world, and then standing in between them, perceiving yourself within the presence of the space. Catharsis for us unclean types.

3 Guston, “Philip Guston’s Object,” 51.
Some Notes on Non-sites, 2015. Sculpture, detail. Clay, mirrors. 60 x 80 x 40 cm. Meise Fabricius
“I remember that I was smoking a cigarette when I looked up and saw the mark on the wall for the first time. I looked up through the smoke of my cigarette and my eye lodged for a moment upon the burning coals, and that old fancy of the crimson flag flapping from the castle tower came into my mind, and I thought of the cavalcade of red knights riding up the side of the black rock. Rather to my relief the sight of the mark interrupted the fancy, for it is an old fancy, an automatic fancy, made as a child perhaps. The mark was a small round mark, black upon the white wall, about six or seven inches above the mantelpiece.”
—Virginia Woolf

When we talk to each other, montages of images are composed within our inner vision. These are linked in various sequences, they are cut and edited mentally as the story unfolds and eventually forms a whole. The impression.

When Virginia Woolf writes about an indefinable mark on the wall and with the passivity of a dandy lets us be carried off on her stream of thought, I let go of myself. I let myself be carried off with the stream, and I feel that anything can happen at any moment. “Wholeness” is a certain feeling she gives me through her language.

Language and art are connected, but seeing art as visual didactics or a language in itself may seem simplistic. The material has its own existence.

“Dr. Baraduc of Paris has nearly crossed the barrier and is well on the way towards photographing astro-mental images, to obtaining pictures of what from the materialistic standpoint would be the results of vibrations in the grey matter of the brain.”

Language, form, material all together articulate ideas and thought streams. The body holds the identity. In our need for defining, for transcending, for crossing the barrier, body and mind are simply catalysts; as Susan Stewart puts it:

“We want to know what is our body and what is not, and it is in the domain of ritual and the carnival grotesque that we see this boundary confused and ultimately redefined.”

The list of ingredients is long and contains extreme amounts of sweat, adrenaline, costumes, objects, and elaborate rituals. Tests of definition on the border between me and not-me.

As long as we draw breath and our hearts beat, our bodies have a rhythm and a form. If we lie completely still, quietly at night, we clearly hear and feel how the body is working continuously; the blood rushes from the heart out into the furthest point of the fingertips, a trembling feeling just under the nails. In soft lips the echo of every heartbeat can be felt as small, fine vibrations, even when the body is at rest.

The body is equipped with a complete orchestra of senses that automatically registers and processes the surrounding world; it helps us react instinctively when we are in danger.

When a memory is stored in the brain it also is stored in the rest of the body. The orchestra of senses can theatrically replay elements of an event; in this way a minimal fragment of a certain scent can also activate our memory, for example. The skin creates barriers and repels the worst attacks by big and small troublemakers. But
how to filtrate an impression, sound and light, in the mind and body? The skin is peeled off.

“Röntgen’s rays have rearranged some of the older ideas of matter, while radium has revolutionised them, and is leading science beyond the borderland of ether into the astral world. The boundaries between animate and inanimate matter are broken down.”

When we die we change radically; possibly we also become something other than dust and earthworms; there is as yet no one who has discovered exactly of what this “other” consists. There are people who believe they can sense the presence of someone they cannot see or hear. Others tell stories about near-death experiences—or rather about having been dead and then returning to their bodies again. In their stories they say that they became light, waves, energy, and they saw their bodies from outside before returning to them again. Surrounding Susan Hiller’s work Channels (2013) is the hum of electricity; one hundred and six flickering TV screens have been stacked like a wall, and through the flickering screens voices relate in turns about near-death experiences. According to Hiller, “Channels is an artwork designed to engage us in a consideration of some of the gaps and contradictions in our modern belief system and collective, cultural life. It is ... a destabilising aesthetic device opening to the un-representable.”

Perhaps this “un-representable” thing that her art often represents is not-so-un-representable after all. Not if we begin to accept the strange and inexplicable as part of reality, create a space for it, and approach it in this space.

A Model of the Visual CorteX

In a split second my “I” has been erased. The work has attacked me, and even worse, it has possessed me!

The whole seems to overwhelm me and I am paralysed; not until after the violation do details appear, one after the other, and I become myself again.

“Groups of figures take no longer time to obtain than single figures would require, since the Camera depicts them all at once, however numerous they may be.”

The aperture of the camera takes in the light, and at the same time the interior of the camera is exposed with a temporary fragment of reality. When I observe, my body functions as a camera. Whether whatever I observe is fiction or reality, I am exposed and an image forms not just in my memory but also in my body.

“The whole is other than the sum of the parts.”

In Gestalt theory, there are discussions of the importance of seeing the whole as something meaningful in and of itself and seeing the different
parts of reality as important each on its own. The relationships among these parts results in their forming more than one single impression. Where text is concerned, we don’t find it particularly difficult to read the meaning even when the text is runied as long as the first and last letters are placed correctly in the context. We experience a work in a space and then break it down into parts. We use our memory’s chains of associations to fill out, identify, and decode the discourses of information in order to reconstruct the work, but we often reconstruct it with the errors our memories already hold. When these errors become visible, they reveal a truth about us, about how our brains work, about how the brain fills in a gap with automated association-meaning.

An image, a form, a material creates an infinitude of a fragment of me, a diffusion in stagnant time.

Reality and fiction—both parts are constructed and animated by us ourselves. Outside consciousness, intuitive thoughts take shape and create their own existence of wholeness: “The logic of organic form vs. the logic of rational form yields, in collision,” as Eisenstein puts it. The subconscious, obsessive thoughts, illusions, hallucinations, thought patterns, associations. In practice, an installation must be a manifestation; like the mass of a photograph of the senses that is directed outward.

“Emil Westman Hertz has been there. He has set off into the unknown—and returned! And he has brought items and things—artefacts—home with him.”

In the exhibition *De smukke drommes Lagune* (Lagoon of beautiful dreams) (2014), Emil Westman Hertz brought reality and the subconscious together through objects in a state of transformation between reality and fiction.

Crystallise the unconscious, move out of one’s own body, break the barrier, see oneself from the outside, see others from the inside; camera obscura, projection, light, via the eye and a destination in the grey mass of the visual cortex at the back of the brain. Where time is not a straight line, but a space without walls. The impression, the experience, and the construction of a stream of consciousness is movement in a certain state, an objectification of a steady state recreated in a new existence and set in motion anew. Fragmented movement.

The brain perceives the light from a projection as constant in spite of the fact that a video, with its approximately twenty-four images per second shown at a frequency of

*At stå stille/ To stand still*, 2015. Still image from microscope video. Video 06:30 min. loop. Meise Fabricius
under 75 Hz, flickers if you blink your eyes rapidly. Whether a room or a thing is constructed real, digital, or out of bronze has no bearing on its existence. The only thing that I know for sure doesn’t exist is the thing I cannot imagine.

Lea Porsager and Christine Ödlund both appropriate Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater’s work Thought Forms from 1901 and explore the universe of the theosophic work. Porsager used a clairvoyant medium in her search for a form for the works in the exhibition How to Program and Use T-F (2013). Ödlund animates and breathes life into the illustrations from the work.

“Every idea is endowed of itself with immortal life, like a human being. All created form, even that which is created by man, is immortal. For form is independent of matter: molecules do not constitute form.”

To be able to touch a thought, feel it, give it mass, a name, and a form. Place it in a space, let it speak, and create new understandings between the rhythms and correspondence of the form in a space. The ultimate space has no walls, no time, no barriers or gravity; it is built of ideas and can constantly be changed.

Fiction becomes reality. Light and dark. A shadow play. The composed images’ photons move around on the wall. The whole is created equally with everything else.

In Rudolf Arnheim’s book Film as Art, he describes film as a combination of reality and artifice, which both entertains and distracts. In the reproduction of reality and the manipulation of reality, he argues, like Walter Benjamin in his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” that the original loses its aura when it is reproduced: “Art begins where mechanical reproduction leaves off.”

Today video is digital, somehow a kind of “meta-material.” As easily as the snap of a finger, it can be re-produced, copied, tripled, and reused in any other context. Even after a few exports and imports, the picture quality of the video diminishes visibly. Fragile as a painting of light from the projector’s lamp, fragments of memory dance around. From moment to moment it breaks down, until it becomes only an idea.

“The emergence of poor images reminds one of a classic Third Cinema manifesto, For an Imperfect Cinema, by Juan García Espinosa, written in Cuba in the late 1960s. Espinosa argues for an imperfect cinema because, in his words, ‘perfect cinema—technically and artistically masterful—is almost always reactionary cinema.’ The imperfect cinema is one that strives to overcome the divisions of labor within class society. It merges art with life and science, blurring the distinction between consumer and producer, audience and author.”

The fragility and extremely self-effacing behaviour of video makes it flicker and crackle, but it is still here, it still exists, in spite of everything.

The images constantly flicker and shift: “Oh no, oh please help me!” I am imprisoned in a stroboscopic landscape of an unmistakable character. But it is not just for the fun of it. Stan Brakhage constantly films, he films his life and he films everything and nothing, all at the same time. His videos remain as poetic flickering journals. They take the viewer along into a neo-avant-garde universe that is wholly his own.

In Organic Honey’s Visual Telepathy (1972), a performance by Joan Jonas and her alter ego, Organic Honey, Jonas documents the dialogue between various disguises and
We get a taste of how it felt being video works, their value is inestimable, with personal and historical precision. In spite of the incredibly poor image and sound quality of many of her video works, their value is inestimable, as these videos expose us to an almost naked reproduction of reality. Even the “poor quality” videos provide us with visual knowledge of events with personal and historical precision. We get a taste of how it felt being in that specific moment.

We get up close.

In a space where sound, form, and thought are the same, the feeling of wholeness is abrupt because it continually collapses in on itself. It is in a self-destructive state, just an illusion. If I direct my attention to the inverted space I see the flashes, the perception, the space that has been broken down into the material of which it is constructed. Both spaces are; they are connected, they constantly collide with each other. Rituals and transformation in the ordinariness of the grey everyday masses. Things and colours, light and dark, shapes and sound and weight, gestures on tape.

Got to go.

“Where was I? What has it all been about? A tree? A river? The Downs? Whitaker’s Almanack? The fields of asphodel? I can’t remember a thing. Everything’s moving, falling, slipping, vanishing. … There is a vast upheaval of matter. Someone is standing over me and saying—"

‘I’m going out to buy a newspaper.’

‘Yes?’

‘Though it’s no good buying newspapers. … Nothing ever happens. Curse this war, God damn this war! … All the same, I don’t see why we should have a snail on our wall.’

‘Ah, the mark on the wall! It was a snail.’

Further references
Porsager, Lea. T-F(3). In the solo exhibition How to Program and Use T-F, Fotografisk Center, Copenhagen, 2013.
Odlund, Christine. Thought-Forms. In the group exhibition I strömmen [In the stream], Lunds konsthall, Sweden, 2013.


You have been told that the atom consists mainly of empty space. A kind of miniature solar system containing vast gaps between small amounts of some actual thing. Before this, the atom was understood as a vanishingly tiny unit, but still as an ultimately solid piece of meaning. This suggests that the fundamental presence of an object and its physical tangibility are illusions, and that the inherent substance lies under the intriguing physicality of things.

A certain thinglessness of things arises; a central aspect that is more basic than the physical indication of a material reality. It is an ephemeral aspect—one that is both obscure of understanding and hopelessly inaccessible. It situates itself between your thought and the object, where they dissolve into each other.

“but what is the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing?”

You create objects in a world where there are already too many. In an attempt to avoid allowing this, the result is usually an object that is reminiscent of something rather than being something. You believe in the simplest way in the materials and their distinctiveness and being in the space you can enter from there. The art lies in no longer wanting to be everything?

Absence could be the method; the room is emptied and the sculpture abandoned.

On your computer you store space in the form of images. The images are a combination of your own and other people’s photographs, in which attempts have been made to document space. You try to store these small repositories of space in an infinite singularity that seems capable of expansion, even though that’s probably not completely true. It is even more uplifting to hide these bubbles that never burst on those of others, where they actually physically disperse. From these vacuums of space, elements can sometimes be extracted and translated, since it is the cables hanging down from the ceiling and the coffee stains on the ground that underline the fact that emptiness is full.

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A cable becomes bronze, becomes space.

Bronze, extend, repeat. A repetition led out to where you can no longer predict. It is an eternal attempt at withdrawing rather than accumulating or adding, and a preference for translating and expanding rather than producing.

About air one might say that it is everything that moves in it. The same thing about bronze: waves, particles, sounds, and seeds.

Objects can vanish and compose themselves. An immeasurable fluidity and a curious body are the reason. As waves they disperse as they arise. Are composed. Decomposed. Recomposed.

It is on the verge of not being here, but by patinating it the hollowness is encapsulated and provides us with a surface that makes it easier to understand. Patina is related to rust, which in itself is a reddish-brown or reddish-yellow surface that is often present on metal sculptures. Rust is caused by oxidation—a non-technological condition based on contact with air or moisture.

In technological contexts rust awakens a fear of use, inactivity, entropy, and ruin. The reason why metal is prioritised over rust is due to technological values rather than your own. Many works of art have been deliberately patinated in order to add and retain a particular condition.

By patinating it, it becomes something.

Nina Canell brings objects together that interact with one another via modest arrangements. Electrical debris, wires, and neon gas establish sculptural and almost performative links. Her search for the sculptural exists somewhere between materiality and immateriality and is conducive to relationships between solid objects and mental events. It seems logical that forces that build upon expectations of material and rational behaviour are easily swept aside. Can it be true that the limits of our knowledge and our observations shall determine the limits of reality?

I need air (crawl out of your window)

You go for a walk in the park because you don’t need anything, which is a lie because you know you need it. Thinking is generally considered the same as not doing anything in a production-oriented society, and not doing anything is hard to do. It is done best by disguising it as doing something, and something close to nothing is to walk. You walk by moving yourself from one place to another, by steps, and contrary to running, you will always have one foot on the ground. How do you walk so it looks like you know where you are going?

You do not yet know; we can never know.

The street we walk upon exists, and underneath there are mussels and damp earth.

If we lift away the streets and let the paths go, we have a spaciousness.
Untitled, 2013. Video, filmed on iPhone, loop. Julie Falk Christensen
It is a movement where sculpture happens. The street is translated into concrete. The lifting is the prerequisite for the sculpture. The street lifted away is the surface, and helps us to understand form. To remind us of the lifting we cannot see, you give the plate four legs, so that it will not be forgotten. An active transition between sculpture and installation has been found.

Concrete is a construction material that consists of cement, sand, stone, and water. The water determines the strength. As you water your plants you water the plates, which in the end removes the strength to such a high degree that they are no longer able to carry their own weight. The concrete has drowned. Impossible to build with, you have removed the concrete’s function — created a fragile material that reminds us of something, instead of being something.

Francis Alÿs has moved a large part of his artistic practice into the street. Having accepted that the only thing we can do is take small steps, he goes for walks in his neighbourhood, hoping to be interrupted by something. We live in environments that are partially visible and partially invisible.

He practises small events in an urban landscape that focuses our perception to a greater extent than does the countryside. Sometimes Making Something Leads to Nothing (1997) is the title of a film in which Alÿs pushes a block of ice around through a town, until we end up where it started, with water.

In gravity lives motion, weight, resistance, force, and the most typical experience of being corporeal through all the touches on our skin. The pleasure of being pulled towards the ground and the actual meeting of the muscles against it. Gravity is a kind of momentum between the two and a way we are able to distinguish between them.

We cannot remember their faces, but each person who has touched us makes a gesture that will never completely end; you can sense someone’s forearm across your stomach, your cat’s rough tongue in your ear. One would wish that there were units like X-ray machines that could make visible these indelible impressions, a series of marks, the opposite of bruises, across you and around you.

You go through the world clothed in these experiences; we all do.5

In Rebecca Solnit’s unpublished short story “Slip,” based on her love for Alfred Hitchcock’s Vertigo, we are introduced to Midge, who has been given gravity.6 She lives on the upturn, just as everything in Vertigo falls. There are people for whom there is only a sun in the sky or darkness, and there is Midge, who lives in a night filled with stars.7

Regarding nature, she is in love with elemental forces: fire and water, gravity and evaporation, light and its properties. This is the way in which ice cream melts down into the cone, the smoke of the cigarette coils upwards, and the ice cubes in the drink you have before you melt.8

It is a sympathy for the invisible and the theory of everything, which is enjoyed incomplete. Robert Smithson suggests that a museum dedicated to various forms of emptiness can be developed, because “installations should empty rooms, not fill them”; you hope for the same.9

All the people behind everything you see

Maybe objects cease to exist in the absence of the consciousness that contemplates it, or do objects exist independently? In Virginia Woolf’s “Solid Objects,” objects lose their solidity when they are intermingled with the consciousnesses of the characters. Often they become reflections of thoughts to a greater extent than separate solid objects.

They act as repositories for memories, personal histories, and experiences. Limits are wiped out and expose us to a complex mixture of subject and object via the thoughts of the characters that makes the objectivity of the objects unsure.

Or, more exactly:

looked at again and again half consciously by a mind thinking of something else, any object mixes itself so profoundly with the stuff of thought that it loses its actual form and recomposes itself a little differently in an ideal shape which haunts the brain.10

We consider the same things, but store them differently. Every object is capable of involving itself with the stuff of thought, so that its actual form is withdrawn and recomposed a little differently.

Objects are malleable. What makes them solid is created by consciousnesses. You simply get them going as little disturbances, without start or beginning. Because of particles. There is something, there is nothing. You finally sit down, waiting to be interrupted.

You can no longer remember what and to whom you are writing on the railing you write

I

am

in

Amsterdam10

“To no longer want to be everything” is an English translation of the subtitle of a Danish collection of works by Georges Bataille, which includes (in English) “Inner Experience,” “Method of Meditation,” “Lectures on Nonknowledge,” “Post-Scriptum of 1953,” and “The Use Value of D.A.F. de Sade.” See George Bataille, Den indre erfaring: At ikke længere være alt, trans. Per Aage Brandt (Copenhagen: Billedkunstskolernes Forlag, 2013).


Philip Jae Worth, personal conversation, possibly in the winter of 2012.


Ibid., 144.

Ibid., 147–48.

Ibid., 147.


Sören Ulrik Thomsen, Samlede Thomsen, City Slang (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2014), 42. Authors translation.

*Untitled*, 2015. Watercolour on paper. 180 x 200 cm. Andreas Franzén
Andreas Franzén

Aretha and Kristina

“Work with what you know, then you're not going to be criticised for following someone else.”

—Madelaine Levy

After I left upper secondary school, I was completely obsessed with music. Loleatta, Aretha, Sister Nancy. Chicago, Memphis, Kingston.

I spent most of the money I made working as a psychiatric aide on CDs, records, and magazines. A year later, when I left Växjö and moved to Stockholm to go to art school, my work samples were all small drawings and paintings of people from my record collection. Blues performers from the South—John Lee Hooker, Muddy Waters, Charlie Patton—served as starting points for a series of paintings. I drew James Brown in pencil, Otis Redding in Indian ink. All done very directly, without any excesses. Like a collage of myself and my world. After all, this was what occupied an incredibly large part of my life at the time.

“Work with what you know, then you're not going to be criticised for following someone else.”

Down in the wood shop. I cut the MDF board sized 244 x 122 cm into two larger and four smaller parts. In the studio, I prime each panel twice with gesso, making coffee while I wait for it to dry. Next painting, next painting. Impatiently. They interact with each other. Almost like a jam, whereby something stated in one painting is picked up on and answered in another. Something that's unclear in the first one is presented with full clarity in the last. It needs to have that rhythm.

It's swing, it's jazz.

Not what I painted, but the fact that I painted, the actual feeling of putting something on the canvas. It was important.

Layer after layer. Scraping and adding. Paint from one painting shows up in another. A ceaseless search for form and meaning. What started out looking a little like an apple became a walnut a while later. One painting resembled Krusty the Clown from The Simpsons, another a cabinet.

An interest in the paint had awakened within me. This was the enquiry my work was concerned with. I let it act as a compass, showing me the way. Sometimes, it worked. It worked the best when I had something to drape the paint over, like a skeleton to dress. This made the eye move back and forth between the abstract and the representative.

Perhaps I wanted my paintings to feel like the dub music I was listening to; twisted shapes and spaces, vibrating colours echoing in strange landscapes of pictures and forms.

Most paintings went through so many different guises, so many things they could represent, so much they wanted to say, that in the end, it turned into a murmur, impossible to make out in all of its potential, drowned underneath all the layers of paint.

I know that this was an important feeling, to feel like I had achieved something by the end of the day. A bit like a job. Being able to go home and be satisfied in the knowledge that I had produced something tangible. I had no patience for letting things take their time. Waiting. Sensing, and giving meaning.

Next painting, next painting. I've always considered my paintings inhabitants of the studio. A little studio population. They've felt so tightly connected to the place where they were made. As though they had invaded the walls and the floor. The paint has escaped the painting and entered the room. The thought that they would be shown to other people, in other rooms, never really crossed my mind. Never more than a few metres away from the palette, always at work, always in the back of my mind. I can see all the failed predecessors through the corner of my eye. Seeing them outside of that context was a strange experience. It was as though something were lost when the

“The story ‘Dream Journeys’, by Hermann Hesse, which shares its title with the short story collection it is in, is about a simple popular fiction writer, who doesn't measure himself against his contemporary colleagues, but rather compares himself to Shakespeare and Homer. Time after time, he has to face the fact that even his most successful writings are nowhere near the greatness of those of his idols. Towards the end of the story, the protagonist abandons his dream of becoming a new Shakespeare. Instead, he begins to look inside himself, and like all people, he discovers ideas, emotions, and moods every bit as beautiful as those that Shakespeare wrote of. However, he will never be able to express them effectively unless he finds his own language. The simple writer returns to what he is the best at, that is, being a simple writer.”

—Madelaine Levy

I was completely obsessed with music.
Night, 2015. Watercolour on paper. 187 x 200 cm. Andreas Franzén
Footwork, 2015. Watercolour and gesso on paper. 15,7 x 14,9 cm. Andreas Franzén
paintings left the studio. The interaction, that give and take that united them, was lost. They hang on the gallery walls, and they feel very lonely. I think about what remains.

Distanced.

That’s how it felt. So much so that they meant almost nothing to me. The way it felt to stand in front of them was more like a memory of the satisfaction I had experienced in the process. The feeling when I got that shimmer just right.

“What kind of a man am I, sitting at home, reading magazines, going into a frustrated fury about everything—and then going home to adjust a red to blue?”

I was introduced to the works of Philip Guston while I attended the Pernby School of Painting.

“Come here and have a look, you might like this.”

Unless I’m mistaken, it must have been some of his last works I was shown. They were black, red, and raw.

I didn’t like them at all.

At this time, I was into other painters, a completely different type of painting. Like Per Kirkeby, with his obvious connection to nature and the landscape, and Dick Bengtsson’s early non-representative period.

The quality of Kirkeby’s work varies, to say the least, but his skilful treatment of paint is inspiring. Slow, broad brushstrokes, layer upon layer upon layer, without losing energy—the way he painted infused his subjects with depth and drama. His most interesting pieces are epic, but tranquil. Beautiful, but edgy; moods, every bit as much as places.

And I thought that Bengtsson’s paintings, with their odd abstract forms on monochrome backgrounds, resembling symbols, temples, and creatures (all at once), were brilliant. Inviting as well as ominous. Made up of distinct fields of earthy, sullen colours, with little touches of bright colour. They felt ancient, and sick. They exhibit an uneasy tension.

In comparison, Guston felt almost illustrative. I didn’t understand his imagery or the way he painted. It took a while.

I began to read his writings, and his interviews. He writes very interestingly, and says a lot that is easy to relate to: “Abandon something that works. Question. Learn to play the game all over.” It was a big trigger for me.

It looks like he had fun when he painted. His paintings have a verve to them, a restlessness, and an impatience. Forms and objects are carelessly painted over to make room for the next whim that grabs him. They chafe—clumsy, frantic, and a little ugly. They are different. Not the tranquillity and beauty that is present in some of his earlier works, which I actually feel much closer to.

“The ideal is to think and to do at the same second, the same split second.”

Guston created his own universe, discovered his own language, and he was the one who made the rules. I envy that sometimes.

This last autumn, working in the studio became more and more difficult for me. The thing I had been dwelling on, which made me go to the studio almost every day for several years, means nothing to me anymore. Painting, all this searching for an indefinite goal, felt pointless to me. Painting, for the next whim that grabs him. I did. I let something new emerge in the process, which I actually feel much closer to.

How did my life seem to me at this point in time? Because I’d always spent a lot of time in the studio, always felt comfortable there, this felt like some huge failure.

“Every moment despair is kept open, there is the possibility of salvation as well.”

Painting one’s way away from something, using what one has done before to fuel progress, like some kind of compost of painting. That’s what I did. I let something new emerge from my failed paintings, my used and discarded efforts. They became my crutches, and my therapy.

This limitation (I will paint this and nothing else) made me freer; I had something to start from. Since the paint had a task, it was suddenly able to depart from it. I gave circumstance an honest chance.

All of the forms and shapes in the old paintings took on meanings. They provided something, fulcrums (skeletons to dress) that felt relevant, that I was personally connected to, and that meant something to me.

I want my paintings to be inhabited by representative objects, and for form and content to hold each other’s hands and never let go.

I began to feel a new kind of respect for my own work. I want to see decisiveness of execution. So that there will be no doubt. Awareness every step of the way.

Preparations consumed me. I would measure things with rulers, consider the format I would use. Do I want a thick or a thin brush? Thin or thick layers of paint?

Do I want a finely or coarsely grained canvas?

I began to write down what I wanted to achieve in my paintings. Just to be able to tell myself the reason why.

as
wind makes wave
and the din of the wave
the thought of the picture gives the picture’
To possess the idea, to hold it so clear in my mind that I can take it all the way. To make execution an issue of clarification, more a matter of sifting something into being than constructing it.

Like a conversation, face to face. That’s what I want my painting to be. A sincere conversation between me and the painting, wherein I say what I want directly, without any detours. I want every brushstroke to be visible; I want everything accounted for. I don’t want to hide anything behind pretty colours.

To achieve this requires attention, a sensitivity to the things that arise. The circumstances are new each time. Each painting says something new, asks something new of you.

What is content that the light shines and the prerequisite for this that is, that the air is clear that is what we call form*

I want to achieve sincerity of a kind similar to that in Kristina Eriksson’s artworks.

Last summer, I bought a little book about her, which I have leafed through almost every week since then.⁹

I saw the exhibition at Sven-Harry’s Art Museum that she shared with her partner, Torsten Andersson, who is probably my favourite artist.

Ever since I received SAK’s monograph of his work, I have been fascinated and inspired by his paintings’ forcefulness and their tangible presence: abstract sculptures painted as though they were real, the results of a notoriously roundabout work process, born from the struggle with language that he was locked in for the larger part of his life.¹⁰

The search for an imagery of one’s own (personality as language) and the integration of it into one’s own person (personality as person)—this

*What is content that the light shines and the prerequisite for this that is, that the air is clear that is what we call form*
is what he strived for. Towards the end of his life, he realised he would never succeed in uniting these two in a single painting. They became two different forms of expression.

There, at Sven-Harry’s, I had my first real-life encounter with Andersson’s paintings. They were big. Both literally and figuratively. They almost glowed. Big, coarse canvases. Big, coarse brushstrokes. Big, bright colours. His paintings screamed.

Perhaps it was no wonder, then, that Eriksson’s collages ended up in the background to some extent. Her drawings whisper.

But they have the same indomitable integrity.

Almost fragile, as though they are about to wither away into nothingness—the white paper yellowed, the colours pale. That’s how it feels. As though the materials she chose to work with were selected to allow her to express what she wanted to say as quickly as possible on paper.

She’s moved beyond external ambitions; she’s doing what she wants to do, or needs to do to progress.

Most of the works are about the end of Andersson’s life.

“Can I dance with you before life is over?” is written on the lower part of the slightly crumpled paper, in the centre. Above it, a little to the left, a simple drawing of a human figure, wearing what looks to be an oversized pink vest painted in watercolours. This character’s gaze is turned down; maybe the eyes are even closed. It’s hard to tell. To the right of this person is something that resembles a rock. Is this what the gaze is fixed on? It feels as though the person has waited for something, or somebody. In the background, you can barely make out what might be a roof with a chimney.

The first time I flipped through this book and saw this picture, it touched me. It struck me emotionally before I had even begun to think about how the pink really worked with the rest.

It was very far removed from my own work.

There is a tension here between the lightness of execution and the weight of the subject. Between the text, the drawing, the paint, and the space around it—the charged, empty white surface of the paper.

It was painful. There was a necessity to it that made it impossible to fend off.

Little, brief notes in a diary. Simple, naive drawings. All working together. As though she’d peeled off everything inessential. As though she’d cut away all excess. There is no doubt at all in my mind that this is what the collage is meant to look like.

In another collage, a colourful geometric shape is positioned in the top left of the picture. It looks like it’s located in the centre of a room. You can make out a door through the transparent white paint just behind it. In the upper-right corner, a small person is sitting in one of the corners of the room. Watching. Along the lower edge of the picture, it reads:

“Hi! You said, ‘You make art because you find it important. If you didn’t, there are so many other things you could be doing.’”

Exactly.

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11 Unnamed work included in Asp, Fagerstedt, and Bons, *Kristina Eriksson*, 27.
12 Ibid., 21.
Under Construction, 2015. Sculpture. Stoneware and steel. 110 x 100 x 60 cm. Andrea Furberg
Nature seems to know how to act; it just is, and that is a comfort. In the same way that common sense for water consists of flowing, the stone is stone and the tree, tree. They do not ask themselves each morning what to do. That is something I really envy. A work by Klara Kristalova depicts a stone wall with one stone that is a head, and if you look on the other side of it, there really is someone standing there, a person whose head has been stuck into the wall. In another work, a girl is smelling a flower, but it looks as if she is about to fall into the flower, like she is about to drown there or disappear in some other way. It also looks as though she is leaning, leaning her head and face towards the centre of the flower. The petals look as if they are wiping her tears. But as my professor, Haegue Yang, said when I tried to talk to her about my jealousy of nature, which just knows what to do: “Be a human, don’t be a fucking tree.”

In Giuseppe Penone’s work of art Ideas of Stone (2004), large boulders are stuck in the forks of the branches of a bare tree, as though the tree had embraced and lifted them while growing (even if trees don’t grow like that). The boulders are companions on the road of the tree’s life. They have not hampered the tree in its life. They are important and enormously heavy. It is easy to love a stone: you get nothing in return but you are not rejected either.

Many artists who I appreciate have made works that contain stones. There is something sympathetic about stones; they are so common, they are anywhere and everywhere. Stone face, stone dead. A filling material—you don’t really care about them. But they are good entities, collected and kept. Clumps of primordial matter. They are easy to identify with, like tokens in a game. And then there is this sleeping, closed, and heavy quality.

I knock at the stone’s front door. “It’s only me, let me come in.” “I don’t have a door,” says the stone.

The sculpture lets us in, although it is closed. It is in a static state; it is fixed. There is security, relief, and calmness in having collected something. I can move on. I know where I have it. I can look and look again at the sculpture; it does not roll away. I want to narrow down, encircle, limit the picture, this day, this moment, this situation, this relationship, precisely this. Put my finger on it and close it.

“Assemblage is different than carving. It is not an attack on things. It is a coming to terms with things. ... It is really a work of love.”

In a video work by Guido van der Werve, a man walks across the ice just a few metres in front of an icebreaker ship. It never ends: the
course of events seems eternal and collected almost as in the sculpture.

II
When I saw the film The Turin Horse (2011), the strongest experience for me was the feeling that the characters’ lives in the film were real lives. A life that was lived in the old days and is still lived today in Transylvania (where the film was shot). It seems to me that nothing in it could be claimed to be fake. The characters can literally grasp their own existence; without intermediaries their own hands are the important links in everything they do. I dream of a direct contact; there is also a direct understanding. I work with ideas, but with a constant suspicion that every idea is a misunderstanding of reality. “If the heart could think it would cease to beat.”

The hand is stretched out directly from the heart. As if the thought does not count; it is not until it has been converted into form and action that it can be taken for reality. Nevertheless, I find myself completely lost in thoughts. I think of thinking. I think of not thinking. I think of life; what is my existence becomes real to him or her. When a person is present, presence infuses the character, to find the innermost in myself. To Léon Werth when he was a little boy. In the same way, I want to address what is fundamental in a human being, to find the innermost in myself. The most fragile and sincere. That which does not know how to dissemble. That is how I take on board Jimmie Durham’s exclamation:

Don’t do your work for your friends, don’t do work for yourself, do work for everybody, address humanity; that’s what we want to do, we want to address humanity. Not exactly with something to say. It’s yourself among other selves, that’s what it is; it’s a continual thing.

IV
“I like to do things properly. I don’t like taking shortcuts. It is a misfortune for almost all of us: our time does not allow us to do things properly so we are continually taking shortcuts. No one is happy with this, so everyone is half-unsatisfied all the time, because we work and live below our actual capacity.”

— Roy Andersson

The care artists put into work touches me. They have taken themselves and their inner images seriously; they have taken their time. Presence infuses the air that surrounds it with dignity. One feels respect for the very air.

When I saw Ingmar Bergman’s film Wild Strawberries (1957), I was struck by an intense feeling of clarity and presence. When a person is present, existence becomes real to him or her. An intensified sense of being. An overwhelming obviousness. The character

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III
Long ago I leafed through a book of Frida Kahlo’s art. I particularly remember one painting that made an impression on me. In it, two women are sitting, both of them Kahlo herself, the two bodies sharing a circulatory system, veins crisscrossing in the air between them. In the book I read that critics had called her a surrealist but she herself said that what she did had nothing to do with dreams or surrealism; what she did was to paint her reality the way she experienced it. Since then I have had a similar attitude in the practice of my own art. When I stage my experienced reality, I make it real to myself. It becomes tangible. What is fundamental, what I stand before, or what I have behind me. That which returns. As the artist Cecilia Edelfalk said on the radio, it has to do with my personal development and what I think I need to learn. It is a quest for understanding.

There is something else in the works by Kahlo as well, in the self-portraits: the serious look. She has the same eyes I have when I look at myself in the mirror. The eyes that simultaneously both ask and state, “Is this me?” Or, simply, “This.”

That look can confront me also in works of art that do not feature eyes. It is as if it is my own eyes I am directed straight at the viewer and makes up the absolute centre of the image says something else. What does the look say? It says, this is I. But this I is something other than the I of the ID card. It says, I am someone else ... I am like you ...

The question is if what one is experiencing is then not one’s own I, the way it is when the I is not exposed to any self-awareness or reflection, and if this selfless I, that perhaps is merely a feeling of exist-
played by Victor Sjöström seems to be precisely that: very present. I don’t know if it was because of that reason I became attuned to this way of being. He moves slowly and thoughtfully through the film. Slowness indicates the opposite of carelessness; you give your time to what is before you. You give yourself. Even so, he is mostly absorbed in old memories, so clearly they are what he has before him. Being present in dreams seems paradoxical. But dreams do not always concern a direct future or past but an inner world. Something that could have been; something that is, inside.

When I am affected by this clarity through art, my being becomes more real to me than the way I usually experience it.

V

“You want to know what is going on inside of things and you content yourselves with observing the superficial sight of things; you want to taste the marrow and you press yourselves against the bark.”
—Franz von Baader

The origin of my work lies in my having felt a necessity to clarify experiences, thoughts, and ideas in order to relate to them. By living through and materialising, I lift them up to the surface, make them tangible and possible to view. Life more often appears like a film than the other way around. When I partake of the experience I have expressed through a medium, the issue of what is real turns into a feedback loop.

The charging of actions, things, concepts, and symbols with meaning is of interest to me. The personal relationship to the world and to language in contrast to norms and what is generally known. I want to reach the concrete or perceptible meaning of the image, the real equivalent of the designation. I wanted to be the angel like the dancer is the dance.

VI

Many times I have thought that I wanted to create art in the same spirit as I experience the music and lyrics of Olle Ljungström. With a kind of simplicity and directness in configuration and language. With an intimate sincerity and without any attempts to avoid sounding banal. Everything is there: that which everyone knows as beautiful and that which everyone knows as ugly.
The last work by Louise Bourgeois is a series of drawings painted with red watercolours. Bodies drawn simply, as in cave paintings. Ungainly but at the same time fragile. It looks as if they were painted wet-on-wet. The paint flows out a bit. Gives a sense of some kind of movement. Motion, emotion. They flow into one another and become a shared being, a shared situation. It is distressing and moving with the body, the one under my clothes, the body I have to walk around in and do everything in. A basic insufficiency. The contrast when a naive clumsy expression captures something great contains a tension that the whole world seems to be filled with: contradictions and a rhythmic interaction. Maybe this is why the apparently surreal images feel so real. Is that not how the world is? It does not seem possible.

VII

“If the viewer is trying to find out what I want to say, they cancel themselves out of the game. The person has to be free and in touch with their emotions, with their intellects. … I don’t want them to be interested in me, I want them to be interested in what I did. If it bothers them, then I’m really successful. If it doesn’t bother them, I feel I don’t have any communication. It makes me feel lonely, if they don’t react.”

—Louise Bourgeois

Sometimes I get a similar feeling before a work of art as when I see a mitten that someone has lost on the ground. Who has lost this mitten? What happened? I imagine the person who has worn the mitten on her hand.

Through art I want to share something that I otherwise would have been alone with. A way of getting from the loneliness one has in facing death or facing life. In art it feels as though I can get closer to people. There is at least something I am getting closer to. Perhaps I don’t feel lonely because I encounter myself in art—I am not lonely, I am there.

When I fall asleep it feels as if I fall through the universe. Like the stone that almost falls through the bed in a work by Jimmie Durham. A large, oblong boulder lies stretched out in a bed, but the stone is so heavy that the bed has broken. That happens sometimes. I fall into doing the way I fall into sleep. When it happens, I don’t notice it, I just do it. Suddenly I don’t worry, I don’t think of the time. Suddenly I wake up and then I see what has happened. When I wake up I understand that I have fallen asleep.

“Fish in the sea you know what I mean, bird flying high you know how I feel.”

Bird, fish, or in between. In a video work by Vera Karlsson, the mittens on the ground say precisely all works of art that speak to me say. They say: “pick me up, I’m talking to you.” When I meet my own eyes in the work of art, I find my mitten. I am the hand in the glove. I am the one who lost the mitten, and I am the one who finds it.
Mademoiselle X

“One day, I was on a small boat with a few people from a family of fishermen. ... As we were waiting for the moment to pull in the nets, an individual known as Petit-Jean ... pointed out to me something floating on the surface of the waves. It was a small can, a sardine can. ... It glittered in the sun. And Petit-Jean said to me—You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you.”
—Jacques Lacan

Jacques Lacan’s little story about the glittering sardine can is strongly related to his theory of the subject’s awareness of itself and its place in the picture. When he was a young intellectual, Lacan wanted to experience other sides of society and therefore went out in a boat with a family of fishermen. The sardine can, the inanimate object floating in the water, is struck by a ray of light that is reflected and hits Lacan’s eyes. While Petit-Jean sarcastically insinuates that the sardine can cannot see Lacan, Lacan himself feels that it can. The physical discomfort of the ray of light striking his eyes makes Lacan aware of his social place in the picture—that is, in the sardine can’s picture. The sardine can goes from being an inanimate object to being the viewer, that is, the subject. Conversely, Lacan becomes the one being seen and therefore a sort of object in another’s picture. This reminder that we are essentially objects to everyone else may cause a sense of anxiety, but it is also a confirmation of our own existence—that we are not invisible.

In 1874, a woman was taken in for treatment by the French neurologist Jules Cotard. She had been ill for a little over two years, beginning from when she heard a “crackling of her back extending up to her head.” In Cotard’s “Du délire hypocondriaque dans une forme grave de la mélancolie anxieuse” (“On Hypochondriacal Delusions in a Severe Form of Anxious Melancholia”) from 1880, the woman is anonymised as “Mademoiselle X.” Mademoiselle X claimed that she no longer had a brain, nerves, or other vital organs, and that all that remained of her was skin and bones. From what little was written about her, we know she was forty-three years old and from her appellation we can surmise that she was unmarried. Mademoiselle X suffered from anxiety and depression, culminating with the complete rejection of her own body and presence, or the délire de négation, as Cotard called it.

What is interesting about Mademoiselle X and her existential denial is not necessarily her obvious mental illness. What I find far more fascinating is the metaphysical aspect and what can be read between the lines in her story. Mademoiselle X saw herself as a kind of wandering spectre that neither God nor the devil wanted. She was trapped on earth in her own limbo, where the only way out was to be burned alive—something
Dødgang, 2015. HD video, installation. Projection on rotating (1 rpm) plexiglas, 100 x 178 cm. 13:20 min. Marianne Glimsdal
she herself tried on numerous occasions, without success.\(^6\)

In our own time, the principle that “if you aren’t visible, you don’t exist” seems to be ever more prevalent—particularly in regard to the emergence of digital sharing platforms and social media, also known collectively as Web 2.0. As long as you are connected to a social network, you can no longer completely withdraw from social situations—not necessarily only because you are more accessible, but also because non-participation entails the risk of being forgotten. This makes me also think about people who are found dead in their own apartments, sometimes even several years after the moment of death.\(^7\) Perhaps one can say that these people stopped existing the moment the world around them forgot that they still lived. To what degree do you really exist when no one sees you? For Mademoiselle X, the lack of acknowledgement lived. To what degree do you really exist when no one acknowledges you? For Mademoiselle X, the lack of acknowledgement was not socially contingent—it came from within.

I regard video as a presentation of an inner reality and the screen as a window to this reality. From outside the window it is possible to see or hear, and thereby experience, the inside, but on the inside you cannot sense what is outside. What the viewer experiences is a glimpse into a past that no longer exists in any material reality. As a ghost world, this reality appears as a sort of memento mori, a reminder that everything is transient. In my own work with video, I want to portray a mysterious character trapped in her own reality. As with the story of Mademoiselle X, the viewer receives no information about who the character is or where she comes from. Moreover, the reality the character is imprisoned within is not grounded in our reality; it represents perhaps a private, subjective state in which delusion has become an inescapable fact.

In my work I also try to create a relationship between the viewer and the viewed. The role of the spectator has usually been assigned to the audience, but lately I have experimented with implementing this role in a game that takes place inside the video. Ostensibly, the audience is given the role of passive observers of such a game between object and spectator, but I also invite them to engage with the work as a third character. The videos are often situated within the context of an installation, where I attempt to explore the distance between our world and the world the video represents. I want to make this distance as short as possible, even as I let the audience know that it is impossible to step into and become a part of what is being projected. In this way, the characters in the video and the audience are each trapped in their own reality. I see it as people in relation to other people: as we each have our own, distinct subject, we will never be able to place ourselves within another subject and find out exactly who that person is. Other people thus become something we must sense from a distance, whether from far away or as close as possible.

Guy Debord’s analysis of modern society describes and criticises humankind’s lost authenticity in regard to one another. In his philosophical tract La société du spectacle (The Society of the Spectacle) from 1967, Debord contends that “everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation.”\(^8\) There is much to suggest that Debord’s “spectacle” can be compared with an organism that just grows bigger and bigger. One of the traits of such a spectacle is that social life has become a commodity in and of itself.\(^9\) We see examples of this trend in our own time, whereby private life has become ever more commercially valuable, with online social contact playing a key role. Perhaps authenticity has been forced to yield to a sort of representation of a life that might not even exist.

In the 1950s, Douglas Sirk directed a number of melodramatic films about small-town life in typical American suburbs. Sirk captures the sense of captivity among the characters, who cannot live as they want. They keep their real thoughts and emotions private, even as it is important for them to seem open and outgoing. The characters thus appear as false representations of their true selves. In his seminal essay on Sirk, Rainer Werner Fassbinder writes, “In Sirk, people are always placed in rooms already heavily marked by their social situation. The rooms are incredibly exact... There is only one way in which one could possibly move. Only certain kinds of sentences could come to mind when wanting to say something, certain gestures when wanting to express something.”\(^10\) Fassbinder describes Sirk’s mise-en-scène thus:

“A house such as one would build if one had a lot of money. A house with all the props that go with having real money, and in which one cannot feel at ease. It is like the Oktoberfest, where everything is colourful and in movement, and you feel as alone as everyone.”\(^11\) I cannot help but draw a parallel to today’s Web 2.0 society. Am I right in claiming that today’s Internet is a bit like Sirk’s portrayal of an American town? I think so. I find it highly interesting, this contradiction of needing to be seen even as the protection of privacy is becoming increasingly important for many people. Perhaps the result is that people never can know whether what they see is true or not, that the artificial is increasingly taken for the authentic. Debord does not seem to be entirely critical of the spectacle. In the process known as détournement, the spectacle can be constructively used against itself and thus more forcibly convey the authentic.\(^12\) Chris Burden’s television commercials in the 1970s
Dødgang, 2015. HD video, installation, detail. Projection on rotating (1 rpm) plexiglas, 100 x 178 cm. 13:20 min. Marianne Glimsdal
exemplify this. By way of a loophole, the commercials were broadcast on television as a criticism against “the omnipotent stranglehold of the airwaves that broadcast television held.”

Since its inception in the 1950s, video has been used as an important part of the spectacle, but also as a way to document and critique contemporary life. In time, both the video camera and post-production tools have become easily accessible, and competition is now rife in the video genre. The democratisation of video equipment has largely erased the difference in technical quality between professional and amateur video. For many viewers, the divide between home video and video art will at times seem imperceptible. The greatest difference comes from the context in which a video is shown and how readily available its showing is. In his text “Vernacular Video,” Tom Sherman writes about the challenge video artists face in a society in which more or less anyone can be videographers, whereby “artists working with video will have to choose between the safe harbour of the museum and gallery, or become storm chasers.” Moreover, the challenge for artists is to embrace everyday video, even as they operate at a higher level—in Sherman’s words, they “must have something to say and be able to say it in sophisticated, innovative, attractive ways.”

One of the most interesting video artists today is Ed Atkins, who creates video art that often employs the latest video technology and a glossy aesthetic. But unlike the videos that surround us in daily life, technology and aesthetics in Atkins’s videos often relate to each other in a deliberate way, so that their fusion results in something poetic, vulnerable, and sombre. In his art, there is much that exists under the polished surface of the screen and the picture. Atkins is also not afraid of adding too many of his private and perhaps even embarrassing sides to his videos. The result is often a subtle and captivating exposure. “I like it when you feel risk,” he explains, “when you haven’t taken the advice that it’s dangerous to confuse ‘professional’ with ‘private’. The best feeling is when you look at somebody’s work, particularly someone you know, and you go: ‘I don’t know you, do I?’”

So what do I think is the reason Mademoiselle X lost her mind? The society she lived in seems the obvious catalyst, a society with major social differences from our own and in which a breach of the norms led to severe sanctions. From what little we know, a vague explanation may be found in what she herself believed was the reason, namely that “because her life was but a string of lies and crimes, she fully deserved having been eternally punished by God to suffer for ever.” Beyond this, it is up to each individual to speculate about what it is that happened to Mademoiselle X that would lead her to deny her own existence. At the same time, I wonder how likely it is for someone to suffer from this malady today. Contemporary references to this disorder—the Cotard Delusion—describe a varying degree of severity, from feeling insignificant and invisible to others to feeling completely dead. The condition can often occur during the depressive phase of schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. The disorder itself is rare, but feelings of emptiness, captivity, and invisibility are recognisable to all, and to me Mademoiselle X seems to symbolise these afflictions. Perhaps you are wondering how Mademoiselle X’s life ultimately ended? When she denied her own material body, including her inner organs, she thought she no longer needed to eat. She therefore escaped her earthly limbo through a final death by starvation. She was thus not burnt alive, which she had so firmly believed was the only way out.
Stenen/The Stone, 2012. Artistic research object. Oscar Hagbard
I walk along a gravel road that runs right through a field; on one side beyond the field comes a wall of forest sitting upon a gentle uphill slope. On the other side of the road, at the end of the field, grow some trees, and it looks like there is a steep downhill slope. I believe there is a river or a stream down there. There is a lot of deciduous forest, so there should be some sort of water. It is very quiet; I can hear the wind soughing in the trees, birds chirping, and a car driving somewhere far away. I slowly walk along this wet, soft road, on which the vessels in the ground have loosened their grip. Early spring buds and shoots are beginning to develop on the trees. There is something special about this place; I cannot really put my finger on what it is, but there is safety here. I reach a farm, a large, rounded house with an outhouse and large barn belonging to it. At the stone fence that runs along the road there are five linden trees; in the yard there are several fruit trees, lilac hedges, a rowan, and a large maple with a swing fastened to its lowest branch. It is something of a countryside idyll. I can see before me the apple blossoms of spring; the vine of autumn that covers part of the barn becoming bright red, and the snow of winter lying a metre deep and the warm light of the fire in the tiled stove through the window. In certain parts of the garden there are vestiges of enclosed pastures that animals perhaps have trampled down and grazed upon. The L-shaped barn is large enough that there is room for both horses and sheep, and in the house there is room for a large family. I get a feeling of wanting to be here all the time, but I don't want to live here. It is perhaps one of the most amazing places I have ever been, but of course this is the place where I grew up, so I suppose I am rather partial on that issue.

I lived by this gravel road out in the forest and I saw and experienced nature every day. The closeness to nature was one of the best things of my childhood and adolescence. I went for walks with my family, played in the forest with my friends, and we knew almost all the trees and stones in the vicinity. On our farm there were lots of different animals; the animals were a part of the family and the family was a part of nature. When a sheep died it was not strange that a few days later the fleece from Lilly was lying on the floor in front of the tiled oven. I grew older in nature. When I became a teenager and began to feel how things were in life, I found comfort in the quiet places, by the stream, in the forest, and in the fields. At the same time that the quiet, empty places gave me strength, they also gave me restlessness and frustration. I had not yet got far enough in life so that I could live in the fantastic city where all the fun was and everything that that meant. After a few years in a city and of searching for what I lived for, I wanted to live through photography and art. Nature has always been with me, but it is not until now that I have become more aware of that.

It was very natural for me to find support and create a relationship with a stone when my artistic practice ground to a halt. The stone became a part of me and a part of me became the stone. It has come to be something physical that I can never get rid of; it is somehow always a part of my artistic practice.

The first time with the stone was, as it is for many relationships, very intense, and we felt everything good and everything bad at the same time. We became more and more physical although without sexual intentions, and there, during the last part of this first period, a strong bond was created. A bond that was much stronger than any other bond I will have for a dead object. This bond now means that I need the stone to be present in places where I know I will be for a longer period of time. Above all, if my stay implies artistic practice, and also if I travel to my parental home over the summer, I find I need to take the stone with me. Even if I don't actively touch it, talk to it, spend time with it, or even think about it, the knowledge of it being available is in my awareness. That availability can be even more important than having my camera or my notebook with me. I still wait for an answer from the stone as to whether it still wants to be with me or if it wants to go back to the brook where I found it.

I am a photographer; that is to say, I know how to use a camera. I won't become more of a photographer than that. I am an artist; that is to say, what I create you can call art. I won't become more of an artist than that. I use the camera as a tool because it is a technique I have mastered. Even if I often can hate everything about photography, I can also think that it is very interesting. A camera is a physical object and a camera can also be any hollow space at all.

I can see the romanticisation of the photograph as a positive thing, and for me it is part of my process. The very act of taking a heavy camera with a tripod out into nature, whether I use it or not, is very important to me. As is having a limited amount of film with me, so that I choose the motif carefully, even if the place and the moment are more important to me than what the image actually represents. I wait and more and more become a part of the place; wait for magic to appear and it always does. Just there and then when the picture is taken something special happens. It doesn't matter if the weather suddenly changes, if a curious animal...
appears, or if only a weak breath of air comes that changes nothing at all. Everything builds up to just that moment, and to me something special and good always happens. All the things that happen before development and post-processing are what matter most to me. That is partly why I use analogue cameras, as well as because I don’t want to know immediately how the picture turned out. I choose the motif before I take the picture instead of taking pictures of everything I see and choosing afterwards. For this reason the number of pictures I have with me is always limited.

To me there is nothing that one can categorise into compartments. It is possible to both have too many different nuances and be in a constant state of change. One second one is the one thing, then the other, and then something else. But it is almost impossible to escape categories and genres. I have problems relating to when things that really are a kind of process or a feeling are placed in a category or given a label. That it always is in a certain way if there is no definition.

Nature: it is not just nature to me—it is constructed of different places where everything really is unique and exists in itself. There is an infinite number of things that can exist in these places and they don’t necessarily have to be absent of civilisation or human influence. Nature can exist in the middle of cities or far out in the wilderness. The most important thing is that one doesn’t regard it as a thing or an environment but rather sees that the place exists in itself and that it is unique in its composition.

Places in non-urban environments with which one creates a bond and builds up some form of relationship greatly affect me. Visited or not. In isolated places such as islands, a mystique easily develops around them, events occur, and stories are created.² It may be that these are just old tall tales, or that what one experiences cannot really be understood, and then one forms one’s own opinion.³ Similar feelings of exhilaration and mystique are easy to acquire through a fascination with weather and natural phenomena, even something as common as a sunset. It is the search for this experience, this feeling, that I have made myself dependent on, and it’s for this reason that I travel out into nature.

The search for such an experience was at the root of why I and Peter Dean, my friend and artist colleague, stayed for a month in an old lighthouse on a small island. We went to this island without taking any modern inventions along, such as

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² Jag kan inte se skogen för alla träden står i vägen så jag lägger mig ner på marken och tittar på molnen istället. I cannot see the forest because all the trees are in the way so I lie down on the ground and look at the clouds instead. 2015. Light box with large format negative 85 x 30 x 25 cm. Oscar Hagbard.
Jag kan inte se skogen för alla träden står i vägen så jag lägger mig ner på marken och tittar på molnen istället / I cannot see the forest because all the trees are in the way so I lie down on the ground and look at the clouds instead, 2015. Digital print. 100 x 70 cm. Oscar Hagbard
the Internet, TV, radio, music, and broadcast news, except for one telephone for emergency calls. We sought isolation from society for a short while and the chance to become a part of nature, weather, and this island. We did what on the surface may seem extreme and magnificent. To many it is precisely that we did something a bit extreme and the fact that we actually finished the stay that is interesting. To us it was not important to complete the whole stay as planned; rather, it was the experiences and the places on this little island on which we focused. We tried to see all the small things that happened during our stay in this place instead of obtaining a finished result at the end.

If I disregard the very experience that I want to get at, what is it then that I want to get out of this? In some way it is a kind of confirmation of a belonging in nature, of nature. Can a tree see my presence or does it have to be a more intelligent individual? Does someone’s presence mean more if it is documented or if there is human confirmation of it? Is it not enough in itself to be in a place, seeing and feeling the place with one’s own senses? If I am present enough in the place that I am no longer noticeable, almost merged with the landscape, nothing happens and I just am. Do I become a part of nature then?

Am I just a part of the modern “like nature” trend, or is my interest and commitment to nature genuine? I do many hip things that I feel other people do because they want to follow the trend. This also affects my artistic practice, such as using an analogue camera and being out in cool places in nature and taking selfies when I am there. I do this while at the same time I question how to behave when in nature, what role I play, and what roles other people play. I try not to give my role in nature a higher value than that of any other person. Selfies I take with joy and with a bit of irony just in that moment, but I also take them because it makes me feel a little more present in the place and in the experience. There is, I think, a difference between me and those who make the evaluation that if something really is no experience, then that is the reason no selfie comes of it. It is precisely that thought I find interesting about taking a selfie.

“For many years I was self-appointed inspector of snow storms and rain storms, and did my duty faithfully; surveyor, if not of highways, then of forest paths and all across-lot routes, keeping them open, and ravines bridged and passable at all seasons, where the public heel had testified to their utility.”

To me, observation and presence are some of the most important things when I’m in nature. There is nothing there that tries to get my attention—
rather the opposite. It doesn't matter greatly what it is I observe or what my goal with it is. Just as with my photography, the act itself is what interests me. Not working towards a specific result creates a freedom and openness towards the place where I am or towards what is happening. Often passively and just being there. A bit like a really poor scientist who doesn't make consistent objective observations that later can be used as a foundation for drawing a conclusion. Instead, I start with myself and note emotional or physical sensations. Like measuring an island in stone's throws and assuming that all throws are equally long, that all the stones one is using have the same weight and are equally easy to throw.

"Actually the only thing that the artist is good at is: not knowing something. Everybody else gets paid or gratified for knowing something. The artist mainly works with the fact that he doesn't know something."

Not working towards a result is a liberation in the course of the process. Place all parts on an equal footing and treat everything like a work in itself. I show material preparations that were made before I got into the part of the project where the main focus is. Then I can more easily look with levity at what I have done, putting it a bit behind me and getting perspective on what I am doing. Displaying works becomes a part of the process; I decide on an angle and what I am doing at that particular time. I rarely see my works as finished; it is more that the process is the work. This is so with Marianne Heske's Project Gjerdeøa (1980–81), in which a little timbered house was relocated from a mountain in Norway to Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. Then, when the exhibition was over, this little house was moved back to its original location. Because the act was so specific and clear, the timbered house in itself is not what is interesting; rather, it is the fact it has been moved. For the book The Oldest Living Things in the World, Rachel Sussman photographed, among other things, extremely old but still living plants, trees, and moss. Even if the images are spectacular and the fact the plants are so extremely old is fascinating, I think the strength of this book lies in her having physically travelled to these locations and seen the surrounding environment. Physically travelling to places in order to investigate and getting a new picture of the place is also what fascinates me in the Character works (2009–) of Tonje Bøe Birkeland. Walking in another person's footsteps, seeing what he or she has seen and experiencing the same locations that this person has experienced. Shedding light on another person's experience that should have been given more attention than it got. The sentimental and romantic attitude in Bas Jan Ader's In Search of the Miraculous (1975) affects me a great deal: the dream of a journey to another world, sailing alone across the Atlantic but never getting there; the attempt to complete this voyage that is almost impossible to finish; but above all, the experiences one gets from being in the middle
of one of the world's greatest oceans.

If you do what I do—go out into nature and carry a large-format camera with you—it is difficult not to think about Ansel Adams and his photography. He represents the greatest cliché in landscape photography: man and nature and the hunt for the best picture from a technical perspective, taken from the highest mountain. There are similarities between us on many levels at first glance, but there are also great differences. The idea of there being some kind of truth in photography goes against my way of thinking. Nor am I preoccupied with the idea of depicting magnificent landscapes; rather, I feel that a common spruce can be the nicest thing I have ever seen. What I can take from the works of Adams is the act of walking to these magical places and waiting for, in his view, the perfect light. Also, his love of nature inspires me, as does the fact he fought for protecting natural areas from human destruction.

“For all that he wrote about nature, Thoreau was not (as some have made him out to be) a radical, antisocial individual who shunned humanity and saw value only in places. Walden Pond itself was not a wilderness by any stretch of the imagination, nor as pristine as many now assume. . . . In short, Thoreau was no hermit, searching out the distant wilderness to avoid being sullied by society’s demands. Nor did he seek to be.”

I want to live in modern society but also be a part of nature; one cannot live off of nature but one can live with it. In wilderness is the preservation of the world and the wild should be in the wilderness forever. People already affect nature too much in many places and exploit it because we think its natural resources are ours. To try to distance myself from a people-centred way of relating to my surroundings is something I think about more and more in my artistic practice. To relate to the forest, to see that it exists for its own purpose and not for anyone else’s.

I turn around and continue walking. I walk straight up into the woods on a path that I have walked so many times before. Now it is a horse pen, trampled by hooves; it is muddy but I walk there anyway. Follow the path out of the horse pen and come to a small field surrounded by trees. The trees here are the same age; the trunks of the spruces are all equally thick and equally tall. The forest is relatively well managed, and that makes me a bit sad. If, for instance, dead trees had been allowed to remain on the ground and to give both more life and more abundant life to everyone’s lives in the forest, I would have been happier. If the trees had been different in age, height, and thickness and been mixed with each other, I would have been even happier. This forest does not simply give life and food to the animals in the forest, but also to the farmer next door, and that is fine, too. I walk on across the field, still a bit sad after the thoughts I just had. Walk into the young, pure forest, smell the smell of spruce, and hear the birds chirping, I like it in this forest. I think the place is special even if the forest is not the perfect and magical place it ought to be. The path becomes more and more narrow the further I go, and the bag with the heavy camera in it chafes more and more on my shoulder. The tripod I hold in my hand. I notice when my arms begin to get tired because then I move the tripod back and forth from one hand to the other more often. The path has nearly disappeared and now I walk on the green moss that spreads out between all the trunks of the spruces. I stop for a moment. This place in the forest is a bit more open. I am standing on a gentle slope; behind my back there is a small ridge and a bit ahead of me runs a brook. It is very quiet. I know there are many moose in this forest, so subconsciously I wait for creak, crack, and a snort to come striding by. I hum a little in a soft tone to myself. I put up the tripod, both because it is a bit cumbersome to carry and because this is a nice place that I want to take a picture of. Set up the camera, focus on a tree a bit further off, measure the light, put in a negative film cassette, set the aperture to f11 and the shutter speed to 1/50, wind up the shutter speed mechanism, pull out the dark slide, and click. Magic.

7 Ansel Adams, The Tetons and the Snake River, 1942, silver gelatin print.
Your active explorational process does not always lend itself to analysis or even common sense.

It is a constant and roaring flow in which you are helplessly seduced by stray thoughts, fixations, and seemingly trivial facts. The stream is never-ending. It is vast and frightening and uncertain. You wonder why anyone would choose to remain here. You cannot hope to determine any form or pattern or clarity within this haphazard tumbling. Any insights, if gathered, will elude you for days or months or years upon years.

When the time comes, you will recall a dream you once had wherein you peeled the skin off an infant and it felt like plastic in your hands. You will hear a fragment of a phrase, its source long forgotten, incessantly repeating itself in the back of your mind. A fact mentioned in passing by a friend will turn into sudden obsession. You are swept up in rapture.

There is a thin layer of delicate skin under your tongue that connects to the inside of your mouth. The texture of your eyeballs is soft and supple when touched. The joints of the knee do not bend in a straight line, they glide slightly up and outward. Vital organs in your body are placed within the area spanning from the genitalia to the top of the head. A drop of sweat is most intensely felt when trickling down the small of your back.

You become a herder of sensations, impressions, and facts, gathering a flock of randomised thoughts every evening and letting them out to pasture the next morning with the hope that one day these fragmented trails will coalesce into a shape that makes any kind of sense.

In the meantime your existence turns into something akin to an old, decrepit house. Pieces fall off and are replaced, others need only minor repair. Sometimes the facade is due for a repainting, at other times the bathroom tiles need to be ripped out so as to clean out the mould behind them. Some parts are sturdier than others and are left untouched, save maybe a tiny crack that needs plastering. Every time something has been successfully repaired, changed, or painted anew you believe you’ve earned a rest. That is until you notice the wooden floor is rotting and grudgingly have to start the entire process all over again. The house is never really finished, it is never really safe or entirely comfortable. Never quite right. The air is thick and stuffy, clothes always cling to your body drenched in sweat and moisture. There is always a feeling of something slightly damp crawling on you. You wonder why anyone would choose to remain here.

Confined and yet enriched by your own physicality you must work with what you have. To find peace within black rot and the always imminent threat of cave-ins. Arduous work is at once both casual and suffocating.

How do you strike a balance between intoxication and suffocation when you are always in-between the two? How do you limit and control the lapses of rapture before being swept too far downstream, to a place where the deafening roar drowns out all possible sensation? How do you remain grounded and yet floating simultaneously?

Two years ago I began to unlearn what I knew of the Zar and relearn ways of learning about it.

The Zar is a communal ritual practice meant to appease spirits, zar (also known as djinn), that have taken a person into possession. It is almost exclusively practised by women, in areas within the Middle East and East Africa. Many ailments, both physical and psychological, are usually ascribed to zar possession. There are different types of zar, ranging from mildly uncomfortable to lethal. Once a person has been possessed, the spirit will remain within her for the rest of her life. The sufferer will have to take measures to treat this condition, such as eating certain foods for a while, adhering
*Bound for*, 2015. Still image from film. 24:05 min, loop. Golnosh Hosseini
to a specific cleaning regimen, and attending regular health controls in the form of the Zar ritual. It can be performed alone or in a group, privately or publicly. Like many other such practices, it involves live music, potential animal sacrifice, and the possessed participants abandoning their bodies to the zar as they dance with increasing intensity, entering trance. Through this, the zar is appeased and content for a while and its influence subdued.²

Due to my involvement and interest in dance practices from the Middle Eastern region, I had heard of this ritual in the way one often hears of such things: in whispered tones of exaggerated mysticism. The little information I had at my disposal was vague or ill-informed, or simply frightfully orientalist. Turning to academia proved more fruitful, yet a majority of the work available left me wanting, never truly conveying the reason for or meaning of this practice. Some seek to explain the Zar by studying the rate of calcium deficiency in the women of the area, as the effects of calcium loss are similar to symptoms experienced by Zar practitioners.³ Others interpret the prevalence of women as a way for them to find female community and independence in a traditionally patriarchal society.⁴ These theories are all sound, scientific, and possibly correct. They are also very symptomatic of how we seek to explain what such primarily bodily experiences are, without regard to their own context or physical reason.

In an anthropological field study of the Zar, ethnographer Janice Boddy focuses her efforts on the village of Hofriyat in northern Sudan, choosing to look uncritically at the cultural and religious belief system of that specific region so as to better understand the possession phenomena in relation to its own context.⁵ According to Boddy, Hofriyat tradition prescribes humans as having three vital essences. These are Ruh, the breath and soul; Aqel, the rational mind and ability for self-control; and Nafs, the animalistic side within us, driven purely by lust, emotion, and desire. Ruh is at a constant level in all humans. Men are capable of developing a greater amount of Aqel than women. Women are more or less completely governed by Nafs.⁶ These essential qualities are those present in many Islamic schools of thought, the common thread being the constant fight against Nafs, which also happens to be the energy the zar thrive on.⁷

Early on, Boddy establishes a critical stance towards earlier theoretical work on the Zar, which I have spoken of above, by stating:

“ultimately they distort and impoverish what they propose to understand. If the aim of the enterprise is to comprehend the scope of possession phenomena, to situate them in their cultural contexts, ethnographers must attend to their informants’ experiences of possession and not seek merely to explain them away as something at once less dramatic and more clinical than they appear.”⁸

Another well-known ethnographer, Victor Turner, seeks understanding through an experimental approach. Lamenting that both film and literature fall short of providing context for the motivation of customs and actions within a given culture, he instead tries to teach ethnography through performance. He details one specific instance when, to give drama and anthropology students a better understanding of life and social structures within Ndembu society,⁹ he tasked them with recreating and enacting an Ndembu name inheritance ritual.¹⁰ Unable of course to exactly mimic such an event, he instead focused on the general sentiment of each action segment, so as to clarify its importance and contextual meaning within the ritual and Ndembu social life.

By translating it through one’s own body, information can become tangible and real. One might inch closer to understanding the mindset or underlying reasons for events when the kinetic information is in one’s own bones. Or, as Turner puts it: “One learns through performing, then performs the understandings so gained.”¹¹

I wonder at how one must accept lived truth unconditionally within each context, so as to understand it to begin with. I find that it provides a way to near the subject of the body without resorting to clinical distancing.

I wonder at this method of moving between constant enacting and reflecting. I find that physical absorption of data provides a way of processing information not available solely through the written or the aural.

You seek to create an understanding, not a repetition of the act. A simple repetition only makes the stream grow more fierce and the roar more deafening. You cannot expect a specific act to hold the same significance when outside its original context. Yet you cannot as well expect to understand the underlying currents of such an experience when simply viewing them through a cool and detached lens of theoretical study. It becomes clear to you that you must experience in tactile form what you wish to understand, by staying true to your own context and finding a similar kinetic path that can allow you to glimpse knowledge as well as contain rapture.

And so in your body the private and public become one and the same. The performer and creator converge.

You find you must immerse to transgress to assimilate to rework to recreate to reproduce. The ecstatic experience is of as much importance as the understandings you may later gain from it. And if such is your goal, you cannot shy away from the physical actions or positions it entails. Be it spatial or social.

At this point I must stop and question myself for an indefinite period of time. I wonder, what responsibilities do I carry when exploring/absorb-
ing/performing a subject such as the Zar? For it certainly is a naive stance to say the artist need not bother herself with such a question. There is often an ignorance to the danger in working with subjects and within settings where one is already laden with expectations to automatically be more culturally informed due to one’s ethnic and geographic heritage. Certain identities cannot be shaken, since they are not entirely of your own construct, or under your control. And it is traitorously difficult not to be complicit in upholding them. I am lured in by auto-exotification. I am enticed by the easiness of simply believing it is somehow in your own bones already, as if by some magical geographical and biological instinct. I must stop and question my lack of questioning this assumption, simply accepting the assumptions of others about my cultural and ethnic and social positioning. To avoid it is a delicate manoeuvring, constantly taking a step back to question my sincerity yet not so far as to let the roar and the initial spark of deep-seated interest die, bogged down by insecurity and concern.

So how do I approach the clausetrophobic nuances of unfettered sexuality without it being interpreted through a lens of my own femininity? How do I myself avoid using the very same gaze? Does my interest in the Zar come from a subconscious orientalist conviction? How do I avoid recreating ideas within my own work of which I am in fact critical? How can I position myself in a way that is both honest and respectful to the knowledge I keep and at the same time does not shy away from the potentially provocative and explorative nature of a work? I struggle to distinguish a line, to know where I stand at this moment in time.

I conclude I must make mistakes. I wonder if I do not need confinement so as to make them freely.

Perhaps that is why my sexual subject turns inanimate. Try as I would I could not bring myself to involve a human body in my sequence of photographs inspired by Georges Bataille’s Story of the Eye. Maybe such a viscerally aggressive piece of erotic pulp does not lend itself to being imagined head on. Or perhaps I simply chose the path of fetishes, in both senses of the word, creeping up on sexual discomfort through seemingly clean and innocuous objects. I would argue there is in fact a pristine quality in Bataille’s writing, tendrils of a disjointed clinical mess. Simone’s smooth ass cheeks in the meadow, like apricots. Marcelle’s pee running silently on the white marble floor, like a clear stream.

Inanimate objects perform their possibilities for us. The clinical holds promise of filth or a dirty past. The distanced image holds a promise of hot flesh on flesh, touching, rubbing, sweating, smelling. Perhaps that is why my bodily subject inhabits a screen, so as to preserve that promise.

Two years ago I began to unlearn what I knew of the Zar and relearn ways of learning about it. It forced me to rework not only a process of learning but a process of my own persona. It forced me to be uncertain, afraid, useless, and euphoric. To handle a subject with increasing care, to carry it with pride and humility. And just as the performative informs the factual, the subject matter can inform the process. Non-separation. Rapture. To be at once physically present and fully immersed in the creation yet physically distant and anonymous in the subject matter. After weaving myself in, to get myself out of the way.

The act of filming is a kind of subconscious intuitive dance where you place yourself in a constant relation with your subjects. Your own body becomes the sole focal point and at the same time completely disintegrates.

Several processes are navigated simultaneously. An awareness of your positioning in the room. Are you blocking the light? Is your reflection visible in the glass in front of you? Your breath slows down. Keep the muscles of your core strong. Feet balanced. Always keep your centre of gravity. Every tremor is recorded. Every fraction of a second you are ready to react to their movements, adjust your body, your position, your focus. You are at once intensely present yet non-existent. Like a predatory animal, poised for the kill.

Muscles will ache. Long hours take their toll. In a state of wide-awake drowsiness you carry on, weaving movement with angles, form, and light. Trying to taste every scene, nibbling at potential transitions.

Now body is central. Now flesh is central. Now performance is central. Physicality is ever present. It takes practice to understand what you inhabit, how it functions and breathes. It takes practice to translate what you inhabit, how it functions and breathes.

I always take my shoes off when filming. Every muscle of my feet touching the ground beneath. Stretching my toes, flexing my arches. I cannot work without tactility, without the instant physical connection.

Maya Deren speaks at great length of the importance of physicality in the act of filming, and even editing. She repeatedly positions herself physically, describing an almost interpersonal relationship with the camera.12

Almost as if mirroring my thoughts she claims:

In any case, for me, this physical contact with the film instrument seems always to have been initially important. The Rolleiflex which I can hold in my hands, steady with my neck, press against my chest and hold my breath at the moment of snapping the shutter or the Bolex, with the vibration of the motor running down my arm. … Like a cat, it sometimes permits itself to be held warmly. But there are times when you have to let it stand on its own tripod legs.13
In my flesh, the performance behind the camera becomes as vital to the final work as what happens in front of it. Rapture becomes inevitable, that heavy, grounded, primal force flowing from the sex to the heart, pulsing through me like a thick twisted vine. The immersive performance is not just for the direct eye of the spectator but also is a tool and a technique used for controlling the camera. It requires the kind of devotion possible when one has understood the context, absorbed the kinetic action, related to the space, experienced the movement.

To find abandonment I require no longer drawing a distinction between myself as a creator of the work and as an active and constant participant. Difficult as it may be I must always be prepared to notice which part of the house will need to be repaired next. It is fraying, frightening, always uncertain and shaky. There is never any safety in such a state of existence. As if I was possessed by my own particular zar that craves the ritual of work, and if denied imposes upon me whatever ailment it may so choose. In a sense the choice to refuse has been taken away from me.

To fully understand every aspect of what I am immersing myself in, to replicate knowledge in my body, to reflect upon my positioning, and to constantly seek to understand the context of what my subject may be requires of me a holistic approach to the work. There is excitement here alongside the terror. There is calm in the throes of anxiety. I must face this head on with all the instruments at my command, for I do not want this old house I live in to crash down upon me.

I want it to expand indefinitely.
I dag, så vi ikke solen / Today, we didn't see the sun, 2015. Sculpture, detail. Concrete, newspaper. Dimensions variable. Mads Juel
THE CONDITION
(as a counterpart to the fall)

People are. Sometimes. For various purposes. Ugly people are less. For certain purposes. You have got an ugly soul, it has been said. God (whose god?) hates you. Hates him. Ugly people are, e.g., less useful for certain purposes. Nice people get forgotten in the crowd. In the meantime. Stuck in your own body. Some bodies are for some purposes.

During the process of dispensation, everyone was given one body and that was a fact you had to live with. There were hopes for the intervening time. Only later did you come to figure out that swapping among each other was not permissible.

PORCH
between dynamic and passive doubt

Situations involving attempts at movement all start at more or less the same place. It is a visual image of a non-existing place. Less an object than a state of mind. A hub for all strands, both those that lead out and attach and turn into something else and more, and the loose ends that are enmeshed in their own closed cycle.

I am not really moving around much inside this room. Maybe, at most, a light quivering in my body when the weight shifts from leg to leg. Three of the surrounding inner walls are made of glass. The fourth wall is the house’s outer wall. A dark ceiling of wood lowers the delimitation of consciousness. I am neither inside nor outside the house. Having strayed away from the flagged path. In the shelter of the porch: static/potential. There is a thin veil between the dynamic and the passive doubt through which movement is made possible or gets eaten up by itself—by the body that stagnates and mediates the room as a locking. The kamikaze pilots float towards the horizon.

The dynamic doubt positions itself in an intermediate stage. In a space of clear sight. Still suffering from the cold, but in shelter from the actual weather—for example, teeming rain/squalls. Hit by the cold, the senses sharpen; the cold pricks the skin and every now and then, your breath becomes visible. Both the flagged path and the front door contain a potential. Possibilities remain accessible.

Trans SPACE
(fluid morphology)

Would I be able to show that everything was gone in a flash? All words amassed around one sentence. The beginning/the finale. Or, merely a single exposure, the surface of which contained all the nuances: among others azure, blue, bluish, light blue or midnight. It is probably a little more complex than that.

“What is so complex?” you would ask. “Your life?” “Your raison d’être?” I will not pretend to know exactly where this is headed, or under what circumstances it started. Everyone tackles survival in their own way.

I am writing on the basis of a room. The room that, among other things, gives its elements a new place, a logic, and lets them flow freely from their frames so that they can coalesce into other forms.

MY PATH THROUGH THE SCULPTURE GRAVEYARD
deconstruction and compost

Observing a deconstruction. Its smallest. The constituent parts. And its reverse:

Aesthetics.¹—sentient, apprehension, intimacy
Aesthetics. ²—extremity/glitter, smoke & mirrors

Thoughts on Camille Henrot and The Pale Fox³

A bluish room arranged on the basis of things’ informal connections. West and east meet, as well as whatever might position itself in between.⁴ As in a landscape, a diffuse transition is created: moss envelopes wood and stone. Shrubs move over into grass. An anthropological study of the human and the animal. Classification and context. Certain qualities will occur when the players are combined. The combination can either create a propagating or a stifling surface tension. Energy forms are standing and establishing polar opposites or they become attached by virtue of a mutual enrichment. For example,
one fragment could be promoted at the expense of the other. Energy would be transferred from the one. (This might also occur in something that is living.)

A combination of a wide mouth with narrower eyes creates a triangle. Shorter arms will leave your lover cold on the back. Limbs from stylistic bodies; exquisite hands and calves are lying scattered about in the grass as a result of something like a lack of interest or a lack of place. Other primary structures are created, as a function of a deconstruction and a composting.

A body that stands forth without informative value. Just form, as an uncertain aspect. "It seems like human beings have difficulty defining themselves without excluding." What makes a body (of work)?

For my own part, I am composing aesthetically charged symmetries. Lines are drawn between points.

TWO SIMILAR MOVEMENTS
(overall)
the body and the shadow

Two similar movements. Beneath these are all the smaller movements. The even smaller. And nerves. Two similar movements. Beneath a combination of a wide mouth with narrower eyes creates a triangle. This might also occur in something.

A whole (or an attempt to be) a body that stands forth without informative value. Just form, as an uncertain aspect. "It seems like human beings have difficulty defining themselves without excluding." What makes a body (of work)?

For my own part, I am composing aesthetically charged symmetries. Lines are drawn between points.

TWO SIMILAR MOVEMENTS
(overall)
the body and the shadow

Two similar movements. Beneath these are all the smaller movements. The even smaller. And nerves. Subordinate and becoming a part of that which is overriding. Have always been part of that which overrides. But this could not be seen and now it looks merely dispersed. Even though it is. A whole (or an attempt to be) a part of the body. It works in different ways. With the same things. Everyone does. But it is something other than immediate. Charges are created in people. I saw her before me: her potential, which was an immanent one, as potentials are. It connected and transferred.

She disappeared into your body. synergy or transfer of energy (further circumstances are still unknown. Part 1)

I made a gesture that seemed foreign to everybody. An attempt at movement. antipoles, no transfer

I saw it as an undressing, which rose again afterwards. Detached from the body. The body, which bore the name, an ego, and the first movement. As your most beautiful set of clothes, it pushed itself away from the ground and left you: a shadow (and the second movement). It sees as the body cannot and attaches itself instead to a phenomenal thought. A slightly faded memory wanders off. Learns, embraces, and returns.

All the while the body is bathing in its own gaze. I recognise myself in my identity. In my individual. individ. identitet. dentitet. vid. tetinedi. dividni. identivid. viditet. dentividi. idiviti. Are these your or my limbs? Tell me again, where does this belong? Body/obstruction.

In a fleeting moment, my body separates itself from the others. I experience it. I experience them in a moment of photographic perspicacity. Next, movements when the body takes over are mixed together.

My ruminations turn into the shadow’s ruminations. My sorrows of love its sorrows. My memories its. My possibilities ours or yours. You can take them if you want. Take whatever you want to have. Conjoin them with whatever you want—with the room they are in. Or the skirting boards, as they run along the length of the floor. Let them reach out from their shape or let them dissolve. Let them be parasites, in much the way that your dreams and memories sponge on your body, which affixes them like ship to anchor. Or like you yourself sponge on your dreams. Through small charges (potentials), bodies bind to each other. When I stand with the shadow on my back, charges bind me to the picture.

Apparantly, my body will always be linked to the shadow, like two hands connected by an elastic band. Like two similar movements.

A POETRY OF THINGS (the fall)
Techno NAUSEA much?

"shooting with Bow and Arrow" Universally fastened duo, a unit, a purpose, a function, complementary God/man
Relation, counterpart, an order, instructions, trust, physics/ anti-physics

Techno
(Gr) techné — arts, crafts

Standing in the shadow puts the systematic teaching out of function.

Ethical thoughts: built around a system in which certain actions are favoured over others and so on. Based on self-invented logical inferences, a conclusion is drawn and a coherent system is created. It’s just another grid.

"Nathaniel, throw away my book; do not let it satisfy you. Do not think your truth can be found by anyone else." When the islands collapse and generate free movement, then we can be together. Then I will break with my extremity, with the pattern. Then the nausea will subside.

CEREMONIAL PEARLS /cut
She wore him, like a scab around herself. one-way transfer of energy (Part 2)

Blackness: a death that lives by your side. From the first breath you take.

Forms keep forming: close up, at a distance. They changed in material, light, and shape. But I knew that the
same core was there. It was me. I was the form, the light, the material. And I came from the blackness, in which everything had taken its beginning. The blackness had merely shown me that it had other aspects, which I recognised. Some of the forms were ridiculous and I couldn’t stop laughing, I was laughing at myself. In a quite heartfelt way.

“— Are you really having so much fun, he asked me, building up those kinds of systems?

“— Nothing amuses me more than an ethics, I replied, and it gives me a spiritual satisfaction. I cannot feel any real joy when I’m not linked up to an ethical system.

“— Does that heighten the sense of joy?

“— No, I replied, but it renders it justified.

“For this reason, I have often been pleased with a doctrine or even a well worked-out thought system that would be able to justify my actions; but sometimes I have, undeniably, merely been able to observe all of this as a cover for my sensuousness.”

During Hurricane Sandy, in New York, in the winter of 2012, large sections of the city lost power for a long period of time. Few cars were driving on the streets and many roads were blocked. The subway was out of service. Space was created for a different kind of normality.

In the sun’s absence/dusk.

Saturday/everything was gone in a flash.
I dag, så vi ikke solen/Today, we didn’t see the sun, 2015. Installation view. Various media. Mads Juel


“It was not vanity that drew her to the mirror; it was amazement at seeing her own ‘I’ … Each time she succeeded was a time of intoxication: her soul would rise to the surface of her body like a crew charging up from the bowels of a ship, spreading out over the deck, waving at the sky and singing in jubilation” (Milan Kundera, “Anden del: Sjæl og legeme,” in Tilværelsenes Utlidelige Lethed [Viborg: Gyldendal, 2013], 51. Published in English as The Unbearable Lightness of Being [1984]).

When is it right? As Milan Kundera further writes in The Unbearable Lightness of Being, you cannot sketch out life before the actual life is lived. You may be given cause to wonder whether this brings about a feeling of heaviness or lightness and, moreover, whether it’s good to feel the lightness … or heaviness? I suspect that it is individual. It requires your presence. In the now. Anything can arise in simple everyday procedures since they are images of what they are. Of life. “Tereza was born of the rumbling of a stomach” (Kundera, Tilværelsenes Utlidelige Lethed, 49). Transposing this lightness (the rumbling or gas in the stomach) into gravity, giving it a purpose and a body, a raison d’être, if you will, implies that it flows together into one: the physicality (the rumbling of a stomach)/abstraction (Tereza) and chance (the acted-out life as a sketch)/personages from novels (art).
The aesthetic discipline, taking its point of departure from Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten's Aesthetica (I–II, 1750–58), provides for the invention of the aesthetic as discipline and conjures up a sharp division between the conceptual and the aesthetic cognition. Later adaptations of the conception have constituted attempts to group the aesthetic within the scientific, the artistic, or the philosophical. Immanuel Kant's interest in the presentation of this problem lay in the relation of phenomenological aesthetics, with a focus on the aesthetic judgment as a judgment of taste. "The aesthetic relation is accordingly a special type of relation between a given subject and a given object; the object can be a work of art but can also belong to nature or, in principle, any other possible kind of order" (Morten Kyndrup, Den Æstetiske Relation [Viborg: Gyldendal, 2008], 35). The judgment of taste was of an antinomian character, and circumvented, on the one side, the concept's nature, since taste is individual and not universal. Conversely, concept-like qualities were attributed to the aesthetic anyway, because "in the very positing of the judgment of taste, there is an invocation of a common 'consensual' level, one upon which there can be disputes, anyhow, about the singular judgment" (ibid.). It is precisely this field of tension between the individual and the universal, with the spiritual as the crux of the matter, that explains how an earlier quotation (from Altête Systemprogram des deutschen Idealismus, presumably from 1796–97, the author being Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, or Friedrich Holderlin, or Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling) can be likened to the title for an exhibition by the Swedish artist Tobias Sjöberg (born 1979): How to attain knowledge of the higher worlds? The quote reads: "the absolute freedom of all spirits who carry the intellectual world within themselves, and may not seek either God or immortality outside of themselves. Finally, the idea that conjures everything is beauty's idea in the higher Platonic sense. I am now convinced that reason's highest action—inasmuch as reason encompasses all ideas—is an aesthetic act, and that truth and goodness are united only in beauty" (Kyndrup, Den Æstetiske Relation, 42).

This also explains how the aesthetic relation can be perceived as the connecting link that opens up for that language where dividing lines and joints are hidden. For more information on Sjöberg's exhibition, see his website: http://tobiassjoberg.nu/posts/46084469027/how-to-attain-knowledge-of-the-higher-worlds.

Camille Henrot, The Pale Fox, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, June 22–August 17, 2014. Camille Henrot's arrangements can be regarded as bringing something universal into an envelope by creating the requisite relations between things' nature.

"The traditional garden of the Persians was a sacred space that was supposed to unite four separate parts within its rectangle, representing the four parts of the world, as well as one space still more sacred than the others, a space that as like the novel, the center of the world brought into the garden (it was here that the basin and jet of water were located). All the vegetation was concentrated in this zone, as if in a sort of microcosm" (Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," in Rethinking Architecture: A Reader in Cultural Theory, ed. Neil Leach [New York: Routledge, 1997], 330–36).

The exhibition Other Primary Structures, at the Jewish Museum, New York, March 14–August 3, 2014, was a commentary on—and a remake of—the exhibition Primary Structures, which opened in the spring of 1966 at the same museum. Carl Andre, Anne Truitt, Donald Judd, Robert Morris, and Robert Smithson were among the artists whose work was shown at the original exhibition, a prefatory landslide in what later became known as minimalism's first exhibition.

A readaptation of a centralisation of the object. A "staging of a series of artificial spaces in reality" (Ulrik Schmidt, Minimalismens Æstetik [Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, Copenhagen, 2007], 245) forces the body out into a field of tension with the theatrical, the stage. That is to say, there is an expectation that a perceptual drama is going to be played out by virtue of the object's perfection or perfect attempt to wrest itself free from any form of subjectivism and illusionism. In doing so, this perceptual drama creates a complex in which "the object appears not so much to be a natural as a supernatural occurrence" (ibid., 247), and thereby creates a form of illusionism in the absence of the object's similarity to anything else in the natural reality.

Camille Henrot, The Restless Earth (New York: New Museum, 2014). 34. When weight lifting, the eye's fixation on an unevenness in the wall's surface will give the body the necessary free space for a heavier lift. Similarly, in an interview with Arjun Appadurai, Henrot discussed the relation concerning free movability and creativity that comes about as soon as an outline of one's frame is drawn. In relation to this, the movement possibility in The Porch (Vindfanget) and its construction can be spotted.

Karen Blixen, Den Afrikanske Farm (Haslev: Gyldendal, 1970), 35. In a break with a binary opposition, Umberto Eco's The Absent Subject (1982) and his semiotic presentation of the problem can be set into relation. Eco's semiotic analyses and their situational context within space/architecture (The Function and The Sign) signal a break with the primordial structure (that connects inflexible structures with an underlying system), which semiotics had been leaning up against in relation to structuralism as methodical apparatus. "Eco introduces a Nietzsche-inspired way of thinking about history, which opens up for an infinite number of possible interpretations, depending on what perspective is being applied to the interpretation" (Umberto Eco, Funktionen og Tegnet: Funktionstænket semiotisk, RILM Analyser [Aarhus: Fonden til udgivelse af Arkitekturteidskrift B, 1997], 295). The external codes ("codes that do not issue from architecture's own system but rather from the surrounding cultural landscape," ibid.) open up the possibility for structures that are movable and changeable, where it is the social or historical context that sets the pace. This changeableness in the connotative reading can be further linked with Wolfgang Tillmans's combination and recombination of his pictures. "Tillmans' installations, with their elaborate recombination of old and new photographs, demonstrate his belief in the capacity of such networks of images and meanings to suggest the multivalent complexity of life" (David Deitcher, "Lost and Found," in Wolfgang Tillmans: Burg [Cologne: Taschen, 2011], 10).

André Gide, dedication of Jordens Frugter (Copenhagen: Gyldendals Bekkasinbog, 1963), 129.

Ibid., 30.

Eva Franch i Gilabert, "Towards a Theory of Earliness: Anger, Impossibilities and Objects," Interdisciplinary Seminars, February 3, 2014, the Cooper Union, New York. In this lecture, what was sketchied out, in relation to Other Spaces (Foucault) was a picture of the footpaths that can crop up between situations as a result of one, sometimes simple, breach of that which serves to normalise and standardise. An unexpected homemade dinner at a debate (physically) could, for example, loosen the hold on people's chaste positions (anti-physical/mental) and give rise to a heterotopic space.
Further references
Tina Kryhlmann

**Untitled**, 2015. Oil on MDF. 35 x 43 cm. Tina Kryhlmann
Art as Truth

“The inspiration comes through a clear mind, right straight through! We have nothing to do with it. It’s just this: move into the path of the truth and you’ll express the truth. You know ... Well, in our best moments we move into the path of truth and we’ll have a flash like that [snaps her fingers] of what we have to do.”
—Agnes Martin

In my opinion, artists always depict truth in some way or another: from the shamanistic tradition to manipulate reality, as in the theories about early cave drawings, to the sober and meticulous recording of surroundings in nineteenth-century realism, to the more feeling of truth in expressionism with Edvard Munch. Then there is the transcendence of the bodily sensed world altogether, with the modernist abstractionists and their “spiritual vocabulary,” such as Wassily Kandinsky and Kazimir Malevich. Art gives us another dimension to grasp reality; it offers a vantage point from which to see ourselves.

I’d say both art and religion, dealing with truth or concepts of truth, exist because people get inspired. Some images, some sentences, some things, whether they’re facts, ideas, images, or objects, ring true—they resonate authentically, with something inside us. This resonating hints at truth. Agnes Martin’s work resonates with me. I feel at home in her works, become at ease, and disappear into them. At the same time, I feel an almost inexplicable respect and a sense of awe before them. Like they express something higher than me. They express truth.

Truth is higher than any religion, including the religion of science, including the trends of the art world.

“There is a kind of moral prestige that an artist has, like a priest in a sense.”

Everything that is, is. Nothing can be that is not. Everything that is has everything that is in it. Even nothing. Everything that is has its opposite inherent in it. An object that has the colour blue looks blue because it absorbs all the other colours; most of all it absorbs orange, blue’s opposite. I would say the object is more orange than blue, even though blue is its apparent primary attribute in terms of colour, because it reflects it. It wouldn’t be blue if it were not orange.

An organic being, something that is alive in the material world, has death inherent in it. It is alive because it is able to die; empirically it is alive because it will die. I find this pointing towards truth to be contradictory by nature. Or towards contradictions not being contradictory. Or rather contradictory in terms of appearance; with the right tools of understanding it probably makes sense. It makes sense that it does not make sense, per se. I accept that I will not, indeed probably cannot, grasp nor express the “whole truth,” nor do I have any desire to do so. But I do enjoy fragments of it. In perception; in art, in literature, in poetry; in states of being. In inspiration.

The truth is such a vast portion of possibilities, probabilities, and contradictions that I think the only way our minds can cope with it is through the subconscious. Underwater currents of everything that is, everything that we are part of, bring about ripples to the surface now and then. The ripples can become work of some kind, if we choose to act upon them. Following an underwater pattern, if followed consistently, the ripples will provide cohesiveness in the body of work. The submerged map will be revealed at some point.

“Agnes Martin developed her aesthetic vocabulary to express her vision of the truths of life, which center around her faith in what she variously calls the sublimity of reality, perfection, or transcendent reality.”

(Was Martin cheating by destroying her early work, then? The work that didn’t ring true? I wouldn’t say so. You have to go through different stages; you have to produce work that does not function in order to produce work that functions. As she said herself: “Inspiration is really just the guide to the next thing and maybe what we call success or failure. The bad paintings have to be painted and to the artist these are more valuable than those paintings later brought before the public.”)

I think she captures a spiritual concept of nature. This can be seen in the titles of works such as Night Sea (1963), Leaf in the Wind (1963), and Mountain (1960), in which the imagery consists of short stripes in horizontal lines on a monochrome canvas. But what is nature, really? It has come to name something (or everything?) outside of human society, though society itself is also a part of nature. Can nature produce something unnatural? We sometimes seem to connect the term “nature” to a certain stillness. A stillness that may be hard to find inside of society. I have an idea that it is connected to language and the way language forms our way of thinking and seeps through our culture. As if the reminiscent ideas of men are lingering in man made things through what they are called, and which easily lead our mind into
certain thought patterns. I do believe, however, that it is possible to take control over one’s own language by being aware of it, though it is easier to expand (if not transcend) the borders of language in a wilderness that is safe enough but devoid of human intervention—to escape the thoughts of other people as well as one’s own. What, then, about the stillness outside of nature? I think the way to stillness is inherent in us; there is a way to it in our mind—through nature, as there also is through our body. By going into the body and into the mind, we are able to transcend them. When going into society, we see nature seeping through the veins of it; by going into nature, we see it seeping through our veins. By seeking the “outside” that really is inside, we see it already seeping through us, through everything that is, that we are one. By going into herself, Agnes Martin reveals the secrets of life.

Trappist monk, poet, and writer Thomas Merton writes:

If one stops to analyze the experience [of contemplation], or if one makes a move to increase its intensity by a natural act, the whole thing will evade his grasp and he will lose it altogether. Now it is precisely here the aesthetic instinct changes its colours and, from being a precious gift, becomes a real danger. If the intuition of the poet naturally leads him into the inner sanctuary of his soul, it is for a special purpose in the natural order: when the poet enters into himself, it is in order to reflect upon his inspiration and to clothe it with a special and splendid form and then return to display it to those outside. And here the radical difference between the artist and the mystic begins to be seen. The artist enters into himself in order to work. For him the “superior” soul is a forge where inspiration kindles a fire of white heat, a crucible for the transformation of natural images into new, created forms. But the mystic enters into himself, not in order to work, but to pass through the center of his own soul and lose himself in the mystery and secrecy and infinite, transcendent reality of God living and working within him.
I see no necessary contradiction between the mystic and the artist. Look at Hilma af Klint, Emma Kunz, and Agnes Martin. Indeed, the mystical experience seemed to weigh heavily for both af Klint and Kunz, and they didn't regard themselves as artists in the sense that Martin did, but they made art—and their work was eventually displayed to “those outside.” Kunz explicitly didn't consider her work as art because of the notion of the “genius” still lingering in the early twentieth century—art as the expression of the ego, which was far from her intentions with her healing drawings. This was something that was also considered by Ellsworth Kelly, in relation to his own work as well as Martin's:

Agnes’s and my art share a love of the anonymous, of doing the work. The work itself is what’s important. We don't want our personality in the art. We all had to get over Picasso, because his was “great personality” art. For Abstract Expressionists, gesture was very important—we were trying to get away from the “I” as in “Look how well I do it.” Then there is a stillness that we appreciate in each other’s work, as in a common destiny.

For af Klint, the importance of spiritual imagery was leading her; she had such a strong faith in it that she didn't even consider her work in the context of the “art world,” but rather held firmly that the world wasn't ready for that imagery yet. Standing in front of af Klint’s work, I get filled with the same respect as with Martin's paintings, though with a different feeling. Almost as if I am looking at something I shouldn't be seeing. At the same time it feels strangely familiar. I recognise it. Like when you watch a movie or read a book that really hits you—as if it were made about you, and you're crying at the end of it because you don't know what to do with this information about yourself that someone else has presented to you.

However, in a splendid description of how the artist works, Merton saw art as a profound danger that could lead him away from his path as a mystic. I can relate to his fear. The fear of misusing divine inspiration and therefore being cut off from it. He seemed to struggle with finding a way to combine mysticism and poetry, and, moreover, to justify his poetry in the path of the mystic. When artists get a flash of what they have to do—they have to do it. It's not like they have a choice: it's like an umbilical cord to life itself.

So why is it important to show your work, or furthermore to work within a context? To me, art is a way of understanding reality as much as any other—science, religion, mathematics—a channel with access to truth, an important voice that can speak of our existence in the world and in society in a way other languages cannot. And I think this is why artists have an urge to “bring images out” and why it isn't sufficient for the artist to be a recluse and live in isolation with his visionary experiences as the mystic does. Although—the mystics usually contradict themselves (those we know of!) precisely by bringing their visions out and displaying them after all. It seems to me as if Merton reached a similar conclusion later on, when, maybe, he realised he couldn't choose not to be a poet:

Let us obey life, and the Spirit of Life that calls us to be poets, and we shall harvest many new fruits for which the world hungers—fruits of hope that have never been seen before. With these fruits we shall calm the resentments and the rage of man.

Let us be proud that we are not witch doctors, only ordinary men.

Let us be proud that we are not experts in anything.

Let us be proud of the words that are given to us for nothing, not to teach anyone, not to confute anyone, not to prove anyone absurd, but to point beyond all objects into the silence where nothing can be said.

We are not persuaders. We are the children of the Unknown. We are the ministers of silence that is needed to cure all victims of absurdity who lie dying of a contrived joy. Let us then recognize ourselves for who we are: dervishes mad with secret therapeutic love which cannot be bought or sold, and which the politician fears more than violent revolution, for violence changes nothing. But love changes everything.

We are stronger than the bomb. Let us then say “yes” to our own nobility by embracing the insecurity and abjection that a dervish existence entails.

Ad Reinhardt’s black paintings make a lot of sense to me in this context. Silence, as in all existing frequencies played simultaneously—the equal frequencies eradicating one another; black, as in all the colours on top of each other, vibrating there on the canvas, but not distinguishable to the human eye. People often associate blackness and darkness with something melancholic or morbid; to me everything is there—it is the opposite of empty. Black paint as white light, as in all the colours in visible light, mixing into this one perfect colour; content, containing everything.

People sometimes ask me: Why paint? Why not any other material? Why not work with light if light is your interest? As perfection is not possible in materiality, truth not captured in words, the whole point lies in the paradoxical process of still trying to reach perfection through imperfect media. Or not trying to reach, as in imagining you'll ever succeed. But in the earnest attempt, viewers are reminded of perfection, the awareness...
*Untitled (Diptych)*, 2015. Oil on MDF. Each painting measures 42 x 53 cm. Tina Kryhlmann
Untitled, 2015. Oil on MDF, detail. 120 x 85 cm. Tina Kryhlmann

Untitled, 2015. Oil on MDF, detail. 46 x 37 cm. Tina Kryhlmann
of it is awakened. It is an extremely process-orientated process.

Besides, paint offers a wide scope of possibilities—that is, if you are willing to accept its rules and enter its world. You must surrender, as in all other forms of art and knowledge, in order to gain from it. If all you see is paint on canvas and remain resistant to the imagery, paint on canvas is all you will see (or whatever is in question: a pile of cardboard boxes).

(Such is also the case of Love. One must give in to it! Be it in relation to another being, or being itself. If you surrender to Love, it will flow through you endlessly. If you resist, you will remain on the brink of it, looking towards it, not understanding, not grasping it. When you surrender, you don't need to understand. You accept. You are it.)

I saw an exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. I was already filled to the brim with emotion from Marlene Dumas's vivid portraits of living as well as dead people in the show *The Image as Burden*. Vivid in the sense that it felt like she'd taken a layer of a person, put it on a sheet of paper or a canvas, and injected that person's innermost condition directly into my soul. Be it a baby newborn, a dead politician, or a prostitute in leather boots, crouching. Open and full of sores, I hurried through the next exhibition. I needed to find a shelter from all these impressions, from all the portraits and pictures preying on my soul, becoming me, as I became them—when I entered a room of Barnett Newman. His *Cathedral* immediately pulled me in and soothed every high-strung nerve. I fell in love. Six layers of blue oil and acrylic (magna) paint over a three-by-two-metre canvas provided just what the title promised: a cathedral. Here the paint lies thicker and there thinner as to let through more light. It fluctuated and became a vivid room I entered. After standing amazed in awe for some time, I resigned and retreated to the bench before it, next to two elderly ladies who kept disturbing the holy atmosphere of the painting with their chattering. I tried to ignore them, but, as I held my hand up to cover the one element of the painting I also found disturbing, but still interesting—a white strip of bare canvas, the “zip” of Newman, which actually had me believing there were two paintings for a moment—they noticed me. The one closest to me turned her head, met my eyes, and laughed—like, what on earth was I doing? She turned to her fellow old lady and their voices lowered before they finally left me in perfect silence before this mystery that's perfectly clear.

I stayed so long the guard started to give me a second look. When I tried to leave, I was drawn back in to have one more look, and then just one more. Eventually I went around so I wouldn't have to pass him again.

*As it was in the beginning, there was no division and no separation. ... Joy is Perception. Perception, reception and response are all the same. Sometimes*
we perceive, sometimes we receive, and
sometimes we respond, but it’s all the
same. It is all awareness of reality.”13

And sometimes we recognise, I
would add in a faint Platonic echo,
like Martin herself believed, that the
awareness of perfection is already in
the mind—the awareness of beauty
“known forever in the mind.”14

I was bicycling home one day
towards the end of summer. Rain
was heavy in the air but not yet
evident. To avoid it, I sped on. On
a small cycling path I rushed by a
wonderful work of art on the ground,
very painterly: circles upon circles
of white glimmering chalk on the
asphalt. It looked so elaborate and
distinguished, made with a steady
hand, by someone who knew exactly
what he or she was doing. Deliber-
ate. I had to turn. I thought I’d seen
the piece of chalk lying at the end of
the last drawn line, as some kind of
statement, maybe. It was not a piece
of chalk—it was a slug. The slug had
left a glistening trail of slime in tens
and tens of circles before walking (?)
out in a straight line from them. The
rain started falling on my neck and
coloured the cycling path darker
grey to stand out even more from
the pattern of a prayer that I felt this
was. I couldn’t help connecting it to
the Sufi dervish in his swirling dance
to attain trance and come into direct
contact with the divine.

In a circus tent on a grass slope
in the southeast of Sweden I saw
the same thing. It was a folk music
festival. Inside the tent was a band
playing traditional folk music com-
bined with contemporary tunes—a
very transcendent backdrop indeed.
In front of the stage was a toddler;
the evening sun entered through
an opening in the tent, the rays play-
ing on his hair, making him a golden
crown of toddler hair as he turns,
and turns, and turns. He gives off
cries of exaltation and joy, and shouts:
Jag snurrar! Jag snurrar!!! I’m swirling!
I’m swirling!!!
Marcus Matt

Mirror, 2015. Oil on canvas. 40 x 30 cm. Marcus Matt

For PB, 2015. Oil on canvas. 25 x 30 cm. Marcus Matt
I'm in the borderlands. The sky is thick with grey, but the light is as bright as on the sunniest of summer days. Yellow.

In a darkened room; need to let more light in, so I roll up the blinds. Two rectangles on the grid of the white brick wall, the shapes of plants drawn in shadows over the bed. Cold feet step over the threshold to the still fresh, cold floor. Pastel walls. The sun, a glass of wine—but only for a short while. A week somewhere else. In a feverish dance, you and I walk narrow alleyways and wide streets, over shiny violet cobblestones and black asphalt. Three hundred fifty-eight days here. Toast. The pattern on the white cereal bowl.

I listen to music, look out the window.

The search for the painting is undertaken by painting and seeing.

The painting begins with the first layer of gesso. It is given a surface and a depth, like skin over bone, muscles, and nerves. In priming, the raw materials undergo a transformation that, when completed, anticipates yet another transformation.

In my work, I use different tools. Some of these: luck, imagination, brushes, experience, mistakes.

I move in and out of attitudes and approaches, reminiscent of the way one moves while painting—standing close, backing up, going closer again. In my initial encounter with the canvas, I don't know what will happen. There is an energy and a will, and I allow it to lead me while remaining open to impulse. It's about being permissive. Playful. But it's never random. Each painting is created exactly in accordance with its own circumstances. One I was painting when, in the corner of my eye, I saw a bird zip past the window. Earlier today, I sat in a cramped cafe, next to a pair of strangers on their first date. Experiences are collected, without any passing of judgment. It's often the small things that make a painting.

Painting allows me to travel. To follow along, departing immediately to an unclear destination, an obscure place that resembles the place where memories gather. This place is permeated by a kind of shimmer, where landscapes, figures, thoughts, and emotions shift shapes and colours, where they are exposed onto each other. There, I try to capture something.

I take a step back, physically as well as mentally. I try not to judge, to look carefully to see what has happened, what I have done. Taking this step back also automatically places me within another experiential domain, where theory, history, and knowledge are all relevant.

The intuitive and critical processes act as counterweights to each other, establishing balance. Keeping me on the border.

“In ‘La Peau de chagrin,’ Balzac describes a table cloth ‘white as a bank of freshly fallen snow, with its symmetrical lines of place settings, crowned with their pale golden rolls of bread.’ ‘Throughout my youth,’ said Cézanne, ‘I wanted to paint this, this cloth of freshly fallen snow... I know now that you’re only allowed to want to paint the ‘symmetrical lines of place settings’ and ‘golden rolls of bread.’ If I paint ‘crowned,’ I’m done for, do you understand?’”

The painting is finished when my interest and energy abate. The dialogue between myself and the painting ceases; the painting grows quiet.

In a monograph on Forrest Bess, there is a quote from Jonathan Swift: “Vision is the art of seeing things invisible.” When I look at Bess’s visionary paintings, they seem tightly connected to reality. Both the visible reality and the “invisible” reality. The lived reality. They are small and very beautiful, but they have a very modest tone. I find something universally human in his works. As curator Claire Elliot explains:

After reading Carl Jung, he became convinced that studying the paintings, “integrating them” in Bess’s words, would reveal the “universal unconscious,” memories and experiences that exist in humanity’s subconscious, having been passed down through generation after generation. Bess’s works represent reality, become parts of reality, and as reality is subjective, so are the paintings, filtered through a transcendental mental state. Experiences of being and phenomena are reduced to their absolute essences, and the results are incredibly direct.

I am searching for a painting, but perhaps more than that, I am searching for the possibility to make a painting.

Searching for the possibility to make a painting leads me to experimenting with conditions, formats, attitudes, colours, materials. Sometimes it works. Sometimes it works for a long time.
There is something inherent to the canvas and its format, something immediately established, that demands a specific approach. A relation to me, as I work on the canvas, to paintings around it, to the room. Preparing a canvas imbues the material with a certain tension. Paper is different. There’s less room for worry. Lately, I’ve stuck to a relatively small format. A certain format allows certain paintings, while another format allows others. The smaller format has allowed me to do a lot of work quickly, then set it aside and start again—start over. It becomes a means of combating the enormous sense of doubt that appears before, during, and after I paint. A way of being permissive, although it requires effort. In the space in between all of these relatively rapid painting processes, I find a place to breathe.

Paint, paint over. Put away, forget, paint. Throw away, keep. The paintings I keep don’t end up how I thought they would, but rather how I want them to.

“You see it, you never understand completely, and you say: That’s it.”

Raoul De Keyser looked. He looked, and painted what he saw. In a video of his studio, you can glimpse a poster from one of his exhibitions, which bore the title “rondom de werkelijkheid.” This can be translated as both “about reality” and “around reality,” which nicely describes his position and relation to painting: both active and passive, acting and observing. Little things in everyday life, observed during a walk, or perhaps when absent-mindedly looking out the window, inspired paintings. The white chalk lines on a football field, a sock on a laundry line. Visually, De Keyser’s works sometimes resemble failed attempts at creating abstract images, but the goal here is clearly neither to make an abstract painting nor to “succeed.” Instead, they are always on the border. On
the border of a memory, on the threshold of reality. They vibrate, and they seem ready to collapse at any moment, but something holds them together, allows them to be. As poet and art historian Bernard Dewulf puts it:

The monkey-puzzle is an evergreen coniferous tree that cannot be climbed even by apes. Up close it looks raw and spiny, while at a distance it can almost seem velvety. This is an ambiguity that particularly suits the artist [De Keyser]: something similar can be said about many of his works.6

The work becomes everyday. The border between life and art is erased, along with the borders between paintings. I eventually discover that paintings have begun to rhyme with one another, to form a larger whole. Somebody said my paintings could have been diary notes.

I was thinking of last summer, when I spent a couple of months in a small town with J. I didn't know anybody else there. She was working quite a lot, so I would take walks around the lake and spend time in cafés, and I painted a little almost every day. When she came home, we would look at the paintings; sometimes she liked them, and sometimes she didn't. Then we would cook and maybe go out somewhere. I put my paintings in a box and didn't give them any thought. The box filled up and the summer was coming to an end, so I went to Malmo, since school was starting soon.

“Painting. Reading. Writing. Are among things to be done around the house. But you could also: Prepare food. Pick a fight with your sister. Check for ghosts. Make love. Phone the printer. Or the house of commons. Tease the cat. Play some music. Not that these activities couldn't also be pursued in and from other places. Yet, in the house they
may all happen, under one roof. So much can come to pass here on a single day that things feel like they happen not after, but next to one another, in parallel, at once.\textsuperscript{7}

Working at home, alongside everyday chores and distractions. It creates a closeness, an intimacy.

Unmounted canvases, stuck to the wall, edge to edge, sometimes worked on for decades. Next to a mirror, over a breakfast table. I don’t know Pierre Bonnard’s exact working habits, but judging by photographs of his home/studio and his paintings, he must have worked on several paintings at a time.\textsuperscript{8} Moving back and forth between them, bringing the picture out a little at a time. You can tell this from his “scratchy” way of painting, with many thin layers of paint. As the paint grows physically denser, the mood of the picture intensifies, and one experiences a sense of recognition. He painted from drawings made in the moment and later worked on for a long time in the studio, where they were transferred onto canvas with paint. Like a sort of evocation of memories.

The absence of an overall plan seems to have been what allowed Bonnard to work in fragments, gathering impulses, glimpses, sensations, and then merging them into a condensed representation of life.

I am searching for a painting and, perhaps to an even greater degree, for a possibility to paint, but the basis of all this work lies in a search for meaning.

It happened a year ago. Almost exactly a year ago. A blink of the eye, and it’s gone. One says hello and goodbye in the same sentence. Once the days have gone by, everything seems just as close, and just as distant, at the same time.

For me, painting becomes a way to fix points within the passage of time, which seems fuzzy and unclear. Getting an overview of and an insight into being. It takes enough concentration and presence to seemingly bend space and time. In one hand, I hold a thin thread reaching back into the past, and with the other, I’m trying to grasp something vague, something I’m perceiving in the air in front of me. What it is, I do not know yet.

\textit{“After some time and without any ambition I painted the first picture. An open picture that, in spring light, was reminiscent of the portal to a forgotten melancholy rose garden. In this atmosphere I painted the others in quick succession.”}\textsuperscript{9}

When Olav Christopher Jenssen paints, will seems to walk hand in hand with the paint; the action comes first. The paint becomes a medium through which thoughts and emotions are invoked. The previous painting gives rise to the next, anticipates the next. The pieces of the puzzle are put together, the knots come undone, risks are taken. It might be banal, but never superficial.

The time in between is vital. Lines and blobs of paint turn into signs.

The painting: a cryptic word or sentence in a language I don’t know, but I can sense its meaning.

The sensation of knowing nothing, but still understanding.

Joni Mitchell sings about the constant stranger.\textsuperscript{10} She’s singing about love, that is obvious. Loving the obscure, the partially concealed, the partially protruding. Mysterious figures that only appear as glimpses, or scents, or ancient memories, before disappearing again, as quickly as they came, leaving behind a distinct aftertaste.

... Some people rest when they are tired. Some people rest when they have nothing to do. Some people rest because they have no opportunity to do otherwise. Some people rest because they can.

\textit{You never rest with nature, it’s a hungry thing}

\textit{Every animal that you meet is hungry}

\textit{Not that I don’t believe in eating but I just want to make the distinction between art and eating}

\textit{This painting I like because you can get in there and rest}

\textit{The satisfaction of appetite happens to be impossible}

\textit{The satisfaction of appetite is frustrating}

\textit{So it’s always better to be a little bit hungry}

\textit{That way you contradict the necessity}

\textit{Not that I’m for asceticism but the absolute trick in life is to find rest.}\textsuperscript{11}
4 Bernard Dewulf, “‘You see it, you never understand it completely, and you say: That’s it’: On Raoul De Keyser,” in Raoul De Keyser: Replay, ed. Christoph Schreier (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2009), 54.
6 Dewulf, “You see it, you never understand it completely,” 57.
Miman 2, 2015. Oil on canvas. 200 x 200 cm. Nicklas Randau
Raintrain, 2014. Oil on canvas. 128 x 202 cm. Nicklas Randau
We Drilled a Hole

It was when we were investigating if the bedroom ceiling had really been lowered that I discovered the paintings.

We drilled a hole in the ceiling, and I shone the torch and stated what I saw. I have a vague recollection of angels and archers, but most of all I remember the excitement and our suspicion that there was something there. The torch never felt as important as it did then.

It wasn't stuffiness that was in the air, but a sense of charged energy, and the torch stuttered when the light dashed around the ceiling.

It's still there, the suspicion or hope that there is some other ceiling beyond the visible one.

The surroundings play a big part in it, and in our times, which sometimes—increasingly often—seem to be spinning too fast, with no time for reflection, art can be the spanner in the works that catches things and slows them down.

In Cy Twombly's painting, I sense an airiness that isn't emptiness. I know it as the "sudden revelation of a truth."1

Like the hidden ceiling in my childhood home, Twombly's airiness seems like an astounding response to a harboured hope. It's as though he opened painting up and released his energy through it. Once the ceiling has been drilled all the way through, it becomes obvious. The room is so much airier now: "it is like a subtle energy that allows one to breathe better."2

Airiness houses density.

The suspicion about the hidden ceiling was caused by the house's exterior; something didn't match up with the inside of the house. It looked bigger. We sensed that there was something hidden. There was a big gap between the flat inner ceiling of the bedroom and the rustic floor of the tower room.

"The poetic word is here an act without immediate past, without environment, and which holds forth only the dense shadow of reflexes from all sources which are associated with it."4

The word *vitsippa* tells me about something other than the actual flower bearing the name. It speaks of lazy associations that I've been given or created as a child, today, or yesterday.

The language and the language of form don't have the same density. The language of form includes associations, everything that is planted in or existing in the vicinity of the word. The language of form is immersed in painting and works there, while written language floats above it.

When I awaken from an inner world to an external one, I experience it as though I were moving between time zones. I live in a state of charged confusion. The pictures come like when I rub my eyes too hard. They remind me of a compass needle, in that they indicate a direction. Intuition is magnetic. Without the pictures, north and south couldn't be found.

In the transition between the inner and the external time zones, the inner light lags in the same way that sleep carries the morning. A delay occurs, and wherever I rest my eyes during this time, I experience a kind of jet lag. The pavement I stare at becomes my internal stage, and the airiness of painting is the sand or mud that I'm plodding through, in which you can see the tracks.

The paint is able to carry traces of what has lingered behind.

"blinds and rain"

"presence from afar"5

I pull the roller blinds all the way down over the window, to darken the room for when I'm going to sleep. They screen off the outside, but from the inside, like my eyelids when I close my eyes. There is an obvious vertical weight to their motion. That's a good thing at bedtime. Venetian
blinds, on the other hand, move erratically. You turn them with a string attached to a stick, and the motion is nowhere near as heavy. Mechanical motion, erratic function.

In Thomas Henriksson’s works, the paint is in such impastoed layers that it’s impossible to forget that what the eye is seeing is paint. But for that very reason, the gaze wanders intensely between the picture and the paint. The gaze moves erratically. Like when you turn Venetian blinds.

There are advertisement signs that shift pictures by revolving. In the shift between the pictures, they make no sense as adverts. But then, I can see how they work, see them moving, and see that a space exists between the pictures. I’m not deceived by them, and, most of all, they don’t try to deceive me, not in those specific moments. It’s brave of the advertisers to reveal the mechanics, to let on that the picture is not what it seems at first. The advertisement uses the picture for a very specific purpose: transforming it into money. But in these shifting advert signs, I understand the picture as the emergence that can “transform what is to be understood into something transformative in itself.” The gaze moves erratically. Like when you turn Venetian blinds.

It’s only when I believe in the picture, like the bird that flies into a window believing in the reflection of the landscape, that I am able to grasp that courage. I crash into the window, too, and when I do I catch a glimpse of the room behind the reflection, the illusion collapses, and the airiness is sensed.

I like it when it rains, because it makes it so obvious if I am inside or not. The view is blurred, but the feeling is clear.

Doubt has a hard time of it, when I stand there in the rain; I feel that I am here. Everything is amplified. It’s as though the whole world has made itself more alert and concentrated all of its senses to right here, where it’s raining. As if the universe were listening.

It’s a transition to a remembrance. A remembrance that I seek in my painting and that can touch me like the rain. I suddenly feel closer. It’s pouring down. Something as ethereal as the mood of a memory emerges, “like the waterfalls tremble already, inside the spring.”

However, things don’t seem to be as I hoped in my imagination; the distance (between me and that which is remembered) is not erased; on the contrary, it becomes clearer. I see this distance through inverted binoculars. Like when you see your house from a distance, on your way home. You see expansive fields, and long paths, and your gaze wanders along the distance.
Hemlöst färgskimmer, 2014. Oil on canvas, 184 x 243 cm, and The reading light (blue ochre), 2014. Oil on canvas, 117 x 146 cm. Installation view Bachelor exhibition, KHM Gallery, Malmö. 2015. Nicklas Randau
Through painting, I illuminate the otherwise shrouded path between reality and my inner picture. Then, I see the density within the airiness, like when a beam of sunlight illuminates the dust that hovers around in the air. 

"From the point of view of a quest for true knowledge, fantasies are treated as unmanageable and incomprehensible, as something that doesn’t really exist. The thing that fantasy obscures is the tension between the picture of that which can be produced beyond the given and the picture of that which can reproduce the given."  

I can feel the tension between the pictures of the given and of beyond the given, like the unreleased energy that was stored between the ceilings.  

Drilling a hole in the ceiling is to ask the imagination to “please get out of the way, out of the painting—you’re in the way of what I know is there.” The tension that has accumulated between the pictures, the density in the air.  

Several pictures live in the shadow. The background, for one, but also the picture the shadow gives. A third and more diffuse picture of the object casting the shadow is hinted at.  

In some of Pierre Bonnard’s paintings, I experience all of the pictures at once. But clearest of all is the diffuse shadow image, as though he had painted his own shadow into the picture.  

If the light of the sun represents reality and the house represents the gap in which the airiness and my internal image reside, then the shadow cast by the house becomes the painting. It’s in the backyard.  

With the sun for my torch, I seek the shadow cast by longing, in the light of distance.  

If I find myself in the gap, I can almost breathe the airiness.
Jonas-Petter Wallner

22.26, 2015. Oil on linen. 111 x 99 cm. Jonas-Petter Wallner
A Frame for a Painting

A red thread, whose colour permeates the things I have created.

A visible obstacle that must be dealt with, climbed over, and once at the top new inspiration can be found, new horizons.

Inspiration is a peculiar thing; with it I can start anything, and if it works it stays with me throughout the entire process, and then I'll have a result that I can feel happy with for several weeks, for months. But if it turns out that I couldn't realise my inspiration, life can become a dark cloud. Through the cloud it often takes time to find new inspiration.

Creative work is such a strong force that it is inevitable to lose one's perception of time and space in the moment of executing it; this force is based upon a balance of inspiration and execution through intuition. The hand and the brain work together, being driven by an interest in what is in front of them. If I work long enough with something seemingly uncontrollable, in the end, via experience of how that which is random appears, a form of control emerges, and the chance-based work is now framed by a newly discovered technique. Find new paths by searching for the unexplored; if nothing is searched for, we accomplish very little.

Every stroke of the brush and every shape in the image appear together in order to create an overall impression, in which every element can be seen as a single musician in an orchestra. Alone they are simply out of context; together they make the music.

“I think of my pictures as dramas; the shapes in the pictures are the performers. ... Neither the action nor the actors can be anticipated, or described in advance. ... It is at the moment of completion that in a flash of recognition, they are seen to have the quality and function which was intended.”

Within us we understand that the colour red means “stop.” In nature it often signifies that something is dangerous and often poisonous. We should direct our gaze towards whatever it is that is red. Fruit and berries have a colour so that animals will catch sight of and pay attention to them, devour them, so that the seeds can come to new places. Colour has a great inherent power of functionality.

Painting is to me primarily a tool that helps me visualise my thoughts and ideas, a kind of symbol that reminds me of who I am and that I am driven by this interest. My work is executed through the filter of my earlier knowledge; this knowledge often drives me to strive for new ways, new areas to gather information about techniques or theories. I look for the unseen in my process; the undefined is a challenge.

Luring oneself onto the sidetracks that appear while one moves forward in one's exploration has often given me—even if these sidetracks have taken up time and led me astray momentarily—some new feeling for a direction in my work, my main road.

Through the forest I find myself walking on a path with a clear desire for where I am going, where I am heading. Then suddenly I find a forking pathway; it seems more interesting. These branching paths rarely lead any further than to a non-place and there cease to exist, as if the sidetrack has always been a reminder that one is on a sidetrack. Once at the non-place, a truth hides concerning why you chose the sidetrack—you were curious. In this revelation, this non-place acquires a greater meaning in the form of an objective view of your own curiosity that led you there. Fascination is created in this moment for the present.

Through painting I can create worlds in which to immerse myself, to make my way to new places and to new understanding. Escapism.

Colour representations can function as direct decodings of nature: land, sky, horizon—the three divisions of a landscape painting to help us create an impression that we are looking at a landscape. The landmasses farther away from us shift their colours against the nuances of the sky, and in this way we can read distance in nature and in the image.

The objects placed in an image should have an affinity, a balance. At least my mind strives for some kind of perfection in composition. In my images I attempt—regardless of whether I am photographing, drawing, or painting—to put my interest in the image as close to the centre as possible. Taking out certain elements that in themselves may figure as single ideas/visual elements for a closer examination. Selecting
Entrance to a pathway, pipe dream, 2015. Oil on linen canvas. 111 x 99 cm. Jonas-Petter Wallner

Monument or some kind of sculpture, 2015. Oil on linen canvas. 111 x 99 cm. Jonas-Petter Wallner
a single shape, giving it greater space, so that an increased understanding of it can be achieved, so that a chance for renewed knowledge and experience will appear.

Composition is important to me. In nature I tend to see the ingenuity of what I perceive as the unplanned; the chaos in nature is nevertheless perfect accord. This cannot be recreated in an image, at least not in any form that I have found, for always the hand is there. An impression of myself and my own ideals of perfection quarrel with this impression I am depicting.

“Imagine an eye unruled by man-made laws of perspective, an eye unprejudiced by compositional logic, an eye which does not respond to the name of everything but which must know each object encountered in life through an adventure of perception.”

Back to the simple shape. Because what can you really add to a shape that sits alone, in the centre of the picture? No further balancing is necessary: the form speaks for itself in its simplicity.

There is an object before you; should you look at it or manipulate it to its final breaking point? It may be that you destroy what you are holding, but then at least you have new knowledge about how much manipulation it can take. It is like walking on a tightrope, a balancing act that demands small mental adjustments in order to steady the body so that the feet stay on their forward course. Fall, start over. Create a frame with one’s hands in order to limit the view to a smaller image. Deconstruct the motif and the composition down to its basic visual elements, bearing in mind the individual elements in the image, how they can be developed, such as how I paint a sky, light, shadow. Building, bridging ideas and knowledge into a journey towards the results. Meeting resistance where knowledge is insufficient. Working with one’s own interest. With interest there is motivation to answer resistances that the material gave me; here, an interest was born. Later, as I developed my skill, I became more specific in my colour quest. The paint’s resistance gave life to many questions. How does one mix a vivid purple colour? Through experimentation and accumulated experience with the material, my arbitrary colour choices began to be replaced with precise ones. I began to use more carefully chosen colours, often with a certain regard for contrast and affinity among the colours on the surface.

I became inspired by expressionism, more specifically Ernst Ludwig Kirchner’s nature paintings, as well as what I saw in the art books I found on him. I could see his joy in creating his visual world. His way of warping the motifs in a way that feels more realistic and akin to how I myself imagine my own visual memories of places I have chosen to remember.

The escapism I experienced in the video games I played as a child made a great impression on me and has acted as a great inspiration in my creation of images. This escapism that I myself have experienced so powerfully has also made itself felt in paintings such as those of Kirchner, Vincent van Gogh, and others.

The colour choices and simplifications of the impressionists remind me in some ways of early video-game graphics. Simplification was so important to the development of early computer game graphics because they needed to function within clear restrictions; that is, only a small number of polygons could be used to create the objects and characters of the game world. With time, this technology has become so incredibly good at representing the infinite details of reality: light, shadow, the wind that moves the grass and the crowns of trees. All these functions are coded in mile-long texts in order to create a convincing visual representation of our real world. What has happened is that the people behind these worlds, the creators, no longer work within the
restrictions that were present in the computer games from when I grew up, and for that reason I also feel part of the charm of video-game graphics has vanished today, when everything is possible. Or is it because I have grown older and can only appreciate computer games through sentimentality?

In order to be a creator of worlds within computer-game development today, one must have a long education and knowledge of the topic in question. I would like to compare the game designers of today with the nature painters of romanticism who studied the topic and materials for many years before they were even given permission to paint.

**Trees**

Trees were probably the first motif that I used often, as often as every time I was in my studio, every time I was about to begin with a new painting. Using the same motif over and over again allows me to erase the limits of what that motif can be, how it must look. Eventually my trees, spruces, no longer looked like a natural representation, but more like a deconstruction of a spruce. I looked, with the aid of physical movement, for something that felt like a spruce. Closer observation of branches gave me the realisation that these trees are incredibly complex in their details, and their realistic representation demands far too much of me to enjoy the creation of the images. Therefore, their simplification was more interesting. How much of all the repeating needles and cones of which a spruce consists could I remove and still understand it was a spruce I was looking at? Repeated movement became very important; from the top I worked my way downwards, with successively greater strokes, to the bottom, the trunk. A bit of the same decoding that I feel Kirchner was doing in his nature paintings, including with spruces, which were often present in his nature motifs.

"A painter paints the appearance of things, not their objective correctness; in fact he creates new appearance of things."  

Confront oneself in the creative act, because one must run through with oneself what is supposed to happen next, and why it is meant to happen. The moment is realised by acting according to the intuition that comes with the inspiration; when the moment ceases to act through a certain flow, we lose that moment forever. If it is possible to pick up this lost moment again, after a longer period of time, that would be good, but it is not possible. If I try to pick up the same process that was connected to that specific moment of execution, then I do not recreate it, but rather add on to it via an interpretation of what I can remember from that moment. Instead of putting myself in the same scenario, a set of rules are created. Rules that I should follow based on the interpretation of these earlier thoughts. This is troubling, because it is not possible to re-experience the person I was yesterday. Even if a similar sensation can be reached, it will have degenerated. Repetition became a tool after I had seen its effect on my mind.

Rituals can help in getting close to something that was executed earlier—if this was executed by way of rituals in the mind. Small-scale rituals help me think in this way—a form of exercise of the mind to remember small details that make up the whole, the determining factor when the action is to bear fruit. Like fiddling with something, a pen between my fingertips, to think of the monotony, to force myself to get caught in the moment when the repetitions start over from zero, opening doors to other, new places in the mind.

Josef Albers's series *Homage to the Square* (1950–76) is a search for meaning in colour. Albers leads us into a game of colours, into our vision and its functions regarding how we decode colour in images. In his book *Interaction of Color*, he speaks of the importance of various relationships among colours; how a certain colour can be changed with the aid of another colour in a different nuance. He provides detailed examples in his chromatology of how, using simple means, we can create little tests for ourselves, in order to produce sympathy and understanding in our use of colour. The repetition of the motif in *Homage to the Square* I see as necessary for Albers to be able to continuously study the implication of colours on each other, without having to spend his energy looking for new motifs.

Tibetan monks, mandalas, the moment, the present, repetition in order to reject a result, no satisfaction from being able to see the work again. Instead, the meditation in the moment of execution is what is important, the awareness of the act. The process speaks for simplicity, a monotonous ritual that has been repeated, a function. By letting go of the reins and setting aside the creative impulse, one can open doors to a careful execution and the care that is necessary for the result. At first I dismissed Gerhard Richter's scraped paintings as "production." But after seeing documentation of him working in his studio, I now see his innovation, his tool made to produce fields of colour. I see how he, with the aid of this tool, controls his own destiny; that is what he wants to do. Richter fulfils the purpose of the tool while he is using it, in fine, precise gestures, making small adjustments of pressure against the surface to create fields of colour that are not at all the product of coincidence. The fields of colour that emerge are the result of the relationship between body and tool (this is how it always works, regardless of whether it can be called chance: there is always something left of the gesture).

Poul Gernes left the hole from the nail in the centre of his paintings of
circles. The hole from the nail is an omission of what has occurred, the gesture. He fastened the nail at the centre so it could function as a tool to make the sketch for the circles. Afterwards, he followed the lines of the circles with great precision in order to fill the spaces in-between with the vivid colours he so often used. This method I have adopted: a dance of exactness in order to follow a line, in which I have to take care all the time to keep the colour on its side of the line. The method provides an almost meditative state.

**Tom & Jerry. The End**

In the episode *Bad Day at Cat Rock* (1965), produced and directed by Chuck Jones, Jerry has a need to become the target of the cat’s instinct. But when Tom’s failure in the hunt for Jerry at the construction site becomes too great and can no longer sustain Jerry’s wish to be hunted, the situation becomes intolerable for our beloved mouse. Jerry now kicks the first available pebble, in an act of sheer boredom, caused by Tom’s inability to make any progress in the hunt. The stone ends up in a nearby can of green paint. Jerry is immediately thrilled to see a way out of the situation. He runs up to the can and paints something with a brush on a board that he turns towards us. On the board are the words “The End.”
My thoughts were pretty clear. There was just that tiny spot at the back of my neck where something was vibrating. Like the light tapping of an insistent, invisible finger. Skin and hair were trembling. Old-fashioned is not a character trait I have ever identified with, but there it was. The word had made a couple of despondent beats of its wings and collapsed lifelessly on the table in front of me. With its back pitifully exposed, it quivered accusingly on the stack of papers it had landed on. I struggled not to gawk—I think I even smiled and nodded back in understanding—but the handless tapping continued.

There, in the middle of the school library, surrounded by my classmates, my principal, and an indefinable smell borne of hours of energetic page-flicking, I realised I was lost. Three years of carefully avoiding the truth had eventually failed to carry me further than this. I know nothing about art. The first recognisable feeling that took hold was shame. It had never occurred to me that someone would challenge my ignorance like this, but my own text had truly painted me into a corner. In arrogant detachment I was moralising about the self-aggrandising position of art and managed to generalise so violently about photographic processes and practices that the skin of my poor fellow student, who had been asked to be the respondent, crawled with aversion. My spirits sank in pace with the increasing colour in his cheeks. The crashed word was just a well-placed full stop. I have an incredibly old-fashioned approach to art.

What started out as a healthy suspicion of the concept of art schools had, as my undergraduate studies progressed, condensed and dried up into a hard knot in my intestines. I almost felt like I had cheated my way into the academy. Everybody else seemed to know what was going on around them. And especially what was going on inside of them. They
Thermal, 2015. Image recorded with a thermal imaging camera. 100 x 86 cm. Line Axman
had already accepted art as a premise for their development and used the concept to support and explain their many projects as something other than accidental and frivolous whims. For me, every single step was a challenge because my foot didn’t care what it was stepping on, my ankle didn’t feel like choosing a direction, my big toe pulled away from the guidance of the authorities, and my smaller toes thought more about the enthusiasm at home over my having been admitted to the programme than about moving forward at all. Either I had ended up in the completely wrong place or everyone else was just stumbling around too. Perhaps the energetic arm movements were just a cover for their own deteriorating balance. I decided to work my way out of my doubts. Metal casting, film course, philosophy seminar, sound course, 3D course, performance course, animation course, art history, photography. If I completed all of the assignments perfectly, then perhaps I would be able to grasp what this art was all about.

It didn’t work. A completed assignment is only interesting until you understand the initiating question. Art does not operate at all according to that logic, and for that reason I continually failed. I thought that was how one worked conceptually. An assignment, an idea, a concept, a work of art. While Haruhiko Kawaguchi’s vacuum-sealed lovers fascinated me, it was first and foremost the crazy idea that made an impression—not the distorted bodies that cling to each other in a split second of repressed fear of death and extreme intimacy. But these photographs are not just the results of a crazy idea. They are more than a gimmick; they activate a primal human fear of being restrained without any apparent escape routes. Such a strong reaction cannot be produced as the result of an assignment, no matter how well it has been completed. The fact that I even feel the need to address this underlines how confused I have been. I was ensnared by that school mentality in whose company I have spent so many years.

It is easy to react to something that happens outside of oneself. When a professor asks if you are in control of what you are doing and glances doubtfully into your studio, it’s easy to assume the role of the rebel. That is how I found inspiration to work when I did not have an assignment to complete. These so-called works did not arise from a need to bare my innermost feelings or explore new artistic domains. They arose out of defiance. And to a young, Scandinavian person like myself—who has never had to put my foot down or shout for my rights—that is a powerful feeling. It is an intoxicating, temporary megalomania. Even if the criticism is well founded, an incredible energy emerges to work in precisely the opposite direction. Sometimes the onrushing will in itself is enough to convince other people about the value of the work. But then, does it really matter where the “creative powers” come from? After all, defiance is a sincere emotion just like wonder or fear. So maybe my process isn’t so different from those who turn their gaze far inwards and expose their souls in their art? On the other hand, I don’t find any peace in creation. It gives me no satisfaction until I can show it to others and see their reactions. Witnessing the excitement of another person trumps both my own doubts and those of professors, and I can finally double underline the result with a complacent smile. It makes me feel grubby to think that way. Instead of creating art, I am producing confidence boosters at the state’s expense. Until that little tapping at the back of my neck begins again …

When I read the reflections of my fellow students, I encountered a strong belief in the potential of art. It was not a superior smugness that characterised the texts but rather an unshakeable faith in the need to engage with and practice art. Their works do not try to convey a conceptually formulated message, but are necessary outlets for an inherent force. Art touches them, challenges them, and takes them to new places. Their practices seemed to be about gaining a deeper understanding of the world, of reality, and I used to think that was my motivation as well. But the more I surround myself with art, the less truth and reality the world seems to consist of. At least I am not getting any closer to it through my concepts and contrived projects. And if anyone nevertheless becomes interested in what I do, it has to be because of the projects’ affinity to visual commercials and popular culture. Those areas influence me far more than art exhibitions have ever done, because they work so directly towards the consumer or viewer. It is difficult for me to discard that mentality, and the creativity that goes into those fields is, in my opinion, at least as exciting as what one usually calls art.

Now I’ll try to remember what I have learned. Right—listen to this: The artist works with his or her body as a finely tuned sensory apparatus, which does not necessarily give an easily readable result. The work of art is the gauge needle that flashes and vibrates and points both outwards and in towards the innermost machinery of the apparatus. What has triggered the movement is not certain, but it happens at any rate, and a passer-by can then choose to relate to it or ignore it. Perhaps someone taps on the glass of the gauge to make the needle settle down, or registers and makes a note of the reading. This is often outside the control of the artist. But why turn on the instrument at all, if no one has an urgent need to run it? It uses up an incredible amount of energy, and in addition it contributes to the already massive soundscape.
Thermal b, 2015. Image recorded with a thermal imaging camera. 100 x 86 cm. Line Åxman
In my original text I claimed (which was met with understandable scepticism) that the needle of an art photographer is so similar to that of a commercial photographer, a photojournalist, or a snapshot-loving private individual that they are easily confused. They all vibrate on the scale of two-dimensional, visual expressions and try to convey a tiny bit of the world through a mechanical device. One needle might be made from an analogue material, another from a digital one, but that does not make any critical difference in the oscillations to my untrained eye. The intentions behind the photographic disciplines are completely different, but they are subject to the same limitations and rudimentary considerations. Among other things, they all have to relate to a long tradition of representational photography and take a stand in regard to concepts like authenticity and staging. But now, when photographs to an increasing degree occur in autonomous swarms through camera phones and intermingle with all kinds of serious media, their authority is undermined. The frequencies of the deviations vary, the needles bump into each other. The abundance carries the limits along with it, and I am no longer capable of differentiating clearly between the individual practices. For that reason I wanted to talk about photography as a mass, even if it might feel a bit unfair. It is so common nowadays for images to be essentially created during post-processing that I have developed a certain photographic paranoia. It has become a chaotic no man's land, where there are no unbreakable rules left.

My own thermographic images also oscillate somewhere in this area. The technology is a warped development of the camera, whereby instead of light waves, longer wavelengths are registered—that which we experience as heat. The result is an abstract explosion of colour that, unlike conventional photography, does not depend on any expectation of realism. As such, some of my original frustrations with the limitations of photography become irrelevant when working with this bastard technology. I no longer have any reason to quote John Taylor on the “truth-value” of the image or to worry about my responsibility in relation to the subject. It is no longer a recognisable world. It is another form of no man's land. An uninhabited wasteland.

A sunbeam on a backrest becomes a burning hot centre in a sea of dark shades. By making use of the direct and instinctive association between colour and temperature, my thermographic images may perhaps convey a more physical experience than a photograph. Photography mostly relates to the eyes, the gaze. Thermography relates to the whole body. But is there really any purpose to presenting to people something as banal as temperatures or in telling people something they already know? Even if they instinctively enter into the expected associations, do they gain something from this? Is my personal, childish joy at a sunbeam not the most trivial thing to communicate further?

Tap tap tap.

Finally I have created something—neither in defiance nor for the completion of an assignment—and then it still seems completely trivial. I would love to see my thermographic images on a homey wall above a battered IKEA sofa, but what value have I really added to the world?

The apparatus ceases its incessant analysis and the creature turns her head and looks out through the mass of working bodies. There are so many people, so many individual needles and oscillations. I hope they have found something that weighs more heavily than my sunbeam. It has never been a problem for me to imitate the artistic apparatus, but I have never had anything really important to communicate. There is no urgent, all-important need in me to create—it has always been a by-product of other circumstances. In school I claimed creative displays were a liberating space, when in reality they were simply an easy way to get attention. At preparatory school, artistic expression was a necessary tool for connecting with my fellow students, and their overwhelming passion for art made me partake in their dreams. When they applied for academies, I too wrote an application. And now I'm standing here, lost and exposed in all my insufficiency, and wishing that I was religious—or at least a bit crazy—so I wouldn't have to justify my artistic choices. (If self-pity were a more durable construction material, I would have plenty to work with.)

The sensation of the invisible hand is stronger now; tap, tap on my neck right there, where the head is connected. It reminds me of an exercise with a lime fruit. Since that exercise I haven't been able to smile naturally. Every time I form a kind smile, my face asks me why, and I let it fade. It's a bit uncanny. The exercise was supposed to “loosen up our minds” and put us in touch with a primal force inside of ourselves. When it was over we left our limes and the mental baggage we no longer needed. I don't believe there is a true core in a person, only layers and deposits from our interactions with other people. But the thing I left behind with that lime now feels chillingly tangible. It is as if I have broken off a small corner of my carefully constructed sense of self, and now it oozes with metaphorical matter. The fracturing of my artistic role is probably just a part of the process.

And now what?

In this moment—at the very deadline of my new text—I am planning an art exhibition at a small gallery. In spite of all my doubts and all my reservations, I immediately accepted when they asked me. I am even looking forward to it. The
Thermal, 2015. Image recorded with a thermal imaging camera. 100 x 86 cm. Line Åxman
recognition that I cannot keep working with art has loosened the knot in my stomach and has given me room to breathe. I don't have a bad conscience with respect to the people who have hired me, because they have themselves found something interesting in my works—I have not tried to delude them. If something in my images or videos resonates with them, then there is no reason to belittle it just because I don't consider it to be art. If the art context gives the works an opportunity to migrate out into someone's home and end up in their true and perfect places, then I will be very happy. In the future I will probably try to reach that goal through other platforms, but time will tell. Isn't there some nonsense about growing up and learning to take control? Not yet? Oh, OK then. But now I have at least realised some of my limitations, and that opens up a world of new opportunities.
Kawaguchi’s Zatsuran (2009–) is an ongoing photographic project of a markedly romantic character—according to the artist himself. He has held countless exhibitions both in and outside of Japan and has, with his images, contributed to countless magazines under the title Fresh Love—a possible misquote of Fresh Love, which refers to the motif of vacuum-sealed commodities in a supermarket. (Fresh Love is the title he uses himself on his website, http://www.photographerhal.com/eng.html.)

In my original text, I connected Ferdinand de Saussure’s literary theory of the duality of signs and the serious effect that, for example, photography has on our understanding of the world. We use conventional words as common denominators in order to talk about things we have not directly witnessed and to discuss abstract topics or events that have not yet occurred. But there is a difference between the word/sign that we use and the concrete thing or the situation to which it refers. What is quite specifically referred to in the consciousness of the sender is, through the word, understood on a more conceptual plane by the receiver, who does not have a direct connection to the concrete event. My contention is that the photograph has a similar relationship to reality as the words in Saussure’s theory, and thus contributes to a processing and change of the signified (the concept/content of the words), and as such influences our understanding of the world. Our brains are quick to make visual reference to the words we hear, and thus another, even greater distance emerges between the real event that is described to us and the understanding we get of that event. If someone says “starving children,” I instinctively think of one of the Red Cross aid campaigns in Africa; if someone says “terrorist,” I think of an Arab man with a long beard from the news. This is dangerous. Access to more photographs make the image on the retina more nuanced, but it is never possible to reach clarity. After all, reality is not clear; the world cannot be understood completely through human eyes. Art can make relationships more nuanced, but it cannot in that way cut through to a common truth.

I see a connection between Steve Reich’s Pendulum Music (1968) and my own relationship to art. When I move around in the world, I encounter something that interests me—woohoo!—and then it vanishes again. I stop in front of an exciting work of art—woohoo!—and then move on. I turn on the radio—woohoo!—and suddenly a news item or a piece of music resonates with the work from before, and in that moment the earlier sounds have a significant value added to them. I find it difficult to care for gallery spaces because they try to distance themselves from everyday spaces. They try to screen art from all the potential contexts it could be a part of, all the sounds with which it could create rhythms. This is of course not really possible, but that topic would fuel a longer discussion. “It’s the ultimate process piece. It’s me making my peace with [John] Cage. It’s audible sculpture. If it’s done right, it’s kind of funny.” Steve Reich, “Steve Reich on Pendulum Music,” Perfect Sound Forever, 2000, http://www.furious.com/perfect/ohmreich.html.

The Danish newspaper Politiken was this year able to report on a sensationally large number of disqualifications at the World Press Photo competition because of extensive image editing, which altered the content of the images nominated for the finals. Elisabeth Lenskjer Eskildsen and Teis Jeppe Görtz, “World Press Photo diskvalificerer 20 procent af sine finalist” [World Press Photo disqualifies 20 percent of its finalists], Politiken, February 13, 2015, http://politiken.dk/kultur/medier/ECE2546223/world-press-photo-diskvalificerer-20-procent-af-sine-finalister/.

“The loss of faith in photography is supposed to be an accurate recognition of its limited truth-value. … But all textual evidence is suspect. … Despite the blurring of boundaries, our belief in language’s and photography’s capacity for reference is part of our contract with the world. This contract may be suspended or broken altogether, but no break is without consequences and there are circumstances when it is unacceptable. Factual accounts place a greater moral burden on readers than fictive descriptions, no matter how graphic they are. The existence or absence of a real world, real body, real pain, makes a difference.” John Taylor, “Stock Photos,” in Creative Camera: 30 Years of Writing, ed. David Brittain (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 297.

How would one experience the world if each morning one woke up to the proposition that a tepid cooking plate in reality looks like a distant galaxy? I have not explored my own home in a long time, but with a thermal camera in my hand it feels like the most natural thing to do. Something is moving just underneath the visible surface that we are constantly aware of through our bodies, but to which we rarely allocate a major share of our consciousness. By illustrating heat to the eyes, the instrument creates a completely new version of the world. It is not so far removed from photography: “Earlier tonight, I said the photograph isn’t what was photographed, it’s something else. It’s about transformation. And that’s what it is. That hasn’t changed, largely. But it’s not that simple. Let’s put it this way—I photograph what interests me all the time. I live with the pictures to see what that thing looks like photographed. I’m saying the same thing, I’m not changing it. I photograph what interests me. I’m not saying anything different, you see.” Garry Winogrand, “An Interview with Garry Winogrand,” interview by Barbara Diamonstein, in Visions and Images: American Photographers on Photography (New York: Rizzoli, 1981), 184.

Observation: the Danish version of this text contains the Danish word for “I” eighty-three times and only thirty-six instances of the word for “art.”
PhD Candidates

Rosa Barba
Matthew Buckingham
Alejandro Cesarco
Mats Eriksson
Marion von Osten
Andrea Ray
Imogen Stidworthy
A lexicon is supposed to be an explanation of words that may have an unknown meaning. Most of the ones elected here are quite simple and straightforward, so why include them in such a list? They were chosen because they allow for a way into thinking about my work. Some words that could help understand my practice. In this sense, each of them gain in this context a very distinct definition, which cannot be compared to one found in an ordinary dictionary. It has thus become a fictional lexicon, somewhat anarchic, speculative, and subjective.

—Rosa Barba on her PhD project: A Fictional Library

BIO

Rosa Barba studied at the Academy of Media Arts Cologne and has, since spring 2013, been a PhD candidate in Fine Arts at the Malmö Art Academy. Barba has had residencies at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam; the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas; Iaspis, Stockholm; and Artpace, San Antonio, to name a few.


Recent group shows: 56th Venice Biennale; Hong Kong Art Centre; 8th Berlin Biennale; MASS MoCA, North Adams, US; MAXXI Museum, Rome; Akademie der Künste, Berlin; Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz; La Cinémathèque française, Paris; WIELS, Brussels; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Swiss Institute, New York; International Triennial of New Media Art 2014, Beijing; 19th Biennale of Sydney; International Biennial of Contemporary Art of Cartagena de Indias, Colombia; Liverpool Biennial 2010; 52nd and 53rd Venice Biennale; 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale; and Biennial of Moving Images, Geneva, among others.

Barba’s work is represented in numerous international collections and her work has been published in Rosa Barba: White Is an Image (2011), Rosa Barba: Time as Perspective (2013), and Rosa Barba: In Conversation With (2011).
There are many “senses” of the past. Orthodox history (the type that nation-states require in their school systems, the type that is said not to have or to need any theory behind it) relies on three defining concepts: 1) anachronism—the sense that the past is different from the present; 2) a concept of evidence with agreed upon rules for deciding what constitutes evidence and what does not; and 3) a concept of causality—the principle that everything has a cause and the proposition that these causes can be revealed if the right evidence is found. This is the logic that drives our dominant form of history, the form that accompanies colonisation and globalisation. By extension, this logic is also the basis for the temporality that everyone in the world now either lives inside or alongside. Science is characterised as the discovery of causation through empirical analysis of evidence. Orthodox history writing tries to move closer to science, adapting its methodology, in order to distance itself from fiction and art. However, science still has no definition of time and there is no access to the past outside of language. Whether or not it legitimates itself through scientific claims, orthodox history transmits knowledge by holding up experience as evidence. But experience is already an interpretation of events that is in need of interpretation itself. What happens if, instead of using evidence to explain, the relation is reversed and explaining evidence becomes the task of writing history? Negotiating with and dealing in facts in this way sweeps aside orthodox history’s false conception of language as direct, referential, and transparent. History writing is then placed in a productive position somewhere between science and literature close to journalism—a discipline that shares many of the same ethical questions and responsibilities for making truth claims. This position also allows the products of history writing to function more as objects or tools with which to test reality. Without collapsing into relativism, the similarities to novel writing and art making can be made clear and useful.

Henry James left his novel *The Sense of the Past* (London: W. Collins Sons, 1917) unfinished. In 1900 he abandoned his protagonist, a young American historian named Ralph Pendrel, on the doorstep of an inherited eighteenth-century London townhouse and on the verge of a fantastic time-travel voyage in which Pendrel would trade places with one of his own ancestors. James may have given up on the story because of the apparent incongruity with his own writing sensibility, or perhaps because of the potentially unsolvable time-travel puzzle he had created for himself in the narrative. In any event, the unresolved and incomplete state of the work leaves it open as fertile ground for reflecting on the task of the historian and on the transference of one discipline into another. My doctoral project uses the premise of James’s novel to explore the potential for bringing a critical sense of history and historiography into visual art and for using the field of visual art to generate experiences for viewers that must be explained.

Matthew Buckingham studied at the Art Institute of Chicago; received a BA from the University of Iowa and a MFA from Bard College; and attended the Whitney Independent Study Program. Utilising photography, film, video, audio, writing and drawing, Matthew Buckingham’s work questions the role that social memory plays in contemporary life. His projects create physical and social contexts that encourage viewers to question what is most familiar to them. Recent works have investigated the Indigenous past and present in the Hudson River Valley; the “creative destruction” of the city of St. Louis; and the inception of the first English dictionary. His work has been included in solo and group exhibitions at ARC/Musée d’art moderne de la Ville de Paris; Camden Arts Centre, London; Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Hamburger Bahnhof National Gallery, Berlin; Kunst-Werke, Berlin; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museum Moderne Kunst, Vienna; Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Whitechapel Gallery, London; and Whitney Museum of American Art, New York. He was a 2003 recipient of the DAAD Artists-in-Berlin Fellowship.
Alejandro Cesarco’s doctoral project proposes to braid together his interests in self-fiction and translation through a number of discrete, cumulative projects leading up to the making of a feature-length film. The film, and the filmic process, will help him to articulate the significance of storytelling both as a fundamental social-ordering structure and as a means of making our experiences intelligible to ourselves. In doing so, Cesarco would like to interrogate the ideological afterlives of stories, how we tell them, and what hold they have upon us in the way we narrate ourselves to ourselves and to each other. In other words, how does the autobiographical form mediate experience?

And, conversely, how is biography a translation of pre-existing narratives? In this sense, autobiography becomes a fictive form, as the narratives we use and that guide us are not only shared, but infused with imaginative ghostly longings. Translation hence becomes the agency through which the binding force of our master narratives is relaxed. It is through this agency that we reconceive the stories that determine us. But how does translation expose the ideological limits of the autobiographical form? And how does translation as topic and methodology function as a metonymy for the creative process itself?

Allegory, or, The Perils of the Present Tense, 2015. Still from 16 mm film transferred to digital, colour, no sound. 9:30 min. Alejandro Cesarco


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*. These exhibitions addressed, through different formats and strategies, his recurrent interests in repetition, narrative, and the practices of reading and translating.

Cesarco is Director of the non-profit arts organisation Art Resources Transfer in New York.

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*Allegory, or, The Perils of the Present Tense*, 2015. Still from 16 mm film transferred to digital, colour, no sound. 9:30 min. Alejandro Cesarco

Cesarco’s most recent video is composed of a fragmented text, appearing as inter-titles, interspersed with snapshot-like images of memories. Throughout the work conjectures about the past are balanced against promises of the future. By talking about the past the artist is also talking about his wants or desires. In this sense, talking about the past becomes a way of talking about the future; of fashioning a future.
Allegory, or, The Perils of the Present Tense, 2015. Still from 16 mm film transferred to digital, colour, no sound. 9:30 min. Alejandro Cesarco
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Allegory, or, The Perils of the Present Tense, 2015. Still from 16 mm film transferred to digital, colour, no sound. 9:30 min. Alejandro Cesarco
Mats Eriksson is an artist, working mostly with photography within his preoccupation with architecture, living spaces, and social issues. Since spring 2007, he has been a PhD in Fine Arts candidate at Malmö Art Academy, where his research has evolved into two longer narrations, of which the first completed, “Skärholmen, Sweden,” was recently exhibited at Gallery APA in Stockholm (2014) and the Latvian Museum of Photography (2013); the second, “It was a time when everything seemed possible—All power to the Imagination!” will be shown at Kulturhuset, Stockholm, in autumn 2015. Some of his projects have also been presented as artist books, including Jakriborg—Architecture as Provocation (2009) and Indian Grammar: A Modernist Experiment in Postcolonial India (2005).
Mats Eriksson’s research takes its interest in urban issues of city planning, as it has been practised in Stockholm and as observed from two different time periods, from the 1960s modernisation to contemporary times. He focuses his investigation on two different case studies: the community centre Gamla Bro (1969–72), looking at the social and political ideas of an allaktivitetshus; and the illegally constructed trailer park of Kontoret (The Office) (2007–11). The research is built upon the personal narratives of people engaged in counter-activities at these two temporary locations, using the dialogue as a method and as part of knowledge production.

Urban Walk: Gamla Brogatan 27

I decide to set off on an urban walk around what was once Allaktivitetshuset Gamla Bro. The building at Gamla Brogatan 27 is still there today, having survived the wave of demolitions that swept across the inner city of Stockholm in the 1960s. At one time, this was an important street, which connected the centre of Stockholm to Kungsholmen, the “old bridge street.”

These days the street is rather in a state of dozing. Despite its central location, stretching as it does between the bustling Vasagatan (close to Stockholm Central Station and Casino Cosmopol) and the square Hötorget (where the covered market, the PUB department store, and the city’s concert hall are located), there really isn’t much happening on Gamla Brogatan anymore. There are only a few people moving about it when I visit, all either seemingly engaged in sporadic window shopping or purposefully making their way towards the central station with their luggage.

In the mid and late 1970s, however, this was one of the hotspots for youth fashion in Stockholm. A number of jeans shops and fashion boutiques, mainly targeting the youth market, were located along the street. There would often be a long line of teenagers winding down the street as they queued up, waiting to get inside.

These days, Gamla Brogatan is a quiet and virtually empty pedestrian street. Despite this, there are still some remnants of the fashion high street it used to be. The Sko-Uno shoe shop, now more than forty years old, is still here. Some of the jeans shops from that time are also still around, across the road from Sko-Uno. Although Impo is no longer here, there are still some army surplus shops left, selling culled army clothes and other items.

But something seems to be afoot. In some of the shop windows, signs are posted to announce imminent plans...
to open a large shopping mall of some kind, but they don’t fully state what plans have been made. Later on, one of the owners of the army shop Indiana Store tells me that a large corporate group recently bought a number of the properties along the street, with the intention of marketing the connected buildings as a shopping and leisure events area. Whatever that means, I think to myself. I also find out that the rents are extremely high in the whole area, despite the fact that most tourists and other curiosity seekers don’t find their way here anymore. The idea is probably for this grand restructuring to make the street more attractive, which would eliminate the independent shops that still remain. At the very least, this future development is a source of great concern for the shop owners I speak to, and they can’t see how they will be able to stay.

I make some notes in my notepad

The market creates the city.

I cross the words out and then write

The market controls the city.

A lot of time has passed since both the street and Norrmalm were gentrified. The whole neighbourhood was actually slated to be erased from the map entirely. The plan was to replace it with a new large cluster of high-rise office buildings by Norra Bantorget, but these grand ambitions came to nothing when it turned out that the city’s large construction loans threatened the continued financing of the project, and the foreign hotel chains that had been approached for the project pulled out of the planned hotel complex at Brunkebergs torg. The costs spiralled, and in the end the buildings were renovated instead. Today, the street life here has changed in order to adapt to market demands, and the people living in the area are not the same class as before.

—What does the actual site generate today, in terms of traces, memories, and past events that occurred here?

The building that once housed allaktivitetshuset Gamla Bro is now home to one of the outlets of the telephone company 3, a small sushi restaurant, and the Blue Fox and Tattoo. When I arrive at the street, I see two black flags hanging from the building. But unlike during the building occupation at Gamla Bro, the flags aren’t flying in support of anarchism. Instead, the number “3” is clearly visible on one of the flags, and on the other one I see a skull with the words “Blue Fox” written above it. On the Blue Fox website I find claims of it being “Stockholm’s largest alternative shop” selling “rock, metal and punk clothing”, which has “the clothes, attitude, and music that give you everything you need for your alternative lifestyle.” Here, the alternative lifestyles have become a well-tried business plan.

Fabegé has owned the premises for about ten years. This property company focuses its activities on rental and management of centrally located office premises, especially in the “fast-growing districts” in the Stockholm area, as it puts on its website. Among other things, Fabegé has recently signed a twenty-year deal with SEB bank, which will be leasing property in the newly developed Arenastaden district in Solna.

I booked a meeting with the real estate manager at Fabegé in order to get access to the building. When I explain why, P tells me that Fabegé would like to see the material that I end up publishing, seemingly in order to determine if they can use it to add cultural value to the building for future tenants. I find myself wondering if Fabegé will actually be happy about the things I’m investigating. But I understand that this proximal history of what once occurred in this building—including positive ingredients such as progressive music, theatre, and art events, but also negative such as political ambivalence, drug use, marginalised groups, and police raids—will give the landlord an infusion of cultural capital. I realise that the things this building once stood for (the struggle of the alternative movements against the commercialisation of the inner city) will simply lend the building an extra “taste of the radical,” and as such add commercial value to it. But these days, Gamla Brogatan 27 has become a rather anonymous building on a back street in the inner city.

P has granted me permission to film inside the empty properties. I’ve decided that I want to document and take in what the building has become today. When I see the flags, my mind’s eye recalls the newsreel where other flags were raised from inside the building. I sense the lingering memories, so distant from the present, that have become romantic notions of a dramatic past. These memories have also become integrated into my own perceptions. And as such, they sometimes obstruct the more sober facts that emanate from the building today.

The renovation of the building that was undertaken during the latter half of the 1980s has left unmistakeable marks on the interior. When I see the marble details and mirrored hallway, I am welcomed by an air of exclusivity. Previously, the only way to access the upstairs floors was by a small spiral staircase, but now a lift has been installed. After going up one floor, we enter the large restaurant hall, which used to be the main room of the building. The elegant turn-of-the-century hall with adjoining rooms in a straight line has been divided into a number of smaller connected offices, which are presently vacant. A small kitchen has been installed, and we see maps with Russian writing left behind on the walls. In one of the larger rooms, the name of the sports team Djurgården IF is written on the whiteboard in green letters as a
final message from the previous tenants. But apart from that, it’s empty here, and persistently silent.

Then I go and look at the rest of the building. The current tenant of one of the former studio spaces is an “institute” called Svenska Hälsoinstitutet, although I later find out that this is a front for some sort of billing scam. In what used to be the popular Broteatern (a venue for concerts, underground theatre, and general assemblies) there is now a large parking garage. In the former art gallery there is now a sushi restaurant, with the same kind of red rice-paper lamps with black writing hanging from the ceiling that used to light up the infamous psychedelic “Tea room”. The entire backyard building where the Tea room used to be is now a temporary changing room for the construction workers renovating the hotel next door. This hotel was built in the late 1980s, when the City of Stockholm sold most of the buildings set for clearance in the Klara area. Now it stands in the middle of the courtyard that once connected the street building to the backyard building. All of this was once part of the Allaktivitetshus. Today, all that remains is a narrow asphalted loading area.

It turns out the rooms I first visited have been vacant for almost three years. P tells me that office spaces in the inner city were hit particularly hard by the recession. There are a lot of vacant properties in the city centre, and lowering the rents is not an option. Gamla Brogatan is also, he claims, an unattractive location. Despite its central position in the city, just a stone’s throw from all the commerce, in many people’s minds Gamla Brogatan is simply the “wrong address” for an office, P explains. This has caused the street to become almost forgotten.

Later on, when I leave P, I return to the shops on the street level. One of the sales clerks at Blue Fox tells me that it has been almost impossible to survive here for a long time, because of the excessive rent levels and the growth of online shopping. The customers don’t come here anymore, the rents keep getting higher, and now they are planning to raise them even more, he tells me. I think to myself: these are the side effects we see of landlords paying for vacant properties in the city while they wait for a coming boom to bring new tenants. Until then, the waiting caused by this speculation will bring the street into a state of dozing.

Author’s note: An Allaktivitetshus was an experimental site realised through different cultural activities for all and by all, and as such was supposed to be age and class integrated. These places were meant to be a new sort of Folkets Hus, sprung from the social and (left) political ideas of the 1960s.

Seven hundred million SEK in 1970, equivalent to six billion SEK today.

In English, the Swedish Health Institute.

For example, see the following webpage: http://www.forenadebolag.se/2009/12/15/shi-svenska-halsoinstitutet/.
In her PhD project, Marion von Osten investigates—following different case studies—the colonial legacy of the division of applied and non-applied arts. She retraces discourses on vernacular architecture in colonial and post-colonial times, as well as testimonies of visual artists of the anti-colonial and independence period on arts and crafts and their search for a postcolonial aesthetic, alternative art educations, and translocal economies. Following concrete cases, von Osten’s recent reflections on contemporary discourses about creativity, the entrepreneurial self, and education reforms will be reshaped, questioned, and twisted with this study.

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. Since fall 2013, she has been a PhD in Fine Arts candidate at Malmö Art Academy, Lund University.


Don’t Breath Normal: Read Souffles!

Rereading Souffles magazine, which was published from 1966–72 in different constellations by the Moroccan poet Abdellatif Laâbi, started for me 2012, as part of a research project hosted at Les Laboratoires d’Aubervilliers in Paris. Here I had initiated a small group of artists and researchers that exchanged on anti-colonial and postcolonial cultural magazines edited in Algeria, France, Morocco, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Uganda in the first half of the twentieth century, such as Alif, Black Orpheus, El Moudjahid culturel, Esprit, L’Étudiant noir, Légitime défense, Les Temps modernes, La Revue du Monde Noir, Masses, Miroir du cinéma, Novembre, Opus international, Partisans, Présence Africaine, Souffles, Tricontinental, Transition, and Tropiques. In the frame of the closing public events entitled Action! Painting-Publishing, the magazine Souffles was exhibited and compared with other above-mentioned magazines. The transnational character of Souffles and the radical aesthetics expressed in its articles and poems were discussed at the 2015 annual seminar of ERG in Brussels, “PAGE AGES PAGE AGES PAGE AGES* / POLITICS OF THE MULTIPLE,” organized by Lotte Arndt and Vincent Meessen, and the first “Aesthetics of Decolonization” workshop in Zurich, organized by Serhat Karakayali and myself. Next year, the journalyst and writer Kenza Sefrioui and I will host a further series of public events organized around the fiftieth anniversary of the magazine in Rabat and Casablanca, Morocco.

The driving force behind all these activities is Souffles magazine’s unique composition. Launched a decade after independence and the retreat of French troops from Morocco, it was a magazine for literature, visual arts, and politics, and at the same time a national, a francophone, and a “tri-continental” periodical. Its hybrid and transnational character is related to one of the main subjects of debate in the magazine; that is, writers, poets, and visual artists were deeply concerned with the awkward position for aesthetic production brought about by both the violence of the colonial past and the conservative cultural politics of the succeeding postcolonial regimes.

In its active phase from 1966 to 1972, Souffles published poems, communiqués, and statements, as well as essays and theoretical texts on poetry, visual and performing arts, and Third Cinema. It also published visual artworks as well as declarations from various revolutionary and liberation movements, such as the Black Panther Party. Editorial members participated in international cultural events like the Festival mondial des arts nègres in Dakar, 1966; the Pan-African Cultural Festival in Algiers, 1969; and the Cultural Congress of Havana, 1968. The magazine included Moroccan writers like Mohammed Khair-Eddine, Mostafa Nissaboury, Abdallah Stouky, and Tahar Ben Jelloun; Algerian writers like Malek Alloula and Mostefa Lacheraf; and French writers like Bernard Jakobiak, André Laude, and René Depestre (a Haitian poet based in Cuba); as well as Etel Adnan, from Lebanon, and Adonis, from Syria. In particular, post-'68 texts were published by political activists and members of African liberation movements, including articles by Amilcar Cabral and Mário de Andrade.

A close reading of the tri-continental positions gathered in Souffles magazine allows for an understanding of this specific moment of a postcolonial modernity as a multi-sited and antagonistic ground on which the invention of the future was negotiated in transnational translations, violent refusals of colonial heritage, creative adaptations of concepts, and border crossings of strategies and aims. The diverse range of articles and artistic statements shows that national borders were far from being the determining aspect of cultural and political radicalisation. The magazine was a major arena in which to define new concepts of radical aesthetics in the era of decolonisation, constantly negotiating the limits between imposed and reinvented traditions. For the editors of Souffles, cultural production was understood as a form of action. The artist was not seen as an outsider but as an active intellectual of and in society.

Souffles reads still today as if its content was developed in the making, from issue to issue, created during the production process due to its transnational social networks. The search for a radical renewal of contemporary aesthetics finds expression in textual and visual productions, especially those produced or republished and translated specifically for the magazine. Authors publishing in Souffles appropriated and experimented with collage and montage techniques to test different narrative forms and possible transculturations beyond the epistemic violence of colonial-based research and categorisations. Searching and finding cultural terrains beyond Western cultural domination, Souffles’s authors considered oral narrative forms and craft production as relevant cultural articulations that needed to be reconsidered to decolonise culture, ten years after political independence.

This last point is especially interesting when one looks at the hitherto underestimated contributions of visual artists to Souffles. In 1967, a special issue was
The independent research group consisted of Lotte Arndt, Mihaela Gherghescu, Fanny Gillet-Ouhenia, Olivier Hadouchi, Pascale Ratovonony, and Cédric Vincent. The project was conducted in collaboration with the EHESS (École des hautes études en sciences sociales), the INHA (Institut national de l'Histoire de l'art) research program Arts et mondialisation, and l’Espace Khiasma, Paris.

Marion von Osten produced that related to the production of this mostly cosmopolitan generation of Moroccan visual artists. In special conversations with the painters and graphic designers Mohamed Melehi, Mohamed Chebaa, and others, the question of how to synthesise local cultural production and meaning as emancipating and modernising forces is of central concern. In their writings they often refer to Bauhausian pedagogy and to a possible re-evaluation of art and crafts as lived traditions by which popular cultures are not folklorised but rather reinvented, imagining and creating a new trans-local culture and thus another possible society beyond violent colonial epistemes.

The very production of the magazine—the act of self-publishing—was thus a foundation on which to constitute a new subjectivity beyond colonial and cultural domination, as well as a transnational space of action and experimentation for poets, writers, and artists. By doing and making *Souffles*, the magazine’s creators constituted a new public and readership. With its concrete content *Souffles* created an imaginary of unrealistic moments of hope, visions for a possible decolonisation of culture through the creation of new relations between art and crafts, politics and culture, poetry and knowledge production.

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1. The independent research group consisted of Lotte Arndt, Mihaela Gherghescu, Fanny Gillet-Ouhenia, Olivier Hadouchi, Pascale Ratovonony, and Cédric Vincent. The project was conducted in collaboration with the EHESS (École des hautes études en sciences sociales), the INHA (Institut national de l’Histoire de l’art) research program Arts et mondialisation, and l’Espace Khiasma, Paris.
BIO Andrea Ray has an arts practice that includes installation and writing. Exhibition venues include Sculpture Center, apexart, P.S.1 Clocktower Gallery, and White Columns in New York; Wesleyan University’s Zilkha Gallery in Middletown, Connecticut; Skissernas Museum and Wanås Foundation in Sweden; and venues in Dublin, Brussels, and Turin. Ray has been awarded an Art Matters grant and is a two-time New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship recipient. Residency awards include MoMA PS1 in New York; MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire; and Cité des Arts in Paris.

Ray completed the Whitney Museum of American Art Independent Study Program, received a MFA from the Cranbrook Academy of Art, and earned a BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design. Ray teaches at Parsons The New School in New York. Ray became a PhD in Fine Arts fellow at the Malmö Art Academy in 2013 and expects to complete studies in 2018.
Andrea Ray’s doctoral project, *A Reeducation*, examines issues of subjectivity, agency, and community through, for example, proposed forms of alternative living and utopian communities. Existing at the intersection of art practice and sociology, Ray’s project examines affect as experienced in audio installations as a productive form of disruption and meaningful contribution to concerns surrounding the individual and gender, affinities and friendship, and love and belonging. Ray’s project aims to intervene, counter, and rework the chronopolitical, heteronormative narratives of constraint, omission, and dominance that institutions like marriage still retain.
INTRODUCTION: THEME MUSIC, SOUND, AND SPOKEN WORD INCLUDING: “WPPF Radio Utopia presents ReCast: LIVE ON AIR.” “Radio Utopia—of ideas forming, of individuals becoming.” “Reality is a sound.” “You have to tune in to it, not just keep yelling.” “A Past, Potential Future.”

NARRATIVE EXPOSITION BY RADIO HOST: What if time, as we know it, is only a construction? I went to Paris in 2004. I searched for evidence of Marguerite Duras’s presence. I walked in her footsteps. I walked alongside her. I went to meet her in the cafes of the Left Bank to talk of politics and feminism. I waved to her from the street as she stood in her window. I met with her in the apartment along Rue Saint-Benoît. I saw her in the streets surrounding the Sorbonne standing next to her comrades, and I sat with her in the cemetery of Montparnasse. But she’d been dead for years. What if there was no time lapse, no time spent between her death and my arrival? What if within the present there always exists the past and future; we just ignore the occurrences and signs in favor of sequence?

As part of an ongoing radio-cast series, an amateur sociologist explores topics of human relationships and the state. In Segment Two, D. hosts a live in-studio interview that includes guests speaking together about the separation of pleasure from love and of alternative forms of relationships with potential to effect politics.

STATION IDENTIFICATION: “This is Radio Utopia, broadcast today, yesterday, and tomorrow. Bringing you voices from across time, all the time, everywhere present, always. A space where utopian dreams are real. Of freedom and social justice for all.”

STING: MUSICAL AND SPOKEN WORD including the phrase: “On the Separation of Love and Pleasure.”

RADIO HOST: Greetings listeners and welcome to Radio Utopia. Last week in the studio, E. Freeman visited to discuss their book, Complex Marriage. They gave convincing arguments for a reconfiguration of marriage by beginning with its history and then outlining meaningful human attachment structures that exist beyond and in addition to couplehood. My question today is, if in fact we do have an essential need for belonging, why not to a community instead? Why not rethink couplehood and family structure altogether?

STING: SOUND AND SPOKEN WORD: “LIVE ON AIR, this is Radio Utopia—of ideas forming, of individuals becoming.” “Reality is a sound. You have to tune in to it, not just keep yelling.” “A Past, Potential Future.”

RADIO HOST: We invited three people to the studio today, to extend and debate Freeman’s idea of a special love by discussing desire for the other, a separation of pleasure from love, and alternatives to couplehood. Sitting with us now is G., a divorced scholar and parent who find themselves, in 2015, to be in the dating ring, really for the first time. What if within the present there always exists the past and future; we just ignore the occurrences and signs in favor of sequence?

To frame today’s subject, I’d like to start with G. Would you share a portion of your journal with us?
PhD Andrea Ray

G.: Yes, thank you for the invitation to come together in this great radio studio today, D. It’s so exciting to be here with you, A. and T. While you were away last Thursday afternoon, I visited both of your homes in upstate New York and Paris. So yes, I’d be pleased to read a section. Here it goes:

“I don’t know if I want to strangle you or have sex with you,” I blurted. They rolled their eyes, put their hand on the door, and then their rigid posture changed. They softened, turned to look at me, walked over, and kissed me passionately.

Yes, a summer read, this is—the language of romance novels.

They had only come over to borrow a tool for a job nearby. They left again for work, but returned later, hungry for food and drink first, before the promise of sex. Afterward, I told them I would like it if they stayed, if we could sleep while holding each other through the night. I needed the comfort of close friendship to restore the self-confidence recently shaken by outside circumstances. But no, in that moment they said no. That was not part of their unspoken bargain for this exchange.

I never knew which way they’d go. Their ego had to control, limit, attract, and repel me. The rejections were coming closer and closer to the sex now, indications that the attachment was against our (unknown to me and always shifting by them) agreement.

A season passed and they initiated another meeting. During this one, they asked me to stay the night. I did. It was familiar, and kind of wonderful. And so, attachment. They would get upset with me if I cared. They’d get especially upset if I wanted them to be a consistent friend. Somehow I was supposed to sense the parameters of each engagement, but my feelings never changed much. I cared deeply for them. I haven’t figured out how some control such emotions or why anyone would want to control them. Wouldn’t that deny the beauty of life? Imposed limits? The imposed and ever changing limits of intimacy they kept—a line not to be crossed? I wanted in them a friend always, a lover sometimes, but it was so inconsistent, I think in part because they were defending themselves from being the one special person in my life. I wouldn’t want one. I prefer many. This they never understood. How might the heart live at ends that society doesn’t yet allow?

RADIO HOST: Thank you, G. It seems there are distinct conflicts within each of these characters. The first-person character seems conflicted about where they locate the pleasure that intimacy creates, while the one they write about might be termed a commitment-phobe who is in troubling need of intimacy.

G.: That’s a good character analysis, yes.

RADIO HOST: Where does this story take us? Does the main character, through their experience, reassign the site of pleasure to that of the self, rather than the other? Or is it more that the engagement with the other can be, not selfish, but compassionate instead?

G.: I’d say that, yes, in this story the main character does shift their perspective to find pleasure in many types of engagements with the world and with others—forgetting about the narrative of needing an other to provide everything. As their sexual practices become more broad, the negative associative feelings of lack fall away.

RADIO HOST: Would you then say that compassion can lead to a flight of freedom of sorts, rather than an imposing responsibility to couplehood? And can you talk about how this work might point to different sorts of affinities, different sorts of relationships?

G.: This journal contains traces of my experiences to support some kind of analysis. In terms of your question about the work producing alternative affinities, what gets difficult is finding commonalities in my experiences with those of others. Everyone has a different motivation, so is it even possible to effectively draw any conclusions in relation to new forms of affinities emerging? I hope my journals might become case studies, but I question whether this is even possible. I do believe this separation of pleasure from love that you bring up is a solid starting point from which alternatives may develop.

D., you introduced this program by mentioning the Freeman book Complex Marriage. The word “complex” for Freeman can refer to the institution of marriage, but I’m thinking about the term “complex marriage” as it means something different. T., I know you’re familiar with this—you live in a community under those beliefs, where all members are married to each other, and in place of couplehood, is the group. Multiple affinities are encouraged, nurtured, and lived out, in theory, eliminating jealousy—a main symptom of desire for ownership of the other.

T.: If you don’t mind, I’d like to contribute to that a bit. May I?

RADIO HOST: Yes, of course, please go on.

T.: Thank you. Indeed, G., you have that right about my community. We believe that marriage is slavery for women, which is why we’ve realigned marriage to be to that of the group, yes. I’d also like to make mention of my friend V. Woodhull who preaches free love. They recently spoke at the Cooper Union Great Hall and I
attended. But free love, in that case, is about the right to have as many lovers as fancied, and to change those partners as often as wished. As I understand it, the type of marriage Freeman discusses is a couplehood that is independent from state rhetoric and laws. That is different again from my community’s practices and from what Woodhull’s speech on free love speaks of.

RADIO HOST: OK, I’d just like to state for our listeners, but mostly for my own conceptual organization, that we’ve already made mention of four distinct forms of romantic relationships. A., what do you make of this? Can we back up a bit? Isn’t G. right that intimacy is about those connections, those intertwined emotions that sex brings about?

A.: From my personal observation, I would say that woman has not made the separation between love and sensuality which man has made. The two are usually combined in woman; she needs either to love the man she gives herself to or to be loved by him. Modern woman may achieve this separation of sex and love which, to my belief, diminishes pleasure and reduces the heightened quality of lovemaking. For lovemaking is enhanced, heightened, intensified by its emotional content. You might compare the difference to a solo player and the vast reaches of an orchestra.

RADIO HOST: (chuckles) Interesting. When you speak of a modern woman, I’m wondering, not what she looks like, but what does she behave like? What does the world that she lives in look like? Maybe you’d like to respond to that, T.?

T.: Yes, well, I would say that this separation that A. refers to is a healthy one that supersedes jealousy that gives way to rash and rage behavior, for instance. As Mr. Free Church states, Liberty breeds virtue, and I maintain that free-love, or complex marriage, combined with community-shared property, would eliminate the very sources of adultery, whoredom, and all sexual abuse. The feeling of plenty would directly stimulate chastity and self-control. I think, perhaps, this might be a good time to share what happened at the community yesterday. As the incident concluded, I slipped away to my room to write down the dialogue in anticipation of our conversation at the studio here today. May I read it now?

RADIO HOST: Yes, please do.

T.: Very good. (clears throat)

It was a bright afternoon. 1855 or 1856.

J. Skinner had conscientiously and with great care, prepared a picnic lunch for he and A. Hobart. An invitation they declined. “Alas, I am not hungry,” they said coldly. They pleaded, “Wait, A. Please.” They turned around briskly and said, “J.S., you let me fall asleep.” They then declared, “I wanted to sleep with you, dear A.” A. then declared, “To stay the night together is against the policy of the Community!” “Policy!,” J. replied. “Do you need a curfew to cut off any true attachment you might feel, A.H.?” With restraint and composure, A. exclaimed, “I am attached to the whole Community, and to stay with one person for the night cuts off the Community. It tends to special love. It breeds exclusivity and jealousy—and leads to the sin of adultery. It is adultery against the Community. “That is old Noyes’s speech, and not the sentiment of a young vibrant person,” implored J. “J.S., if you wish to see me, you may submit your written request through a proper intermediary, and I will consider slating an appointment. But we will not stay the whole night, nor will we pair off and picnic, nor anything of the sort. Good day, M. Skinner.” A. abruptly turned and walked away, ending the conversation.

RADIO HOST: Thank you, T. How fantastic that this exchange happened just last night (in 1855 or 1856) before our conversation. If we compare this reading to G.’s we find ideas of desire present and, coincidentally, in both is the sleepover. If desire is at the center of the problem, as it were, in both instances, how then would desire be tamed to accommodate a community-centered form of loving more than one? Of the non-monogamous?

A NARRATIVE EXPOSITION: The four continue speaking about these experiences, two of whom argue for a necessary separation between love and pleasure, while G. can’t be convinced. Torn between romantic love affairs and the knowledge that this is only a construction, a template they buy into from a society they groan to be stuck in, they are cast just short of hypocrites—unable to live out their different sense of ideas for freedom within romantic relationships. G.’s only refuge, then, is their imagination.

RADIO HOST: Let’s pause here for a Station Identification, and when we come back, we’ll switch gears to speak about the politics of relationships. Now that gay marriage is accepted, but less people are getting married, how can the politics of relationships catch up with the people’s practices?

STING: SOUND AND SPOKEN WORD: “LIVE ON AIR, this is Radio Utopia—of ideas forming, of individuals becoming.” “Reality is a sound. You have to tune in to it, not just keep yelling.” “A Past, Potential Future.”
Imogen Stidworthy’s work focuses on the voice as a central material, working with its sculptural, spatial, and semantic dimensions to investigate social and subjective spaces. She works with people who inhabit the borders of language, whose relationship with language is affected by conditions such as aphasia or the impact of overwhelming experiences. Often combining the staged with the observed, she makes films and installations and uses a wide range of media including sculptural objects, print, and photography.

Imogen Stidworthy’s doctoral research focuses on the question: What forms of relation are produced between people who inhabit language in profoundly different ways? The research seeks to develop new forms of mapping these relations, spatially, visually, sonically, and textually. The starting point for this research is the pioneering work of Fernand Deligny and his experimental network (réseau) for living with autistic children in Monoblet (Cévennes, France, 1967 to the mid 1980s). Stidworthy will be focusing particularly on the sonic space of the contemporary situation at Monoblet and building upon the historical film material about the network, which includes two films by Deligny and the video archive of Jacques Lin (one of the original members of the network, along with his wife Gisèle Durand). From this work arises the question of how what has been developed at Monoblet can be brought to bear upon other situations, relationships, and contexts with which Stidworthy will be engaging in her ongoing research.

The setting in Monoblet involves autistic people who do not speak, who have no practice of language at all. This context opens a new paradigm for Stidworthy’s artistic research of the past ten years, building on her experience of working with people who in some way inhabit the threshold of language. Stidworthy believes this research may offer new perspectives for the ways in which we might understand language in the formation of subjectivity.

The research will focus on three key questions: What forms can I develop to map the space of relation? What is the place of my subjectivity as an artist within the intersubjective space? What forms of translation are taking place and what is at stake in these processes, at each stage of my research, including the material, technological complex of the artwork?

In her initial investigations at Monoblet, mapping has involved a number of practices largely carried out within the spaces of one working room and the kitchen: observing and registering (video, audio) the patterns and rhythms of a small number of regular domestic tasks carried out by the autistic adults over several months; making links on the level of bodily movements and bodily proximities in spaces of shared activity (framing, editing); and registering sonic events across the...
spectrum of language/non-language (speech, voice, object sounds) and mapping these spatially, using ambisonics. A key method has been the activity “tracer,” involving tracing and mark-making with the autistic adults and Gisèle Durand, which becomes a form of non-verbal dialogue between them. This is a practice that Durand initiated many years ago as a form of research and kept up for five years; in a collaborative mode, Stidworthy and Durand reactivated this practice in 2014. In context of this research, tracer—“tracing”—becomes a method to investigate the relation between speaking adult and autist, in which two paradigms come into relation: that of drawing, transcription, art, and aesthetics, and that which appears to exist primarily in the sensible, in material, spatial, and temporal dimensions.

In the réseau, Deligny developed the notion of “being with” to refer to a way of living in common with the autistic children outside the assumptions of therapeutic or interpretative frameworks. Stidworthy’s PhD research will explore this notion by developing different practices of sensibilisation, to render this new form of relation knowable within a number of artworks and texts.

In the absence of speech, attentiveness to other registers of relation comes to the fore in a heightened and multidimensional perception of the world. How can the material and immaterial quality of this experience be shaped through the work of art, in its installational and mediatic languages? Stidworthy will explore this question through investigation into technologies such as the “non-retinal” point cloud image of the 3D laser scan and the full sphere psychoacoustics of ambisonics.

The role of writing is key in this research, firstly as a primary medium for Deligny’s research and reflection; secondly, as a paradox to communicate traces of “being with,” beyond language, within language; thirdly, to situate the artistic research within a discourse of intersubjective practices around language and the voice. Approaching other spaces of relation through the prism of Monoblet and related contexts will lay new ground to think through the formation of subjectivity in the dimensions of language difference.

Balayer—A Map of Sweeping, 2014. Still from HD video. 27 min. Imogen Stidworthy

Balayer—A Map of Sweeping, 2014. Still from HD video. 27 min. Imogen Stidworthy
Stills from the archive of Jacques Lin shot in 2000. From *Balayer—A Map of Sweeping*. HD video. 27 min. Imogen Stidworthy

Left: Sound plan for *Balayer—A Map of Sweeping*, 2014. Pencil and pen on paper. Imogen Stidworthy
Right: Pencil drawing, 2014. Imogen Stidworthy
Faculty
2014–2015

Selected Activities

Plastic Course
Lead Teacher: P-O Persson
Guest Teacher: David Nilsson

See course description p. 484
Casting Course:
Bronze/Aluminium/Silicone

Lead Teacher  Senior Lecturer
P–O Persson

Guest Teacher  Robert Cassland

See course description p. 490
Ceramics Course

Lead Teacher            Senior Lecturer
P–O Persson

Guest Teacher            Klara Kristalova

See course description p. 490
Critical & Pedagogical Studies
Workshop on Workshops with Neil Mulholland

Programme Director: Maj Hasager

Critical & Pedagogical Studies is an international programme that leads to a Master of Fine Arts degree, working across borders between art theory, practice, and pedagogy. The programme brings together a small group of artists with diverse interests, who work from critical perspectives on contemporary art practice, theory, and education.

In September 2014, the Critical & Pedagogical Studies Programme offered a KUNO express course called “Artists Teaching Artists,” which featured the session “Workshops on Workshops,” led by artist and professor Neil Mulholland. As a guest teacher from Edinburgh College of Art, Mulholland shared his knowledge from running Shift/Work, a research project that develops and shares open educational resources for artists and art educators.

We were happy to host a group of enthusiastic participants through the KUNO exchange, including students from Oslo, Copenhagen, Reykjavik, and Gothenburg. The participants developed their own concepts for workshops, which they tried out together, and later practised “unlearning” as a pedagogical strategy. The students were sited walking backwards through the halls, down the stairs, and around the surrounding neighbourhood. Rooms were rearranged into sculptural installations and sticky notes of ideas were left on every imaginable surface. On one of the last evenings, we prepared a collective potluck dinner in the student kitchen as an extension of the workshop.

See course description p. 487
Art History, Artistry, or Arsery?

Aby Warburg's Modes of Thinking and the Library-in-Exile: A Troll’s View

Lecture by Sarat Maharaj
Part of the course “Imaginary Exhibitions — The Spaces”

We look at the ways in which Aby Warburg explored creative processes: through art historical analysis and exposition; through artistry — idea/image sequences and constellations (Dada epistemics); through “arsery” — open-ended larking about, idling, that is the semantic surplus or retinal-conceptual overflow of thinking activity. Do they throw light on today’s rising field of art research?

In what ways did he touch on “otherness” — on modes of thinking of the aboriginal world? Do we stumble over clues to cultural translation in his work, to “ways of knowing the other and other ways of knowing” (xeno-epistemics)?

The ongoing demolition of Sandwich Street, Bloomsbury, London, is scanned from the vantage point of my street-level kitchen and from the top-floor of Sandwich House. Where does the Warburg “library-in-exile” in Bloomsbury now plug into the knowledge/ignorance production landscape, as the neighbourhood is increasingly geared to service the emerging global market in education products — especially the China market? This is voiced through the “anti-method” of the contemporary knowledge-producer figure — the Troll — that stalks the tweet-zone, the Guardian’s CIF columns, and Internet of the post-Gutenberg space.

—Sarat Maharaj

See course description see p. 483
The course is a unique opportunity to reflect upon your own practice through 3D computer work (SketchUp) and performance combined with discursive and theoretical input. We will explore the spatial relations between artistic practice, body and viewer, and what the possibilities are in expanded thinking around one’s own practice. Furthermore, the course offers lectures and workshops with a wide range of international practitioners.

The course consisted in two parts: The Spaces and The Gestures.

See course description p. 483 and 489
The Spaces images from the presentation of the The Spaces, which happened under the title *We will push the ship from shore and let it drift toward the darkest of oceans*
We will push the ship from shore and let it drift toward the darkest of oceans
Malmö Art Academy visits Malmö Art Museum

June 5–August 30, 2015

In summer 2015, the graduating students of the Master of Fine Arts and Critical & Pedagogical Studies (MFA) were invited to exhibit at Malmö Art Museum. The exhibition, *We will push the ship from shore and let it drift toward the darkest of oceans*, was conceived in collaboration between the Art Museum and the Art Academy.

“We at Malmö Art Academy are very pleased with this collaboration with the Malmö Art Museum. The project was initiated by Museum Director Cecilia Widenheim and executed with the help of Assistant Curator Marie Thams, along with Art Academy Professors Joachim Koester and Emily Wardill and Programme Director Maj Hasager.

This year the Art Academy is celebrating its twentieth anniversary, and we’re especially happy to be able to present all of the new graduates from our Master’s degree programmes to the people of Malmö. All of them have worked hard with their individual thesis exhibitions or educational projects, which were on display this spring in our KHM Gallery.

In seeing all these works gathered together, one is struck by how independent each is in its expression. It is also obvious that all are full of faith and belief in the capacity of art to say something about the world that is different from all the other proposals and assertions that so fill our society.

For today’s society, art represents the Other, which the title of the exhibition underscores.

Malmö Art Academy is an international institution. Of the twenty students participating in this exhibition, fifteen come from countries other than Sweden. We think that’s just how it should be for an art school in Sweden’s most international city.”

—Gertrud Sandqvist, Rector, Malmö Art Academy, from the exhibition guide.

In front: Loui Kuhlau, *At the border between you and I*. Installation, 2015


Image on the left: Laila Svensgaard, *we can know more than we can tell*. Sound installation, 2015
José Tomás Giraldo, *Tornberg’s Utopian Cast*. Table display, 2015

Image on the right: José Tomás Giraldo, *Tornberg’s Utopian Cast*. Table display, 2015
In the back: Desmond Church, *Feeders*. Sculpture, installation, 2015

In the back: Karin Hald, *Surface Goes Free Will*. Ink and oil on textile, clear acrylic, 2015

Left: Danilo Stankovic, Sjas! Material found at Marsvinsholm (telephone pole, Christmas sack, rope, sticks), 2014
Right: Thale Vangen, Ephemera. Wood, rope, blocks, 2013

Tiril Hasselknippe, Stairs. Welded steel and lacquer paint, 2014
Students and recent graduates participated in the 2014 summer exhibition at Marsvinsholm Castle and Sculpture Park

June 28–August 17, 2014

Participants: Marie Bonfils, Karima Furuseth, Tiril Hasselknippe, Lavinia Jannesson, David Nilson, Jessica Sanderheim, Emelie Sandström, Marianne Skaarup, Danilo Stankovic, Thale Vangen.

Organised by professors P–O Persson and Gertrud Sandqvist in collaboration with Marsvinsholm Castle and Sculpture Park.

Marsvinholm Castle and Sculpturepark, 271 42 Ystad, Sweden.

Left: Emelie Sandström, Ljusbringare. Bronze, 3,5 meter high, 2014
Right: Marie Bonfils, Prelude. Sand and india rubber, 450x180 cm, 2014

Biographies

Gertrud Sandqvist
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 researching the occult diaries of Hilma af Klint.

Dr. Sarat Maharaj
Professor of Visual Art and Knowledge Systems; supervisor for the Doctoral Programme

Sarat Maharaj is a writer and curator. He was one of the curators of documenta XI (2002), in collaboration with Okwui Enwezor, and he was chief curator of Pandemonium—Art in a time of creativity fever, at the Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art (2011). He co-curated the 29th Sao Paolo Biennial (2010) and Farewell to Postcolonialism, at the Third Guangzhou Triennial (2008) and acted as curatorial advisor to the Sharjah Biennial 2012.

His PhD 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 the first Rudolf Arnheim Professor, Humboldt University, Berlin (2001–02) and Research Fellow at the Jan Van Eyck Akademie, Maastricht (1999–2001).

His specialist research and publications cover Marcel Duchamp, James Joyce, and Richard Hamilton, with extensive writing on visual art as knowledge production, art research, globalisation, and cultural translation, among other subjects.

Current projects: As part of the Distinguished Scholar Professorship in Pretoria, South Africa, Dr. Maharaj is working on a series of visual-textual-film constructions called Drakensberg. The project Ignorantitis Sapiens focuses on the “knowledge/ignorance virus,” looking at knowledge produced through art practice as a kind of “knowledgeable ignorance.” It is part of a mapping of the ongoing transformation of London from a postcolonial city into a post-imperial, global exchange zone. How do the migrations, changes in housing and work regimes, city space, and infrastructure, etc., shape the rise of “a design for living of a new urbanity”? This is explored through the demolition/construction works in the patch of London he lives in: the “knowledge mecca” called Bloomsbury.

Dr. Matts Leiderstam
Professor of Fine Arts

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, Graz; Salon MoCAB—Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade; Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe; Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein, Vaduz; and Magasin III Stockholm Konsthall.

Selected group shows include the 8th Berlin Biennale; Gasworks, London; Museo Tamayo, Mexico City; Witte de With, Rotterdam; the Göteborg International Biennial for
Contemporary Art 2010; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; and the Third Guangzhou Triennial.

Haegue Yang
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.
Her most recent solo exhibitions include Glasgow Sculpture Studios; Musée d’art moderne et contemporain, Strasbourg; Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris; Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston; and Haus der Kunst, Munich. Recent group exhibitions include Forum Stadtpark, Graz; Greene Naftali, New York; Overbeck-Gesellschaft, Lübeck; Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm; Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography; Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz; Kunstmuseum Stuttgart; Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland; Institute of Contemporary Arts, London; dOCUMENTA (13), Kassel; Tate Modern, London; and Hayward Gallery, London.
Her work can be found in the following museums and collections: BSI Art Collection, Switzerland; National Museum of Contemporary Art, Korea; Sammlung Haubrook, Berlin; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster; Zabludowicz Collection, London; Bristol’s Museums, Galleries & Archives; Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh; Explum, Murcia; Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig; Kulturstiftung des Bundes, Halle an der Saale, Germany; Kunsthalle Hamburg; Leeum, Samsung Museum of Art, Seoul; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; Museum of Modern Art, New York; and Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz.

Joachim Koester
Professor of Fine Arts
Joachim Koester is a Danish artist based in Copenhagen.
His work has been shown at documenta X, Kassel; the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale; the Gwangju Biennale 1995; the 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 Mònica, 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; and Centre d’art contemporain, Geneva.
Koester’s work can be found in the following museums and collections: 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; Kongelige Biblioteks Fotografiske Samling, Copenhagen; Fonds national
Emily Wardill

Emily Wardill is a British artist based in Lisbon, Portugal. She has had solo exhibitions at the 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.

Maria Hedlund

Maria Hedlund is a Swedish artist based in Stockholm. 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 Artpelag, 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 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.

Per Olof Persson

Viktor Kopp
Junior Lecturer in Fine Arts

Viktor Kopp is a Swedish artist based in Stockholm. He has completed studies in Fine Arts in Malmö, Göteborg, and Helsinki and teaches painting at the Malmö Art Academy.
Selected solo exhibitions include Ribordy Contemporary, Geneva; Blondeau & Cie., Geneva, Bureau, New York; Galleri Riis, Passagen Linköpings konsthall; Galleri Magnus Åklundh, Malmö.
Group exhibitions include Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Royal/T, Culver City; Salon Zurcher, New York; Ribordy Contemporary, Geneva; Bureau, New York; Ystad Konstmuseum, Ystad.

Margot Edström
Junior Lecturer in Fine Arts

Margot Edström is specialised in video and digital media (2D and 3D animation, 3D printing, digital imaging, and postproduction).
For the past decade, Edström has been working as a freelance motion graphic designer, mainly for Swedish television and documentary film companies in the region. She graduated from Malmö Art Academy in 1997.
Her artistic background is in performance-based video and experimentation with different kinds of narratives.

Maj Hasager
Senior Lecturer, Programme Director of Critical & Pedagogical Studies (MFA)

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 Fokus Video Art Festival, Nikolaj kunsthall, Copenhagen; Society Acts, Moderna Museet, Malmö; Community Works, Cleveland Institute of Art; Red Barn Gallery, Belfast; Laznia Centre for Contemporary Art, Gdansk; Liverpool Biennial; Al-Hoash Gallery, Jerusalem; Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center; Ramallah; Overgaden Institute of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen; Guangzhou Triennial; Gallery 21, Malmö; LOOP film festival, Barcelona; EMERGED Space, Glasgow; and KargART festival, Istanbul.
Hasager is the recipient of several international residencies and is currently a fellow at Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart.
She has been awarded grants in support of her work from the Danish Arts Council, the Danish Arts Foundation, Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (Beirut), ArtSchool Palestine, the Danish Centre for Culture and Development, and the Danish Arts Agency. Additionally, Hasager is a guest lecturer at the International Academy of Art Palestine; Dar al-Kalima College, Bethlehem; and the University of Ulster, Belfast. She occasionally writes essays, catalogue texts, and articles.

Nathalie Melikian
External visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

Nathalie Melikian is an artist based in Vancouver, Canada. Her work has been shown in group exhibitions at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Seattle Art Museum; Bergen Art Museum; National Museum of Contemporary Art, Oslo; Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, University of Toronto; Art Gallery of York University, Toronto; Vancouver Art Gallery; Centro José Guerrero, Granada; Marco Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Vigo; Artium Centro-Museo Vascote Arte Contemporáneo, Vitoria-Gasteiz; Kunsthalle Fridericianum, Kassel; and Frankfurter Kunstverein.
Solo shows include Voxx, Montreal; MuHKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp, Malmö Art Museum; Frankfurter Kunstverein; and Centre pour l’image contemporaine Saint-Gervais Genève.
Her work is in the collections of the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Malmö Art Museum; and Vancouver Art Gallery.
João Penalva
External visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

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. Penalva represented Portugal in the 23rd São Paulo Biennial (1996) and in the 49th Venice Biennale (2001). He also exhibited in the 2nd Berlin Biennale (2001) and the 13th Biennale of Sydney (2002). 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; Lunds Konsthall; Centro de Arte Moderna, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon; Brandts Kunsthallen, Odense; and Trondheim Kunstmuseum. Penalva was awarded the DAAD Berlin Artist’s Residency in 2003 and the Bryan Robertson Award, London, in 2009.

Nina Roos
External visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

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 Francois Mansart, Paris; Galleri K, Oslo; Kunstnernes Hus, Oslo; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Malmö Konsthall; Kiasma, Helsinki; and Brandts Klaedefabrik, Odense. Selected group exhibitions include Artipelag, Stockholm; Lunds Konsthall; Carnegie Art Award touring exhibition (first prize 2004); KUMU Art Museum, Tallinn; Kunstverein München; MUHKA, Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp; Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki; the 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).

Christine Ödlund
External visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

Christine Ödlund is a Swedish artist 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 (Elektronmusikstudion) in Stockholm (2002–04) and is a regular contributor to electro-acoustic and sound work festivals around the world. Ödlund’s work has been shown in group exhibitions in Stockholm, Tel Aviv, and Tokyo. Her work is included in the public collections of Moderna Museet, Stockholm, and Magasin III, Stockholm. Her most recent solo exhibition is Music for Eukaryotes at Trondheim Kunstmuseum in Norway (2013).

Charif Benhelima
External visiting Lecturer in Fine Arts

Charif Benhelima is a Belgian artist. He lives and works in Antwerp. 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 a professor at the LUCA School of Arts, Ghent, and guest professor at the Higher Institute for Fine Arts (HISK), Ghent. Recent solo exhibitions were held at Niterói Museum of
Benhelima recently participated at the Marrakech Biennale 5; the FotoFest 2012 Biennial, the Fourteenth International Biennial of Photography, Houston; and in group exhibitions at MuHKA Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp; Musée de Marrakech; Institute of Contemporary Arts Singapore; Bag Factory, Johannesburg; Shanghai Art Museum; and Witte de With, Rotterdam.

Andreas Eriksson is a visual artist based in Medelpiana, Sweden. He graduated from the Royal Institute of Art, Stockholm, in 1998. Recent solo exhibitions include Michel Majerus Estate, Berlin; Sommer & Kohl, Berlin; Galleri Riis, Oslo; Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; Lidköpings Konsthall, Sweden; the 54th Venice Biennale; Galleri Susanne Ottesen, Copenhagen; mumok, Vienna; Art Statements, Basel; Skövde Konsthall; and Trondheim Kunstmuseum. Selected group exhibitions include Gumbostrand Gallery, Helsinki; Galleri Rotor, Göteborg; FRAC Auvergne, France; the 30th São Paulo Biennial; D’Amelio Gallery, New York; Artipelag, Stockholm; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk; LAUTOM Contemporary, Oslo; mumok, Vienna; and Moderna Museet, Stockholm. Eriksson’s work can be found in the following collections: the National Museum of Art, Architecture and Design, Oslo; Louisiana, Humlebæk; AstraZeneca, Lund; ECB, Frankfurt; Göteborgs Konstmuseum; Landstinget Halland; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; mumok, Vienna; Skövde Konstmuseum; Statens Konstråd; Sundsvalls Museum; and Uppsala Konstmuseum.
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 and 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.
Programme Descriptions

Bachelor’s Programme in Fine Arts
—BFA
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. The Bachelor’s Programme in Fine Arts begins with a foundation course dealing primarily with different artistic techniques and basic art theory. Malmö Art Academy has no separate departments. Students organise their own curriculum, choosing from a wide range of courses on topics in art theory, artistic techniques, and artistic interpretation. The courses are announced the first week of each semester. Students who successfully complete the required amount of courses, earn a sufficient amount of credit points for their own studio practice, and are approved for their graduation work and thesis will receive a Bachelor’s degree in Fine Arts (180 ECTS credits, equivalent to 30 credits for each semester). Professors at Malmö Art Academy are, in consultation with an external participant, the examiners for a Bachelor’s degree.

Master’s Programme in Fine Arts
—MFA
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 continuously offered at the Academy. In the second year, students focus on their graduation work, which includes writing an essay and presenting a solo exhibition at the Academy’s gallery, KHM. Malmö Art Academy has no separate departments. Approved graduation work meets the requirements for a Master’s degree in Fine Arts (120 ECTS credits). Professors at Malmö Art Academy are, in consultation with an external participant, the examiners for a Master’s degree.

Master’s Programme in Critical & Pedagogical Studies
—MFA
Critical & Pedagogical Studies is an international programme that leads to a Master’s degree in Fine Arts in Critical & Pedagogical Studies (120 ECTS credits) and works across borders between art theory, practice, and pedagogy. The programme aims to encourage thinking within the artistic field related to art creation, training, and production. We want to encourage initiative and experimentation, especially in the fields of art production, education, writing, and theory. Teaching is largely based around seminars and workshops that are led by visiting lecturers, the professors at Malmö Art Academy, and the programme leader of Critical & Pedagogical Studies. There is focus on the students’ own projects through group critiques and individual tutorials. Theory is seen as practice and practice is theorised. Key concepts are critical thinking and questions of artistic production, education, and pedagogical strategies, combined with an openness to learn and experiment. The programme is conducted in English.

PhD Programme in Fine Arts
The four-year Doctoral (PhD) Programme in Fine Arts for practising artists and curators is the first of its kind. Sweden’s first Doctors in Fine Art graduated from the 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).
Course Descriptions

**Art Courses**

**Copy—Interpretation**

*Lead Teacher*  
Senior Lecturer  
Maria Hedlund

*Guest Teacher*  
Anna Bokström

Participating students: Oscar Hagbard, Trine Hansen, Jonna Hägg, Agnes Jonasson, Hanni Kamaly, Jae Lih Young, Daniel Spies, Jonas Wallner, Line Åxman.

The aim with this course is for students, through individual artistic work and discussions, to become familiar with the concepts “copy” and “interpretation,” together with other similar concepts used in relation to artistic connections. Students will also be given opportunity to become engaged in and inspired by another person’s work, and through this process develop an increased understanding of their own practice.

We start with a meeting in the photo studio. To this meeting, everyone should bring a photographic image. The image should in one way or another connect to an artist, and will function as a base for ongoing work throughout the course. The initial step is to make a copy of the image, using photographic techniques. It’s not about making a reproduction; instead, it’s about trying to copy the situation and imitate its content. Parallel to this, each student should find out as much as possible about the artist and the story around the image. Profound research is expected, and there is always the possibility to ask Madeleine Bergquist in the library for help. The teacher will go through the equipment and the technique the students might need. Anna Bokström will help out in the dark room.

The course is planned as a workshop, with a focus on individual work, which will be discussed both in the group and individually.

**improvisation in Relation to Narrative**

*Film: Like the Walls to My House*  

*Lead Teacher*  
Professor Emily Wardill

*Guest Teacher*  
Anna Bokström

Participating students: Meise Fabricius, Keanan Fox, Marianne Glimsdal, Golnosh Hosseini, Ingvild Hovland Kaldal, Loui Kuhlau, Johan Lundqvist, Marie Schou Raffn, Ana Rebardão, Markus Strandjord Bråten.

“Like the walls to my house” (the title of which is inspired by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, who in an interview once remarked: “I would like to build a house with my films”) is a series of workshops, reading groups, and lectures using the process of filmmaking to think about working as an artist in the moving image today. We will begin with an introductory lecture looking at the difference between modernist and post-modern approaches to artist film and how ideas around illusion have changed in the last fifty years within art and moving image discourse.

Participation and collaboration are a necessary part of filmmaking, and students will be asked to make a film as part of a group. We will explore improvisation, using techniques developed by Viola Spolin and Keith Johnstone, to open up this process and reanimate practices that have become stuck in the studio.

Finally, we will look at editing and montage, focusing heavily on the work of Sergei Eisenstein to think about montage as it relates to painting, collage, and poetry. Running parallel to the lectures and reading groups within this course will be a practical element that corresponds to the three main topics: improvisation, shooting, and editing. Students will be asked to make a collaborative work in response to the course, and this will be presented at the final feedback session.

**Landscape (Seen/Scene)**

*Teacher*  
Professor Mats Leiderstam

*Guest Teacher*  
Anna Bokström

Participating students: Julie Falk Christensen, Tina Kryhmann Elstein, Daniel Fleur, Andreas Franzén, Trine Hansen, Mads Johansen, Agnes Jonasson, Johan Lundqvist, Marcus Matt, Martine Thunold.

“Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture. It is both a represented and presented space, both signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulacrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package.”

—W.J.T. Mitchell, *The Power of Landscape*

“Landscape (Seen/Scene)” deals with landscape and landscape image as a subject for artists. We will study landscape as a medium, both as we know it from art history and how landscape is represented in our time. We will read and discuss some important texts about the subject and look closer at some contemporary artist’s practices, and a couple of guests will be invited to give input to our discussions. The main focus will, however, be working with your own landscapes images from your own practice.

**Working methods**

Individual and group critique of your work, lectures, screenings, and close reading seminars. In the end, we will make a small show together and gather for a critique. My ambition is that the participants of this course will get a deeper knowledge about the subject and be able further develop his or her own artistic practice.

**Location**

We will have our critiques and seminars in the teaching studio/library/lecture hall, and between our meet ups, you will work on your own project in your studio. The teaching studio will be the space for the end exhibition.

**Literature**

Peter Gidal, Janet Kraynak, Williams Greaves, Sergei Eisenstein, Sjoukje van der Meulen, Guy Debord.
Imaginary Exhibitions—The Spaces
Teacher
Professor
Joachim Koester
Credits
6


In the course we will focus on the exhibition space and address this as a creative expanded field. We will discuss its potential and the web of connections and knowledge that informs contemporary exhibition making.

We will start by making an exhibition with artworks from all participants. This installation will be constantly altered throughout the two weeks: new artworks, props, texts, and objects will be added as we build a labyrinth of discourses, narratives, forces, and expressions. We will read to the exhibition, move through the exhibition, discuss the exhibition, and gradually transform it into a physical manifestation of everything that has taken place there. As we engage in this, we turn thinking into space and space into thinking.

Additionally a group of guest curators has been invited:

Jesper Juul will speak on computer games as a new creative architecture, and we’ll use his talk to discuss some of the technologies that have transformed our relation to time and space and thereby also to the exhibition venue at large.

Lastly, Lars Bang Larsen will speak on “the experience economy, self-consumption and mirror touch synesthesia” and in a group setting inscribe some of these themes into our constantly shifting installation.

Sound Art and Digital Sound
Sound Art—Soundscape—Noise—Electroacoustic Music—Sound and Video
Guest Teacher
Stefan Klaverdal
Credits
9

Participating students: Isabelle Andriessen, Jae Lih Young, Henrique Pavão, Lea Petrikova, Tomas Sjögren, Simon Söder, Line Åxman.

Sound is a very interesting and direct medium. Much is possible with the use of the right sound in the right context, and people can be manipulated to feel and think things that would never be possible without it.

This course focuses on the use of sound in general, as sound art, composition, and sound for use in video and film. We will talk about recording techniques and how to compose with sound, but also how to create a specific mood with sound and music.

We will also experiment with how to exhibit sound art in different spaces. How do different pieces affect each other? How does the sound environment affect a specific piece and why? We will go through the technical means of how to record, edit, and reproduce sound, in workshops as well as in theoretical classes.

We will work both as a large group and in groups of two or three students. I will also meet each student for individual sessions. All students will have access to the sound studio as well as other computer stations with sound-editing software.

Contents
Overview of the sound studio, different free and commercial applications, and how to use them (Pro Tools, Peak, Max MSP, and more); Cables and contacts; Overviews of your own possibilities—What can you do with only your computer and free software?; Basic acoustics; Basic discussion of how sound behaves in the digital domain; Basic microphone and recording techniques both in live situations and in studio; Interview techniques in the recording situation; Sound editing in video and film; Music scoring —Which music gives the best result?
Plastic
Lead Teacher  P-O Persson
Guest Teacher  David Nilsson
Credits  3

Participating students: Isabelle Andriessen, Julie Falk Christensen, Mads Johansen, Marianne Skaarup.

The course in handling plastics gives knowledge in laminating and casting of plastics, plus basic information about safety prescriptions in the workshop. After finishing the course, you will get a “driver’s license” that permits you to work in the workshop on your own.

Welding
Lead Teacher  P-O Persson
Guest Teacher  Robert Cassland
Credits  6

Participating students: Axel Burendahl, Tina Elstein Kryhlmann, Thomas Hostrup, Ingvild Hovland Kaldal, Jonna Hägg, Agnes Jonasson, Henrique Pavão, Martine Thunold.

Through this course you 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 license” that allows you to work on your own with the welding equipment.

3D Printer Basic Modelling Course
Lead Teacher  Margot Edström
Guest Teacher  Olof Broström
Credits  6

Participating students: John Alberts, Jae Lih Young, Rina Eide Lovásen, Wilfred Tarding.

The course will teach you to create digital 3D sculptures or prototypes to be printed in plastic (PLA) material. You will obtain modelling skills from industry leading software Autodesk Maya 2015 and use freeware Sculptris for an organic sculpting workflow. We will print the optimised 3D models using the new MakerBot Replicator Z18. The maximum size of printed objects is 30.5 L x 30.5 W x 45.7 H cm.

Schedule
Week 1: Hands on exercise, demonstrations of techniques. Intense work with online and printed tutorial.
Week 2: Students will practise the techniques in individual projects to complete a 3D model of their own.
Week 3: Printing of 3D objects.

Prerequisites
The course is designed for beginners but also for students with previous knowledge of 3D modelling or other 3D software, such as Blender, Sketch-up, C4D, and Z-Brush.

Topics
Planning for a sculpture or prototype to be printed; How is the technique used by other artists?; Understanding the software interface and workflow; Polygon modelling/Box modelling; Using freeware models; Assembling parts of ready-made objects; Various techniques for surface manipulation; Understanding of mesh topology; Optimising polygon models to be printed; Using Mesh Lab.
Economy and Law
Guest Teacher  Géza Antal
Credits  7.5

Participating students: Axel Buhrendal, Julie Falk Christensen, Trine Hansen, Thomas Hostrup, Jonna Hägg, Agnes Jonasson, Marcus Matt, Rasmus Ramö Streith, Simon Söder, Johan Østerholm.

The aim of this course is to give students theoretical knowledge and practical skills in accounting and legislation relevant for their future work as artists.

This course consists of lectures about basic accounting and Swedish tax law for the cultural sector, with special emphasis on artists as entrepreneurs, and workshops with practical training in basic accounting and income tax declaration. Further, there will be lectures in basic Swedish and international intellectual property law, with emphasis on artists and their working situation, and an introduction to economic and legal circumstances in the Nordic countries, with focus on Denmark.

Why Do You Think Your Video is Art?
Teacher  External Visiting Lecturer
Nathalie Melikian
Credits  6


This course will ask students to expand and articulate their thoughts around their work and how they see their video in the greater context of video and film work.

We will look at some video art and installation videos from the 1960s to today, analyse them thematically and formally, and look at the contexts of how and why these works were produced.

This course requires students to present video works and support material they think is pertinent to the discussions of the course. As well, each student will present his or her own work to the class and discuss and articulate issues around it, including why the work is convincing or not and how the student sees his or her work in relation to other video artists and within the greater context of video art.

There will also be a screening one night per week with discussion afterwards.
**MFA Fine Art—Theory Courses**

### Ecriture Féminine
**Teacher** Professor Gertrud Sandqvist

**Credits** 9

Participating students: Christian Bang Jensen, Marie Bonfils, Hans Carlsson, Karin Hald, Dick Joakim Hedlund, Hanni Kamaly, Lea Petrikova, Marie Raffn, Ana Rebordão, Markus Bråten Strandjord, Þorgerður Þórhallsdóttir

The term “écriture féminine” was coined in the 1970s by the philosophers Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and, to some extent, Julia Kristeva. It is closely associated with the expression “parler femme,” and means that language, writing, and speech are regarded from the point of view of the (female) body. The emphasis is placed on the flow of language, favouring sound, timbre, and rhythm at the expense of grammar rules and a clearly delimited subject.

In this course, we will read, speak, and write *écriture féminine*, partly through texts of Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva, but also through texts from a wider field, including authors such as Clarice Lispector, Virginia Woolf, Nathalie Sarraute, and James Joyce.

We will also explore the encounter of *écriture féminine* with philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.

### Artists Teaching Artists
**Two Unique Opportunities for Artists from the Position of The Artist.**

**Guest Teachers** Ann-Mari Edström and Neil Mulholland

**Credits** 6

Malmö Art Academy invites students from KUNO partner universities to participate in two workshops on artists teaching artists. The workshop will be a pedagogical workshop and seminar taught by artist and pedagogue Dr. Ann-Mari Edström (Malmö University) that investigates a relational view on learning and teaching in visual arts practice, the double identity of the artist-teacher, and the impact of previous experiences of learning on a present learning situation.

The second part of the course will be a “workshop on workshops” by artist and professor Neil Mulholland (Edinburgh College of Art), drawing from Mulholland’s experiences with Shift/Work, a research project that develops and shares open educational resources for artists and art educators. Shift/Work examines and recon-figures workshop-based approaches to artistic production that are theoretically informed, practical, and participatory. Shift/Work facilitates new experiential knowledge, practices, and tools for artists and art educators to adapt and implement.

### Pedagogical Workshop: Part 1 of KUNO Course “Artists Teaching Artists”

**Teacher** Ann-Mari Edström

**Credits** 3

Participating students: Hans Carlsson, Ioanamaria Cojoçariu, Birta Guðjónsdóttir, Laila Svensgaard, Desmond Church, Karin Hald, Jessica McMillan

As I see it, the foremost “tool” you have as a teacher is the relation between yourself and the student. There are a variety of aspects of this relation that may affect the learning, and each aspect may be turned into an asset as well as a handicap in a teaching situation. This workshop aims to problematise some of these aspects, and thus facilitate the students’ reflection on and analysis of their own upcoming internship period. The three main aspects that will serve as starting points for the seminars are a relational view on learning and teaching, the double identity of an artist-teacher, and the impact of previous experiences of learning on a present learning situation (teachers’ as well as students’ previous experiences). The examination of the workshop will be integrated into the internship assessment (please see internship assessment specifications for details).

**Schedule**

The first day’s lecture will introduce my own research on learning in visual art practice, along with a relational perspective on learning and how this perspective relates to the other two dominating perspectives on learning within pedagogical research today. The double identity of an artist-teacher will be the theme of the second day’s seminar, and the third day’s seminar will concern the impact of previous experiences of learning on a present learning situation (teachers’ as well as students’). The students are expected to read selected texts (forty to fifty pages in length) in connection with each seminar/lecture. For the second and third seminars, the students will prepare three questions, each based on their readings of these texts and on their own experiences of teaching and learning. These questions will then serve as a starting point for the discussions at the seminar. The students’ active reading during the course is part of the pedagogy of the workshop. I will provide the students with the selected texts in connection to each seminar.

**Literature**

Workshop on Workshops: Part 2 of KUNO Course “Artists Teaching Artists”
Teacher  Neil Mulholland
Credits  3
Participating students: Hans Carlsson, João Carlos Guerreiro Costa, Desmond Church, Karin Hald, Jessica McMillan

The second part of the KUNO course “Artists Teaching Artists” will be a hands-on “workshop on workshops” by artist and professor Neil Mulholland (Edinburgh College of Art), drawing from Mulholland’s experiences with Shift/Work, a research project that develops and shares open educational resources for artists and art educators. Shift/Work has arisen from a number of learning experiments conducted in Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop and at Edinburgh College of Art. The project examines and reconfigures workshop-based approaches to artistic production that are theoretically informed, practical, and participatory. Shift/Work facilitates new experiential knowledge, practices, and tools for artists and art educators to adapt and implement.

Shift/Work is an attempt to establish a collective ontology for practice, creating process-led pedagogy, critically reflecting upon the learning processes involved, and disseminating research on a share-and-share-alike basis.

Suggested readings
James Elkins, Lars Bang Larsen, Felicity Allen, Pascal Gielen, Paul de Bruyne, Paulo Freire, among others.

Artists’ Writings
Guest Teacher  Kristina Lee Podesva
Credits  6
Participating students: Amalie Brandt, Hans Carlsson, Desmond Church, Georgia Munnik, Maarit Mustonen, Hedda Ottesen, Wilfred Tarding

“Artists’ Writings” surveys artistic writing from the 1960s to the present. Specifically, this course will examine broader categories of such writing, including the articulation of aesthetic arguments and theories, the (re)construction of political concepts and histories, the development of performance scripts and experiments, and the expression of and reflection on pedagogical projects by artists. This course is designed to support students in identifying the many compelling possibilities writing by artists offers.

Discussions will consider assigned readings (for home and in class) in addition to student proposals or in-progress projects on the final day of the course in a workshop/critique format.

Each day of the course is organised around a specific theme related to the instructor’s areas of interest and experience.

Literature
Kristine Stiles, Mike Kelley, Hélio Oiticica and Lygia Clark, Martha Rosler, Group Material, Luchezar Boyadjiev, Luis Camnitzer, Allen Sekula, Andrea Fraser, Adrian Piper, Kristina Lee Podesva, and Pablo Helguera.
Internship
Credits  
15 (work experience)  
+ 3 (assignment)

Participating students: Hans Carlsson, Ioanamaria Cojocariu, Birta Gudjónsdóttir, Laila Svensgaard

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 programme. Students are given the opportunity to apply theories learned during the first year of the programme to practical skills in the work environment. A plan is produced prior to each individual internship in collaboration between the place of internship and the student, in which 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 programme. The interns will also be able to explore the notion of the pedagogy as practice and the position of the artist-teacher through the process of delivering their individual projects. The interns should have hands-on experience in educational situations, to be able to test experimental pedagogical strategies and education both on a theoretical and a practical level under supervision. This can be in the format of a workshop, a seminar, organising an event, or gallery education conducted by the intern (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 for an additional 3 credits.

Assignment—Logbook
The logbook must be completed during the course of the internship and should document the student’s work through direct written reflections and observations on his or her 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, organisational observations, and societal aspects of the workplace and experiences during the internship; Related images, articles, or other relevant materials.
BFA Fine Art—Art Courses

Cascade of Idiosyncrasies
Guest Teacher: Ieva Misevičiūtė
Credits: 9


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, that is, very personal occurrences in our minds and bodies. Eventually, we’ll treat these 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 spaces are transformed, constructed, and deconstructed in sessions led by dancer Liz Kinoshita and performance artist Jeremiah Day. Kinoshita will talk about her work with Tino Sehgal and lead a series of physical exercises. Day will work with choreography and performativity in relation to the imaginary exhibitions that have been created in SketchUp. The computer program SketchUp is very useful when developing a 3D model or an installation layout for a future exhibition. In this course we will enter a virtual world of ideas and possibilities and use this for making imaginary exhibitions. We will expand the notion of exhibition making, as well as discuss the web of connections and knowledge that informs contemporary exhibition making. Following this thread we will expand the discussion to cover the relations between bodies and virtual spaces, perception, and physicality.

In the second part of the course we will use the generated 3D models as a blueprint to engage new spatial considerations through bodily movement. The White Room at Inter Arts Center will be an experimental laboratory, where the “imaginary” spaces are transformed, constructed, and deconstructed in sessions led by dancer Liz Kinoshita and performance artist Jeremiah Day. Kinoshita will talk about her work with Tino Sehgal and lead a series of physical exercises. Day will work with choreography and performativity in relation to the imaginary exhibitions that have been created in SketchUp.

Additionally, curator Sonia Dermience was invited to talk about her work with Copenhagen Art Festival. If possible, Dermience will also make individual studio visits with the participants in the course.

BFA Fine Art—Technical Courses

Imaginary Exhibitions—The Gestures
Teachers: Junior Lecturer Margot Edström, Senior Lecturer Maj Hasager, and Professor Joachim Koester
Credits: 5


We will start by learning the 3D modelling program SketchUp. The computer program SketchUp is very useful when developing a 3D model or an installation layout for a future exhibition. In this course we will enter a virtual world of ideas and possibilities and use this for making imaginary exhibitions. We will expand the notion of space and use imagination and fiction as a tool for exhibition making, as well as discuss the web of connections and knowledge that informs contemporary exhibition making. Following this thread we will expand the discussion to cover the relations between bodies and virtual spaces, perception, and physicality.

In the second part of the course we will use the generated 3D models as a blueprint to engage new spatial considerations through bodily movement. The White Room at Inter Arts Center will be an experimental laboratory, where the “imaginary” spaces are transformed, constructed, and deconstructed in sessions led by dancer Liz Kinoshita and performance artist Jeremiah Day. Kinoshita will talk about her work with Tino Sehgal and lead a series of physical exercises. Day will work with choreography and performativity in relation to the imaginary exhibitions that have been created in SketchUp.

Invited guest lecturers
Jeremiah Day is an artist and performer and is currently pursuing a Doctorate of the Arts in collaboration with the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, and the Utrecht Graduate School of Arts. His work has been presented in recent exhibitions at Ludlow 38, New York; FRAC Champagne-Ardenne, Reims; and Essays and Observations, Berlin. Day is represented by Ellen de Bruijne Projects, Amsterdam, and Arcade, London.

Sonia Dermience is a curator and in 2002 founded Komplot in Brussels, a curatorial collective concerned with nomadic creative practices, such as with early projects such as Midi Zuid, Vollevox, and Architecture of Survival. Under the name of Catherine Vertige, she conducted extensive research into post-’68 collaborative art practices in Belgium with seminars and two documentary films. In 2009, Komplot founded the Public School Brussels. Since 2010, Komplot has been located in a converted warehouse dedicated to exhibitions, residencies, and studios. She was the curator of Copenhagen Art Festival 2015.

Liz Kinoshita is a dancer and was born in Toronto, Canada, before moving to Europe in 2002 to study and work. Since graduating, she has worked with various Belgian companies, including with ZOO/Thomas Hauert in Accords, You’ve Changed, and MONO; with Ig STAN in Nusch and The Tangible; and with choreographer Eleanor Bauer/GoodMove in A Dance for the Newest Age (the triangle piece) and Tentative Assembly (the tent piece).
Casting: Bronze/Aluminium/Silicone

Lead Teacher  Senior Lecturer  P-O Persson
Guest Teacher  Robert Cassland

Credits  9

Participating students: Carl-Oskar Jonsson, Gabriel Karlsson, Joakim Sandqvist, Ernst Skoog, Øystein Sølberg, Þorgerður Þórhallsdóttir, Elisabeth Östin, Carl Østberg.

The course will provide basic knowledge in silicone and cire-perdue casting. With the help of moulds and silicone, the students will produce objects and moulds in wax, which they will cast in bronze or aluminum.

The course will be divided in two blocks:
Block 1 (duration two weeks): Silicone casting; Producing objects suited for casting in bronze or aluminum.
Location: Annexet.

Block 2 (duration two weeks): Casting (cire perdue and sand form casting); Grind work; Patination.
Location: KKv-gjuteri (located in the same building as KHM Gallery).

Plastic

Guest Teacher  David Nilsson

Credits  3

Participating students: Trine Hansen, Nillas Helander, Hanni Kamaly, Martine Thunold.

This course in handling plastics gives knowledge in laminating and casting of plastics, plus basic information about safety prescriptions in the workshop. After finishing the course, you will get a “driver’s license” that permits you to work in the workshop on your own.

Ceramics

Lead Teacher  Senior Lecturer  P-O Persson
Guest Teacher  Klara Kristalova

Credits  3


This course is intended as an introduction to pottery using ceramics and dealing with the different techniques and stages in the process leading to the final object.

The course consists of two one-week sessions bridging a period of individual work in which the pieces in progress are also to be dried and fired once. The second session will consist of glazing and final firing.

An information meeting will be held by P-O Persson well in advance of the start of the course.
Between Painters

Teachers
Professor Gertrud Sandqvist and
Junior Lecturer Viktor Kopp

Credits 3


“Between Painters” is a seminar focusing on the conversations that may take place in the field of painting. We have invited both comparatively established and new artists with a clear relationship to painting as an art form. In order to get the conversations between the seminar participants started, each duo of painters will be given a day to demonstrate and discuss their relationships to painting. We have decided to invite artists with very different approaches so that the full spectrum of modern painting can be illustrated.

The invited artists are Julia Rommel (New York), who traces processes in works that are both abstract and monochrome; Jakob Simonson (Malmö), who relates to the physical dimensions of existing spaces in abstract paintings; Vincent Geyskens (Brussels), who focuses on “dysfunctional” painting; Viktor Rosdal (Malmö), who has a particular relationship to painting, narrative, and politics; Nina Roos (Helsinki), whose paintings move in between shadows and language; Hertha Hanson (Malmö), who makes thoughts concrete in painting; Narcisse Tordoir (Antwerp), who works with physicality and the theatrical in painting; and Ditte Ejlerskov (Malmö), who creates explorative narratives, often starting from icons of popular culture.

Psychoanalysis, a Manual

Teacher Professor Gertrud Sandqvist

Credits 15


The twentieth century was the era of psychoanalysis. Sigmund Freud’s The Interpretation of Dreams appeared in 1899 and started a fundamental reassessment and exploration of the human psyche. Many of its ideas have entered everyday discourse and, of course, art and culture theory. Who has not heard of repression, the subconscious, the oral, anal, and genital phases, sadism, masochism, the Oedipus complex, and much more?

This course deals with both the concepts and theories and the history of psychoanalysis, in which famous representatives such as Melanie Klein, Jacques Lacan, Lou Andreas-Salomé and Wilhelm Reich will be treated in addition to Freud. The course involves a lot of reading, but even more talking. It is no coincidence that the first patient of psychoanalysis, Anna O, christened the treatment the “Talking Cure,” or “Chimney Sweeping” …

The Responsibility of Forms

Guest Teacher Linda Norden

Credits 3


Through Gesamtkunstwerk, the work of Pierre Huyghe, and specifically an interest voiced in Jakob von Uexküll’s findings in animal semiotics, this year’s brief, intensive seminar will again play notions introduced in a few key readings against close examinations of several complex contemporary artworks in an effort to distinguish coded contents from more broadly recognisable information and affective aesthetic decisions.

Though the theoretical sources here will be somewhat eccentric—including selections from Uexküll’s “A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans”; Linda Norden’s essay on defamiliarisation, “Art as Technique”; several from Roland Barthes’s essays in The Responsibility of Forms; which detail his distinctions between obvious and obtuse meanings; and two features in the online magazine DIS: one on a complex photograph series commissioned by W magazine from Ryan Trecartin and Lizzie Fitch, the other an interview with Hito Steyerl on the politics of post-representation. The aim is to use these very different enquiries into aesthetic decisions and the aesthetic processing of information to enable more detailed readings of what is operative in a given artwork, both for viewers and for you, as makers. Linda Norden is specifically interested in distinguishing between what’s intended by the artist and what is visible and available to viewers in the work as presented.

Readings will be assigned at the beginning of February, which should leave plenty of time to read before we meet in April. Classes will meet for the entire day, plus a few evenings of film screenings, including a mix of student presentations, group discussions, and a possible guest visit.

Literature

Films
The Blind Watchmaker, educational documentary, BBC; Sex, Death and the Meaning of Life, documentary mini-series, Channel 4.
“Historical knowledge consists of transmissions in which the sender, the signal, and the receiver all are variable elements affecting the stability of the message.”

—George Kubler, 1962

Documentary in a broader sense will be the topic of this seminar. Telling the “truth,” illustrating or mediating our being, and reflecting on different forms of perception will be discussed. The reading of texts and screening of films will alternate.

Art practices with references to the “document” will be related to documentary film practices that seek to negotiate the complicated and complex constructions of realities.
Current and graduating students

BFA1
Sergio Alvear
Andreas Bentdal Amble
Axel Berger
Inka Hiltunen
Cecilia Jonsson
Carl-Oskar Jonsson
Gabriel Karlsson
Stephan Möller
Ernst Skoog
Carolina Sandvik
Øystein Solberg
Carl Østberg
Elisabeth Östlin

BFA2
Axel Burendahl
Geirðrúður Einarsdóttir exchange student
Daniel Fleur
Thomas Hørstrup
Jonna Hägg
Agnes Lovisa Jonasson
Rasmus Ramö Streith
Joakim Sandqvist
Trine Sruwe Hansen
Simon Söder
Martine Thunold

BFA3
John Alberts
Meise Fabricius
Julie Falk Christensen
Andreas Franzén
Andrea Furberg
Marianne Glimsdal
Golnosh Hosseini
Oscar Hagbard
Mads Juel
Tina Kryhlmann
Marcus Matt
Nicklas Randau
Jonas-Petter Wallner
Line Axman

MFA1
Alice Angeletti exchange student
Markus Bråten
Dick Hedlund
Hanni Kamaly
Youngjae Lih
Johan Lundqvist
Jan Moszumanski exchange student
Henrique Pavão
Lea Petrikova
Marie Raffn
Ana Rebordão
Tomas Sjögren
Daniel Spies
Wilfred Wagner Tarding
Pørgerður Pórhalldóttir
Johan Österholm

MFA2
Isabelle Andriessen
Christian Bang Jensen
Lily Benson
Balthazar Berling
Marie Bonfils
Desmond Church
Karín Hald
Niillas Helander
Ingvild Kaldal Hovland
Lou Kuhlau
Ronnie Lykke Lauridsen
Kalle Lindmark
Rina Eide Løvaasen
Sandra Mujinga
Madeleine Oldeman
Emelie Sandström
Marianne Skaarup

CPS
Hans Carlsson
Ioanamaria Cojocairu
Joao Evangelista
José Tomás Giraldo
Berta Guójónsdóttir
Laila Svensgaard

PHD
Rosa Barba
Matthew Buckingham
Alejandro Cesarco
Mats Eriksson
Marion von Osten
Andrea Ray
Imogen Stidworthy